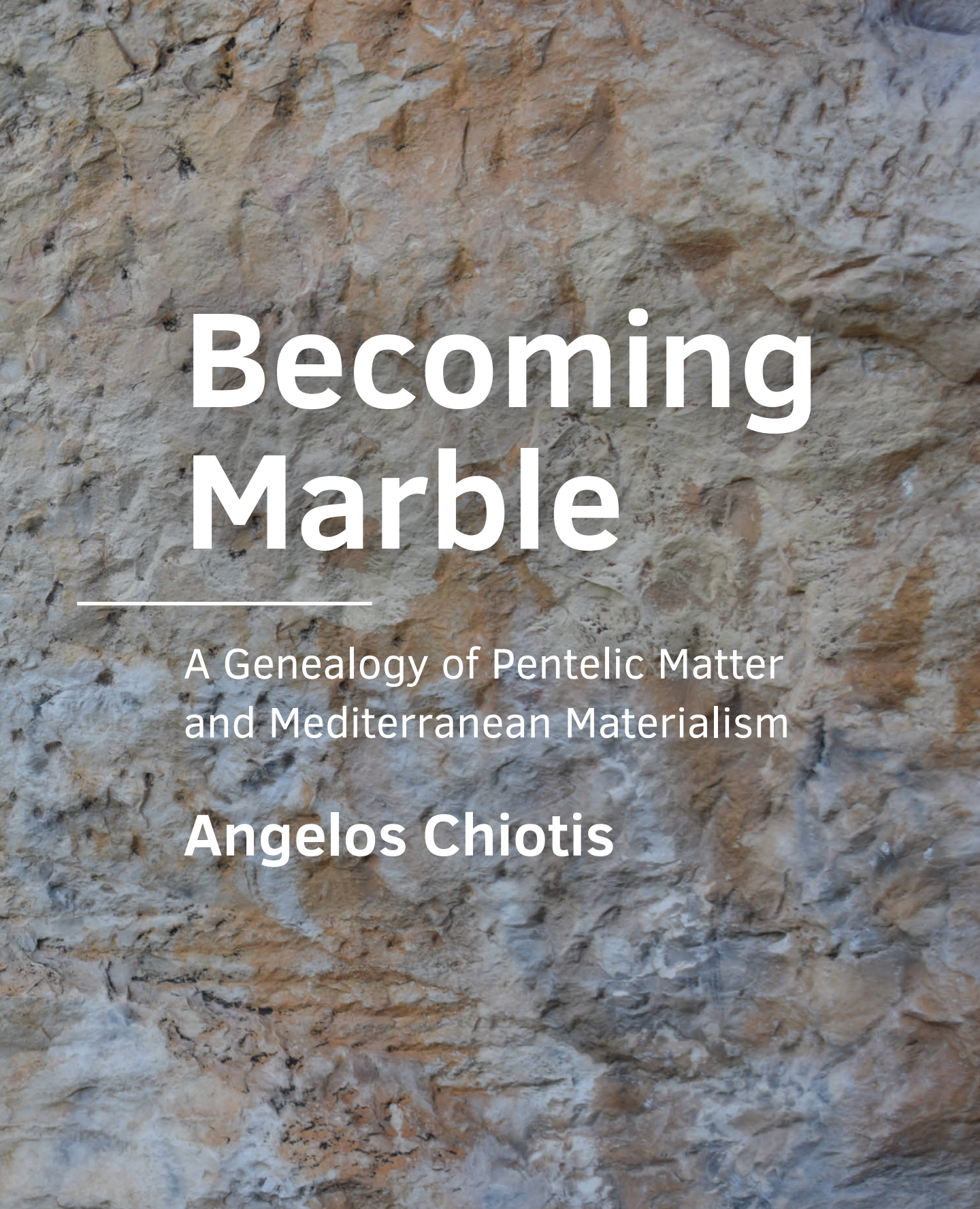


The background of the entire image is a close-up photograph of a marbled surface, likely marble or stone. It features a complex pattern of swirling, veined colors in shades of beige, tan, brown, and grey, with some darker, almost black, spots and lines. The texture appears rough and natural.

# Becoming Marble

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A Genealogy of Pentelic Matter  
and Mediterranean Materialism

**Angelos Chiotis**



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## A Genealogy of Pentelic Matter and Mediterranean Materialism

Dissertation

for the purpose of obtaining the degree of doctor  
at Delft University of Technology  
by the authority of the Rector Magnificus,  
Prof.dr.ir. H. Bijl,  
chair of the Board for Doctorates  
to be defended publicly on  
Monday, 28 September 2026 at 10:00

by

Angelos CHIOTIS

This dissertation has been approved by the promotor and the copromotor.

---

**Composition of the doctoral committee:**

|                     |                                            |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Rector Magnificus   | chairperson                                |
| Dr.ir. H. Sohn      | Delft University of Technology, promotor   |
| Dr.ir. S. Kousoulas | Delft University of Technology, copromotor |

---

**Independent members:**

|                           |                                                   |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Prof.dr. T.G. Vrachliotis | Delft University of Technology                    |
| Prof.dr. H. Frichot       | University of Melbourne, Australia                |
| Prof.dr. K.T. Grillner    | KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Sweden         |
| Dr. G. Themistokleous     | Norwich University of the Arts, England           |
| Dr. E. Distretti          | Royal College of Art, England                     |
| Prof. D.J. Rosbottom      | Delft University of Technology,<br>reserve member |

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# Originality

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I declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for the award of any other degree at this or any other institution. During the preparation of this manuscript, I used AI-assisted tools, including ChatGPT (OpenAI) and Grammarly, to support copy editing, language refinement, translation, and general improvements in academic style, such as correcting spelling and grammar and enhancing clarity and structure. These tools did not contribute to the development of the arguments, analysis, or conclusions. All content was reviewed, revised, and approved by me, and I take full responsibility for the final version of the manuscript.



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# Summary

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*Becoming Marble* traces the shifting life of Pentelic marble across geological, architectural, political, and epistemic terrains. Rather than treating marble as a stable medium of classical form, the dissertation develops a genealogy of its successive stabilisations and disturbances, from object to surface to particle, examining how material processes and conceptual formations continuously remake one another. The study draws on Deleuze and Guattari's notions of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, while engaging postcolonial critique and new materialist approaches to articulate a Mediterranean materialism grounded in the specificities of the Attic landscape. The first part, *Classical Object*, follows the historical production of marble's coherence as an aesthetic and political category. It interrogates how architectural whiteness, neoclassical historiography, and colonial knowledge regimes naturalised Pentelic marble as a universal classical substance, while obscuring the labour, exclusions, and racialised imaginaries embedded in its use. The second part, *Modern Surface*, turns to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which marble reappears within modernist abstraction and global circuits of power. Here, the marble surface operates as an interface that organises visibility, legitimacy, and institutional authority, while simultaneously revealing the strains and contradictions of modernity's universal claims. The third part, *Material Particle*, repositions marble at the scale of fragments, dust, and dispersed geological residues. Through archival work, quarry ethnographies, and material encounters at Mount Pentelicus, this part foregrounds matter's own tendencies, thresholds, and agencies, challenging subject–object logics and exposing the partial, discontinuous nature of material memory. Across these movements, the dissertation argues that Pentelic marble does not simply connect antiquity and modernity; it participates in the continual reconfiguration of both. Its transformations reveal how architectural standards, national identities, and colonial imaginaries are consolidated through material practices that appear stable only in retrospect. By shifting attention from the monumental to the particulate, the study proposes a rethinking of architectural materiality that acknowledges entanglement, heterogeneity, and the ongoing production of genealogies rather than fixed origins. *Becoming Marble* thus offers a material–philosophical framework for understanding how matter and meaning coemerge across time, and how Mediterranean landscapes continue to unsettle the conceptual architectures built upon them.



# Samenvatting

---

*Becoming Marble* beschrijft een genealogie van Pentelisch marmer in geologische, architectonische, politieke en epistemische contexten. In plaats van marmer te beschouwen als een stabiel medium voor klassieke architectuur, beschrijft dit proefschrift een genealogie van zijn opeenvolgende stabilisaties en verstoringen, van object tot oppervlak en vervolgens tot deeltje, en onderzoekt het hoe materiële processen en conceptuele formaties elkaar voortdurend hervormen. De studie bouwt voort op de begrippen territorialisering en deterritorialisering van Deleuze en Guattari en verbindt postkoloniale kritiek met nieuw-materialistische benaderingen om mediterrane materialen te herpositioneren als geworteld in de specifieke kenmerken van het attische landschap. Het eerste deel, *Klassiek Object*, gaat over de esthetiek en politiek van de historische totstandkoming van marmer. Het bevraagt hoe Pentelisch marmer is genaturaliseerd als het universele materiaal voor klassieke architectuur, door een esthetiek van witheid, neoklassieke geschiedschrijving en koloniale kennisregimes, terwijl de arbeid, uitsluitingen en geracialiseerde verbeeldingen die in het gebruik van marmer besloten liggen, verborgen blijven. Het tweede deel, *Modern Oppervlak*, richt zich op de twintigste eeuw, toen marmer opnieuw een belangrijke rol vervulde binnen modernistische abstractie en gerelateerde wereldwijde machtsstructuren. Hier functioneert het marmeren oppervlak als een interface die zichtbaarheid, legitimiteit en institutionele autoriteit uitstraalt, terwijl het tegelijkertijd de spanningen en tegenstrijdigheden in de universele uitingen van de moderniteit blootlegt. Het derde deel, *Materieel Deeltje*, bestudeert en herpositioneert marmer als fragmenten, stof en verspreide geologische resten. Aan de hand van archiefonderzoek, etnografieën van steengroeven en ontmoetingen met het materiaal op de Pentelische Berg brengt dit deel van het onderzoek de karaktereigenschappen van de materie zelf naar voren. Daarmee worden subject-objectlogica's bevraagd en wordt de gedeeltelijke en discontinue aard van materieel geheugen zichtbaar. Met deze beweringen betoogt het proefschrift dat Pentelisch marmer niet eenvoudigweg een verbinding vormt tussen antiquiteit en moderniteit, maar actief deelneemt aan de voortdurende herconfiguratie van beide. Door de aandacht te verschuiven van het monumentale naar het partiële en deeltjesachtige, stelt het proefschrift een herdenken van architectonische materialiteit voor, waarin de onlosmakelijke verbintenis, heterogeniteit en de voortdurende productie van genealogieën centraal staan, eerder dan vaste oorsprongen.



# Περίληψη

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Το *Becoming Marble* διερευνά τις μεταβαλλόμενες μορφές του Πεντελικού μαρμάρου μέσα από γεωλογικά, αρχιτεκτονικά, πολιτικά και επιστημολογικά πεδία. Αντί να προσεγγίζει το μάρμαρο ως σταθερό μέσο της κλασικής μορφής, η διατριβή αναπτύσσει μια γενεαλογία των διαδοχικών σταθεροποιήσεων και αποσταθεροποιήσεών του, από το αντικείμενο στην επιφάνεια και από την επιφάνεια στο σωματίδιο, εξετάζοντας πώς υλικές διεργασίες και εννοιολογικοί σχηματισμοί ανασυνθέτουν διαρκώς ο ένας τον άλλον. Αντλώντας από τις έννοιες της εδαφικοποίησης και της απεδαφικοποίησης των Deleuze και Guattari, τη μετα-αποικιακή κριτική και τον νέο υλισμό, η έρευνα διαμορφώνει μια εκδοχή Μεσογειακού υλισμού, εδραιωμένη στις ιδιαίτερες συνθήκες του Αττικού τοπίου. Το πρώτο μέρος, *Κλασικό Αντικείμενο*, εξετάζει τη συγκρότηση του μαρμάρου ως αισθητικής και πολιτικής κατηγορίας, αναδεικνύοντας πώς η αρχιτεκτονική λευκότητα, η νεοκλασική ιστοριογραφία και τα αποικιακά καθεστώτα γνώσης συγκρότησαν το Πεντελικό μάρμαρο ως οικουμενικό κλασικό υλικό. Το δεύτερο μέρος, *Νεωτερική Επιφάνεια*, εστιάζει στις μοντερνιστικές αφαιρέσεις και τα παγκόσμια δίκτυα εξουσίας του εικοστού αιώνα, όπου η μαρμάρινη επιφάνεια λειτουργεί ως διεπιφάνεια ορατότητας, νομιμοποίησης και θεσμικής αυθεντίας. Το τρίτο μέρος, *Υλικό Σωματίδιο*, επανατοποθετεί το μάρμαρο στην κλίμακα των θραυσμάτων και της σκόνης, αναδεικνύοντας, μέσα από αρχαική και επιτόπια έρευνα στο Πεντελικό Όρος, τις τάσεις και ενεργητικότητες της ύλης, αμφισβητώντας λογικές υποκειμένου-αντικειμένου και αποκαλύπτοντας τον ασυνεχή χαρακτήρα της υλικής μνήμης. Η διατριβή υποστηρίζει ότι το Πεντελικό μάρμαρο δεν συνδέει απλώς την αρχαιότητα με τη νεωτερικότητα, αλλά συμμετέχει ενεργά στη συνεχή αναδιαμόρφωση και των δύο. Οι μετασχηματισμοί του αποκαλύπτουν τον τρόπο με τον οποίο αρχιτεκτονικοί κανόνες, εθνικές ταυτότητες και αποικιακά φαντασιακά παγώνονται μέσω υλικών πρακτικών που εμφανίζονται ως σταθερές μόνο εκ των υστέρων. Μετατοπίζοντας την προσοχή από το μνημειακό στο σωματιδιακό, η έρευνα προτείνει έναν αναστοχασμό της αρχιτεκτονικής υλικότητας που αναγνωρίζει τη διαπλοκή ύλης και νοήματος. Έτσι, το *Becoming Marble* προτείνει ένα υλιστικό και φιλοσοφικό πλαίσιο αντίληψης των τρόπων με τους οποίους τα Μεσογειακά τοπία εξακολουθούν να αποσταθεροποιούν τις εννοιολογικές αρχιτεκτονικές που έχουν οικοδομηθεί πάνω τους.



# Introduction

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## I Research Context and Key Concepts

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Pentelic marble appears in architectural history with an almost disarming immediacy, as though its meaning had been settled long before any encounter with the material itself. Yet this sense of inevitability, this quiet presumption that marble is classical, pure, luminous, rests upon a long sedimentation of practices, desires, and conceptual operations that have naturalised its presence as an object of architecture. Beneath this smooth surface lies a turbulent field in which geological histories, aesthetic codifications, colonial structures of knowledge, and modern technological regimes intersect in ways that are neither linear nor harmonious. It is within this field of tensions that the present research is situated. Pentelic marble's material life unfolds across temporalities that exceed human scales: tectonic pressures, crystallisation processes, mineral dispersals, and sedimented patterns that began long before classical antiquity became a reference point. Geological time does not serve here as a romantic backdrop but as a reminder that what we call marble, especially this marble, is not a natural unit but a temporary coherence formed by pressures, fractures, and discontinuities. Architecture enters this field late, and not as a neutral participant. Through extraction, shaping, polishing, and circulation, architecture reorganises stone into an object that can bear meaning, legitimacy, and authority. Within this transformation, marble's geological agency is folded into cultural and political projects, yet it does not disappear. Internal veining, fissures, and eventual fragmentation reveal a persistently unstable substance that resists complete capture. Across the genealogy of Western architectural imagination, Pentelic marble becomes entangled with particular regimes of visibility. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed a powerful reordering of the classical world: the Parthenon was framed as the apex of architectural achievement, Greek antiquity as the origin of Europe's rational modernity, and whiteness as the aesthetic foundation of this lineage. The selective effacement of ancient polychromy and the whitening of marble played a crucial role in producing this coherence. A material once alive with pigments was retrospectively purified, allowing the white surface to become both a universal standard and a racialised signifier of civilisation. This aesthetic operation did not simply misinterpret the ancient world; it reorganised the distribution of cultural authority. Yet such stabilisations never operate independently of matter. The marble surface, even when idealised, carries its own resistances: discolouration,

weathering, mineral impurities, and the subtle opacity that emerges in certain lights. These material realities do not render the imposed narratives invalid, but they complicate them, creating tensions between the historical image of marble as perfect continuity and its lived materiality as unstable, reactive, and at times undisciplined. It is in these tensions that a genealogical inquiry finds its force.

A genealogical approach, following philosopher Michel Foucault and reworked through philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, does not seek to recover origins or to trace a singular developmental line. Instead, it attends to the contingent and often contradictory forces through which materials, concepts, and institutions become what they appear to be. It foregrounds discontinuity, conflict, and variation, those elements typically smoothed over in narratives of progress or revival. Within this methodological frame, the study of Pentelic marble becomes an inquiry into how material and conceptual formations coproduce one another across different epochs and scales. The aim is not to describe marble as a passive substance subjected to human shaping, but to understand how marble participates in shaping the conditions of its own historicity. Three interlinked conceptual operations help articulate this dynamic: territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation. Territorialisation describes the processes through which marble becomes stabilised as a classical object: the architectural canons that define its ideal forms, the political imaginaries that claim it as national heritage, and the epistemic frameworks that bind it to notions of purity and order. These processes create the appearance of a stable identity for the material, even as internal and external forces periodically undo this stability. Deterritorialisation marks moments when these stabilisations unravel or shift. This occurs when marble migrates from structure to surface, from monument to commodity, from local resource to globally circulating material. It intensifies when the marble surface becomes implicated in modernist abstraction, or when its whiteness becomes entangled with administrative and diplomatic architectures that exceed the national frame. Deterritorialisation also operates at the scale of particles, dust, residues, and fragments, where marble escapes the coherence assigned to it by classical and modern narratives. Reterritorialisation names the countermovement by which new stabilisations form. These may reinforce older hierarchies or produce new ones. They may reproduce whiteness as a normative aesthetic, institutionalise marble within global architectural discourse, or position it as a heritage object requiring protection. Such stabilisations are never total: they coexist with fractures, returns, and latent resistances.

The entanglement of material agency with colonial and postcolonial conditions further shapes the research context. Pentelic marble's meaning has been repeatedly reframed within European epistemologies that position Greece as the cradle of Western civilisation while rendering other temporalities and materialities peripheral

or invisible. This construction of Greece as a cultural origin, which some scholars describe as a form of internal or crypto-colonialism, has had significant implications for how marble has been used, restored, and imagined. The application of modernist or neoclassical forms onto marble surfaces often naturalises these genealogies, embedding their hierarchies into the built environment. At the same time, new materialist and posthuman approaches invite a reconsideration of matter itself. They shift attention from human-centred narratives to the material processes that exceed human agency, emphasising entanglement, relationality, and the partial autonomy of nonhuman forces. But these approaches require careful mediation: the agency of matter cannot be understood apart from the histories of extraction, labour, displacement, and violence that shape the conditions under which matter becomes visible as such. In the case of Pentelic marble, these histories include quarry workers, suburban encroachments, environmental transformations, illicit extractions, and the dispersed particles that circulate long after the marble has left the mountain. The conceptual terrain that emerges from this constellation, genealogy, deterritorialisation, material agency, and postcolonial critique, forms the ground upon which *Becoming Marble* unfolds. It provides a way of reading Pentelic marble not as an expression of continuity but as a material defined by discontinuities, reconfigurations, and persistent tensions. This approach allows the dissertation to navigate between the monumental and the particulate, between the classical object and its modern surfaces, and between the geological processes that form marble and the political forces that attempt to claim it. Through these perspectives, the research situates Pentelic marble within a Mediterranean materialism that understands matter as active, relational, and historically saturated. The Mediterranean is not approached as a timeless cultural zone but as a site where environmental, geological, cultural, and geopolitical entanglements produce uneven material and conceptual histories. Marble, in this frame, becomes a participant in the ongoing negotiation of what the Mediterranean has been, what it has become, and what it continues to unsettle. The dissertation, therefore, approaches coloniality not as a discrete historical period but as a series of material and epistemic operations that become attached to Pentelic marble across different historical configurations. Genealogy allows these operations to be traced without presuming continuity or rupture in advance. Rather than asking whether marble is colonial or postcolonial, the study examines how colonial distinctions, hierarchies, and claims to cultural authority are repeatedly assembled, destabilised, and reformulated through material practices.

## II Research Questions, Framework, and Methods

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The research questions animating this dissertation emerged and transformed gradually through encounters with Pentelic marble in its material states: coherent block, polished surface, fragmented residue, and airborne dust. Rather than approaching marble with a predetermined conceptual lens, the inquiry unfolded alongside the material's own movements. These movements revealed tensions and discontinuities that conventional architectural historiography tends to obscure: the instability of the classical object, the political weight embedded in the modern surface, and the uneasy agency expressed in marble's particulate dispersals. The questions, therefore, arise from practice rather than abstraction, from matter rather than metaphor. At their broadest level, these questions ask how Pentelic marble has been made intelligible within different architectural and cultural regimes, and how these regimes have relied on specific combinations of material practice, epistemic ordering, and political authority. More precisely, the dissertation asks:

- 1 How has Pentelic marble been stabilised as a classical object, and what aesthetic, technical, and colonial operations made this stabilisation appear natural rather than produced?
- 2 How did marble's surfaces in modernity acquire the capacity to signal neutrality, clarity, and authority, and what forms of institutional power were projected and secured through them?
- 3 What becomes visible when marble is approached at the scale of fracture, residue, and particle, where its coherence dissolves, and its agency emerges in new and often resistant forms?

These questions do not form a sequence. They overlap, return, and diverge, much as the material processes they seek to understand do. Together, they aim to illuminate how marble participates in shaping architectural meaning across different temporal and spatial configurations.

The methodological ground of this dissertation is genealogical, understood in the Foucauldian sense. Genealogy does not seek origins, essences, or foundational truths concealed beneath historical appearances. Rather, it investigates the contingent emergence of practices, institutions, classifications, and forms of knowledge, tracing how they acquire the appearance of necessity through historically specific struggles and relations of force. Against narratives that privilege continuity and development, genealogy attends to discontinuity, dispersion, accident,

and emergence, revealing the unstable conditions through which objects become intelligible and authoritative.<sup>1</sup> It shifts attention from what things are to the historical processes through which they come to be accepted as what they are. Genealogy is inseparable from Foucault's analysis of power and knowledge. Rather than treating knowledge as an autonomous reflection of reality, Foucault argues that power and knowledge are mutually constitutive and cannot be understood independently of one another.<sup>2</sup> Regimes of truth emerge through institutional procedures, professional authorities, classificatory systems, and mechanisms that determine what counts as true, how truth is produced, and who is authorised to speak it within a given society.<sup>3</sup> Genealogical inquiry, therefore, examines the heterogeneous practices, institutions, and material conditions through which objects of knowledge and truths are produced, stabilised, and circulated. The question then is not whether a particular representation is true or false, but how certain truths become possible, authoritative, and enduring within specific historical formations, that is, through the rules governing the formation, circulation, and historical conditions of discourse. Gilles Deleuze's reading of Foucault is particularly important for the present study because it clarifies genealogy's relationship to historical formations. As Deleuze argues, Foucault's genealogy is:

*No longer a simple archaeology of forms that appear in a stratum; it now becomes a strategy of forces on which the stratum itself depends.*<sup>4</sup>

Genealogy, therefore, moves beyond the description of historical strata and toward the analysis of the forces, struggles, and power relations that produce them. Historical formations do not constitute neutral containers within which events occur. They emerge through the interaction of heterogeneous forces whose alignments, conflicts, and stabilisations generate the conditions under which objects, subjects, and forms of knowledge become possible. For this reason, Pentelic marble is approached as the provisional outcome of interacting extractive, aesthetic, political, economic, and ecological processes. In this sense, the geological language of strata intersects productively with Foucauldian genealogy. Geological formations

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," (2001): 140–55.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 131–33.

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze, "Michel Foucault's Main Concepts," in *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, ed. Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail, and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2016), 65.

provide the material conditions from which marble emerges, while genealogy traces the historical and political forces through which that material acquires cultural, architectural, and epistemic significance. Within this dissertation, genealogy provides a method for examining how Pentelic marble has been repeatedly rendered classical, pure, national, modern, or universal, categories that appear stable only when their historical production is concealed. A Foucauldian genealogy is attentive to power. It understands power not simply as coercion but as the ensemble of practices that organise visibility, define value, and shape what can be thought. Marble participates in these practices. Its whiteness has been mobilised to stabilise specific aesthetic norms; its presence in neoclassical and modernist architectures has been used to legitimise state formations and institutional authorities; its material refinement has often concealed the labour, extraction, and environmental transformations that enabled it. Genealogy thus allows the research to trace how marble has been drawn into regimes of classification, conservation, and monumentalisation that define architectural authority. Yet the dissertation does not remain within a Foucauldian frame alone.

The dissertation also draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of territorialisation, deterritorialisation, and reterritorialisation. For Deleuze and Guattari, territories are provisional stabilisations produced through material practices, social arrangements, and systems of meaning. Territorialisation and deterritorialisation are not opposed conditions but mutually implicated processes. Every territorial formation contains tendencies toward dispersal, just as movements of dispersal simultaneously generate new stabilisations and attachments.<sup>5</sup> Territorialisation refers to the processes through which assemblages achieve relative coherence and consistency, while deterritorialisation designates movements that unsettle, displace, or transform that coherence. Reterritorialisation names the formation of new stabilisations that emerge from such transformations rather than a return to an original condition. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, strata are constituted through ongoing processes of territorialisation. They are simultaneously traversed by movements of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, meaning that apparent stability is always provisional rather than given.<sup>6</sup> Deleuze and Guattari illustrate this reciprocity through the example of the orchid and the wasp:

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<sup>5</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 10-13, 54-56.

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 54-56.

*The orchid deterritorialises by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorialises on that image.*<sup>7</sup>

These concepts support an understanding of Pentelic marble as neither a stable object nor a passive material substrate. Marble's historical formations are approached as contingent territorial achievements: classical canons, national narratives, architectural surfaces, and conservation regimes stabilise particular meanings, while extraction, circulation, weathering, fragmentation, and environmental dispersal continuously unsettle them. Territorialisation and deterritorialisation, therefore, describe simultaneous and uneven processes through which marble acquires, loses, and reconstitutes its architectural significance. These concepts are used here as analytical tools for tracing the contingent stabilisations and destabilisations through which Pentelic marble acquires, loses, and reconfigures architectural meaning.

The relevance of these concepts extends beyond questions of material transformation and architectural form. They also provide a way of understanding the colonial and postcolonial conditions through which Pentelic marble has acquired its cultural and political significance. Colonial formations may be understood as processes of territorialisation that stabilise particular narratives of origin, identity, and authority around materials, landscapes, and populations. In the case of Greece, Western philhellenism, archaeological knowledge production, and neoclassical aesthetics territorialised Pentelic marble within a narrative that positioned classical antiquity as the origin of Western civilisation. Deterritorialisation occurs when these stabilisations are displaced, contested, or reconfigured through geopolitical change, migration, modernisation, and critical reinterpretation. Reterritorialisation designates the formation of new configurations, including nationalist appropriations of antiquity, postcolonial reworkings of heritage, and contemporary global circulations of marble within institutional and diplomatic architectures. Coloniality, therefore, appears not as a singular historical episode but as an ongoing field of territorialising and reterritorialising practices that continually reorganise material and cultural relations. Genealogy is mobilised in this dissertation precisely to trace

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<sup>7</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 10.

these shifting configurations without presuming a stable colonial origin or a linear movement towards decolonisation. Rather than treating colonialism, postcoloniality, and neocoloniality as discrete historical periods, genealogy follows the discontinuous operations through which power becomes materialised, naturalised, contested, and reformulated. A genealogical approach, therefore, makes it possible to examine how colonial distinctions and hierarchies persist within changing architectural, aesthetic, and material regimes, including those that present themselves as postcolonial or universal. The task is not to identify a single colonial cause but to analyse the heterogeneous assemblages through which colonial and postcolonial relations continue to be produced.

The dissertation also engages with new materialist and posthuman approaches. Marble is treated not as a passive substrate awaiting conceptual inscription, nor as a metaphysical agent endowed with universal vitality. Instead, its agency is understood as situated: emerging from geological processes, extraction practices, environmental conditions, and its interaction with human and nonhuman forces. Material agency is therefore considered relational rather than essential. The marble's behaviour, its fracturing, staining, weathering, or resistances, exerts force, but always within configurations shaped by labour, politics, and history. Finally, postcolonial critique is essential in situating marble within the geopolitical and epistemic structures that shaped modern Greece and its representation within Europe. The dissertation examines how classical heritage was reassembled as a European origin, how aesthetic whiteness became intertwined with racialised hierarchies, and how national identity in Greece was articulated through selective material revivals. Postcolonial theory thus provides the tools to interrogate the ideological work performed by marble's surfaces, especially in modernist and diplomatic architectures. The framework that emerges is therefore composite, because the object of inquiry requires a method capable of holding together geological time, architectural form, political formation, and material transformation. Genealogy provides orientation; Deleuze and Guattari offer the vocabulary of movement; new materialism attends to matter's capacities; decolonial thought makes possible readings such as this by situating material processes within structures of power.

The methodological practice of this dissertation follows from the heterogeneity of its theoretical framework. It combines archival analysis, fieldwork, material observation, close reading of architectural works, and attention to sensory and environmental conditions. These methods operate through adjacency, resonance, and contrast. Archival research investigates documents that reveal how marble has been classified, restored, circulated, and legislated across different historical periods. These sources illuminate the cultural, political, and bureaucratic processes that shaped marble's

association with antiquity, national identity, and modern authority. They also reveal silences, erased labour histories, environmental losses, and unrecorded material transformations that are central to understanding marble's genealogies. Fieldwork at Mount Pentelicus and across Athenian sites anchors the research in lived material encounters. These encounters were treated as situated engagements with material processes unfolding across different scales. The experience of moving through quarries, encountering extraction debris, marble dust, abandoned cuts, and active quarry infrastructure informed the dissertation's attention to fragmentation, residue, and material transformation, while exposing the extent to which contemporary extraction technologies continue to reorganise the relation between marble, labour, and landscape. These encounters provided an empirical orientation through which broader geological, architectural, and historical processes became perceptible. The quarries expose extraction as a geological and social event, where blocks, fragments, tailings, and dust articulate a material life that exceeds architectural framing. Observations of marble within the city highlight the surface conditions, pitting, dulling, staining, and patching that mark ongoing negotiations between matter, environment, and human use. A close reading of architectural works supports an analysis of how marble functions across different formal, aesthetic, and political configurations. These readings examine the roles marble plays in classical structures, neoclassical revivals, modernist institutions, diplomatic buildings, and quotidian urban spaces. Attention to the surface, its smoothness, opacity, reflectivity, or grain, reveals the ways marble mediates between materiality and meaning. Attention to scale is central. The research moves from geological pressures to state policies, from monumental facades to dispersed particles. This movement is not decorative; it is methodological. It allows the dissertation to trace how different stabilisations coexist, how territorialisation at one scale may be undone at another, and how material transformations resist their conceptual framing. Taken together, these methods support a mode of inquiry that does not attempt to reconcile marble's contradictions but to understand their persistence. They allow the dissertation to follow marble's movements across epochs, regimes, and material states, and to articulate how Pentelic marble becomes a site where matter, power, identity, and imagination continually reconfigure one another.

### III Dissertation Structure and Contribution

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The structure of this dissertation is a series of shifting material conditions through which Pentelic marble becomes legible. It refuses the conventional progression from antiquity to modernity, from form to abstraction, from monument to fragment. Instead, it arranges the inquiry around three modes of material stabilisation, object, surface, and particle, which are not phases in a linear evolution but nodes in a field of recurring, overlapping, and at times contradictory intensities. These modes emerge not as abstractions but as historically situated configurations, each shaped by practices that attempt to render matter coherent and by counterforces that unsettle this coherence. This structure allows the dissertation to move across temporalities without binding them to developmental narratives. Geological time intersects with the modern administrative state; colonial aesthetic norms reanimate classical imaginaries; particulate dispersals coexist with the managerial surfaces of 20<sup>th</sup> century diplomacy. The arrangement of the dissertation, therefore, expresses the conceptual argument at its core: that Pentelic marble does not reside within a single history but becomes what it is through multiple and intersecting genealogies. These genealogies do not converge into unity. They remain open, partial, and discontinuous, and the structure of the dissertation is designed to hold that multiplicity without resolving it. Although this dissertation is organised genealogically rather than chronologically, the principal historical constellations discussed can be broadly situated as follows: classical antiquity; Byzantine and Ottoman reworkings of the material landscape; 19<sup>th</sup> century neoclassical nation-building; 20<sup>th</sup> century modernism and global circulation; and contemporary material and ecological conditions. These periods do not function here as discrete stages in a linear development. Rather, they constitute overlapping historical formations that recur throughout the dissertation as Pentelic marble is stabilised and reconfigured as an object, a surface, and a particle. The chronology serves only as a provisional orientation for the reader; the argument itself follows genealogical relations that frequently move across and between historical periods.

The first part, *Classical Object*, engages the longeststanding and most resilient stabilisation of Pentelic marble: the coherent block identified with classical antiquity. Here, marble appears as a bearer of order, proportion, and idealised form, aligned with a vision of antiquity that has shaped generations of artistic, architectural, and political imagination. Yet this coherence is not inherent in the material. It is produced through a series of discursive, visual, and technical operations: the erasure of polychromy; the canonisation of whiteness as a marker of purity and civilisation; the construction of Greece as the cradle of Western cultural lineage; the restoration practices that create the appearance of unbroken continuity. In this part, the dissertation traces the production of the marble object through architectural theory,

neoclassical reconstruction, imperial collecting, and nationalist symbolisation. It shows how marble becomes an “object-regime”: a stabilised configuration in which material and epistemic forces converge to produce a coherent entity. But this coherence is fragile. Embedded within the classical block are tensions, labour concealed beneath idealised form, fractures masked by surface smoothing, and colonial projections that reframe Greek antiquity as a European inheritance. By revealing these tensions, the first part demonstrates that the classical marble object is not a timeless essence but a historically constructed stabilisation that depends on continuous maintenance.

The second part, *Modern Surface*, shifts attention from the solidity of the block to the surface’s thinness, smoothness, and abstraction. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marble was increasingly deterritorialised from its classical role and reterritorialised within modernist aesthetics, diplomatic architecture, and state institutions. Its depth becomes secondary; its surface becomes primary. The marble tile, panel, or facade does not emphasise mass but visibility. It projects clarity, neutrality, and timeless authority. Behind this apparent simplicity lies a dense interplay of political and epistemic forces. Marble surfaces in this era operate as interfaces, zones through which institutions stage their power. In embassies, ministries, museums, universities, and hotel lobbies, the whiteness of marble becomes a visual shorthand for rationality and legitimacy. The surface smooths over the disparities of labour and extraction, the colonial legacies of aesthetic whiteness, and the national narratives embedded in the material. Yet the surface is never entirely stable. Weathering, staining, microfractures, and environmental exposure gradually reveal material conditions that resist the perfection projected upon them. This part of the dissertation explores how modernism embraced the marble surface as a means of reconciling global architectural languages with local historical imaginaries, and how this reconciliation was often strained. The use of Pentelic marble in modernist Athens becomes a site where national selfpresentation intersects with international aesthetics, where the desire for continuity with antiquity coexists uneasily with the imperatives of modern governance, and where the whiteness of the surface continues, quietly and persistently, to echo its earlier racialised and civilisational associations. By tracing the operations of the modern surface, the dissertation reveals a second stabilisation of marble, one that effaces depth in favour of legibility, that reorganises material complexity into institutional clarity, and that situates marble within global circuits of authority. This surface is neither merely decorative nor simply functional; it is a political and epistemic device.

The final part, *Material Particle*, moves into the smallest scales, the dispersed, fractured, and unstable states of marble. This is where the genealogical argument extends beyond familiar architectural categories. At this level, marble no longer

appears as a coherent object or even a legible surface. It appears as sediment, dust, chips, or residue. These particulate forms are not incidental; they are key to understanding the material's agency. The particle discloses processes that the object and surface obscure: geological thresholds, structural fatigue, environmental erosion, mechanical breakage, and the cycles of extraction and abandonment that shape the contemporary landscape of Mount Pentelicus. It also reveals human and nonhuman histories that remain invisible at larger scales: the repetitive gestures of quarry workers, the dispersed remains of illegal extraction, the ecological scars left on the mountain, the migration of dust particles across the city's atmosphere. In attending to the particle, the dissertation shifts from marble as a bearer of classical memory to marble as a dynamic material field, where forces operate beyond the horizon of representation. This scale exposes the limits of monumental imagination, challenging the coherence traditionally imposed on the material and opening a new understanding of how matter participates in the production of space, identity, and history. The particle is not an endpoint. It is another stabilisation, foregrounding material agency and geological entanglement, and complicating the cultural and architectural narratives that attempt to contain marble within classical or modern frames. Through this final part, the dissertation proposes a material ontology capable of accommodating dispersal, contradiction, and transformation. Taken together, these three parts examine different material states of marble and transform the analytical work performed by the dissertation's key concepts.

While territorialisation, deterritorialisation, genealogy, coloniality, and whiteness operate throughout the dissertation, they do not produce the same analytical effects at each scale. In *Classical Object*, these concepts illuminate the stabilisation of Pentelic marble as a coherent classical material, exposing how architectural authority, cultural legitimacy, and racialised ideals of whiteness are assembled through the production of apparently self-evident forms. In *Modern Surface*, attention shifts from stabilisation to circulation. Marble becomes an interface through which these earlier formations are abstracted, institutionalised, and projected across modern architectures of governance, diplomacy, and global exchange. Here, the analysis shows how authority is maintained through regimes of visibility that present particular historical and political arrangements as neutral or universal. In *Material Particle*, the same concepts expose the limits of these stabilisations. Attention turns to fragmentation, residue, labour, extraction, and geological processes that exceed the coherence of both object and surface, revealing what previous formations depend upon yet simultaneously obscure. The movement from object to surface to particle, therefore, progressively transforms what becomes visible within the material, political, and colonial genealogies examined by the

dissertation. Put differently, the object exposes how classical authority is produced, the surface how that authority circulates, and the particle what both forms of authority exclude.

The contribution of this dissertation lies in its reconfiguration of how architectural materials, and marble in particular, are understood. It advances a genealogical materialism attuned to the multiplicities of marble's life across object, surface, and particle. First, it reframes Pentelic marble as a material with historical agency, resisting the reduction of matter to passive substrate. This is not to attribute intentionality to stone, but to recognise that marble's capacities, its fracture lines, its reflective properties, its weathering patterns, its geological singularities, shape and are shaped by cultural, political, and architectural practices. The dissertation thus positions matter as an active participant in processes typically described in exclusively human terms. Second, it demonstrates how architectural meaning emerges through material–political entanglements spanning classical canon formation, colonial aesthetics, nation-building, modernist abstraction, and contemporary ecological conditions. Marble becomes a site where these entanglements become visible and tangible. In tracing these operations, the dissertation unsettles the ways classical antiquity has been mobilised in modern discourses. It also contributes to postcolonial architectural scholarship by showing how genealogy can be mobilised to trace the material operations through which colonial distinctions persist, mutate, and reappear within architectural histories that frequently present themselves as universal, neutral, or postcolonial. It reveals the material and epistemic violence embedded in the whiteness attributed to the classical form. Third, it contributes to Mediterranean studies by proposing a materialism grounded not in cultural essence but in geological, political, and environmental specificities. The notion of Mediterranean materialism proposed here does not assume the Mediterranean as a coherent cultural, geographical, or civilisational unit. Rather, it draws upon debates within Mediterranean Studies that have emphasised mobility, conflict, asymmetrical exchange, and overlapping historical formations. The Mediterranean, therefore, appears less as a stable region than as a contested field produced through uneven political, economic, and material relations. Mediterranean materialism does not seek to recover a Mediterranean essence or regional unity. Instead, it follows the material processes, extractive networks, circulations, and geological formations that traverse the region while remaining attentive to local specificities and historical asymmetries. This Mediterranean materialism resists the idealisation of the region; it acknowledges the region's long histories of extraction, circulation, mixture, and rupture.

The Mediterranean here is neither origin nor periphery but a field of ongoing material and conceptual negotiation. Finally, the dissertation intervenes in architectural theory and historiography by experimenting with structure itself. It demonstrates how a non-linear, scale-shifting, genealogical approach can reveal forms of material–conceptual relation that remain invisible within conventional narratives. The structure of the dissertation thus enacts its central argument: that marble’s coherence is not given but produced, and that this production unfolds within overlapping fields of power, imagination, and matter. In bringing together these contributions, the dissertation offers a framework for thinking architecture beyond the object and beyond typology, towards an architecture attuned to material genealogies, political entanglements, and the active life of matter itself.

# 1 Classical Object

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Pentelic marble often appears in architectural history as though its meaning had already been decided. It enters accounts of antiquity, architecture, and cultural heritage as a material whose significance seems self-evident: the stone of the Parthenon, the substance of classical form, the enduring medium of beauty, permanence, and civilisation. Whether encountered in architectural histories, archaeological narratives, restoration practices, or the urban landscape of Athens itself, marble is generally presented as a coherent entity whose cultural authority requires little explanation. The object appears already formed. The apparent stability of the classical marble object conceals a long history of aesthetic judgments, material practices, political projects, institutional interventions, and systems of knowledge through which marble acquired its privileged position. What appears today as a continuous inheritance from antiquity is better understood as the outcome of repeated acts of stabilisation. This part investigates the conditions under which Pentelic marble became intelligible as a classical object. Rather than approaching marble as a passive material that receives cultural meanings from elsewhere, it examines how material properties, architectural practices, political ambitions, and cultural imaginaries converge in the production of marble's authority. The object is therefore approached genealogically. It is not treated as an origin, an essence, or a timeless substance but as a historically contingent formation whose apparent permanence depends upon continuous maintenance. The classical object refers to a broader assemblage through which marble becomes visible, knowable, and valuable within particular historical conditions. Architecture, archaeology, art history, conservation, state institutions, and cultural narratives each contribute to this process. Together, they establish the material and conceptual boundaries through which marble appears as a coherent entity capable of carrying meanings such as antiquity, national identity, beauty, and cultural legitimacy.

That formation is approached from different perspectives. Chapter 1.1, *Material Athens*, examines the relationship between Pentelic marble and the material, cultural, and imaginative landscape of Athens. Particular attention is given to the ways geological formations, urban experiences, artistic interpretations, and aesthetic traditions contributed to marble's emergence as a privileged architectural material. Here, marble appears as a cultural technology through which relationships between matter, memory, and collective identity become organised. Chapter 1.2, *Neoclassical Alignments*, shifts to the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the formation of the modern Greek state.

In this context, marble becomes entangled with projects of nation-building, urban planning, historical reconstruction, and cultural self-definition. The transformation of Athens after independence illustrates how Pentelic marble participated in the production of new narratives linking antiquity to modernity. The main question is how material practices helped create the appearance of continuity between different historical formations. Chapter 1.3, *Tradition under Pressure*, investigates the tensions, exclusions, and displacements that accompanied these processes. The coherence of the classical object depended not only upon what was preserved and celebrated but also upon what was marginalised, forgotten, or rendered invisible. The erasure of ancient polychromy, the suppression of Ottoman and vernacular histories, the obscuring of quarry labour, and the racialisation of whiteness each contributed to marble's authority as a classical material. The object emerges as the provisional result of struggles over visibility, value, and historical legitimacy.

Several themes, therefore, recur throughout the *Classical Object*. Whiteness, coloniality, territorialisation, nationhood, heritage, and material agency do not function as independent topics. They intersect within the historical production of marble's coherence. Their repeated appearance is intended to reveal how the same material participates in different configurations of power and meaning. Each return discloses another dimension of the object's formation and another set of conditions that sustain its apparent stability. At stake is a reconsideration of one of architecture's most persuasive material certainties. The classical marble object often appears as a point of origin from which architectural meanings naturally unfold. Genealogy invites a different perspective; it asks how marble became what it appears to be. Such a shift redirects attention from origins to formations, from timeless essences to historical processes, and from inherited meanings to the practices through which meanings are produced and maintained. The purpose of the chapters that follow is therefore not to diminish the power of the classical object but to understand the conditions of its emergence. By tracing the aesthetic, material, political, and epistemic operations through which Pentelic marble acquired authority, the *Classical Object* examines how a geological material became a cultural object, how a stone became classical, and how that classical status came to appear natural, self-evident, and enduring.

## 1.1 Material Athens

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### 1.1.1 Deep Time and Urban Imaginaries

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**FIG. 1.1** Pentelic marble surface with lichen growth. Photograph by Josef Röder. Arachne Database, German Archaeological Institute.

Pentelic marble, a transformed variety of limestone, enters historically specific architectural and cultural regimes already shaped by deep geological processes that stabilise the material as an object within architectural perception (Fig. 1.1). Yet, it is within these regimes that its coherence and cultural authority are produced. In this chapter, marble is approached within an object-regime: a mode of stabilisation through which classical and neoclassical traditions render the material coherent, legible, and available to architectural and cultural classification. Here, “object-regime” refers to the historical ensemble of perceptual, architectural, and classificatory practices that render marble legible as a coherent classical material. Its diverse textures, shaped by natural variations within the stone, offer extraordinary

pictorial potential and an intensity described as metaphysical, an effect generated by the visual density of its patterns and their partial resistance to immediate legibility. Such descriptions reveal how marble came to be read as an object of coherence, a material through which depth, harmony, and latent structure were projected. When cut, it reveals internal formations that have been historically interpreted as an inner “art.” These formations appear as a rich tapestry of quasi-scriptural, dotted, or geometric patterns that trace millions of years of intense tectonic activity and the slow aggregation of particles within the stone. These geological traces have been repeatedly interpreted as signs of inner order, even when such order is retrospectively imposed. Architects, aesthetes, and philosophers, from Piranesi and Ruskin to Leibniz and Goethe, were drawn to such stones, likely because quarrying exposes geological formations that later come to be interpreted through aesthetic and architectural categories,<sup>8</sup> not as inherent meaning but as invitations to projection. This movement already sketches a genealogy of such interpretive alignments. These interpretations disclose less about the stone itself than about the perceptual habits through which marble was constituted as an aesthetic object. Both art historians and architects have affirmed such insights. Architect Paolo Portoghesi read marble’s formations as evidence of a harmony between the human mind and an imagined order of natural shapes. Artists have long treated marble as if it bore psychic or unconscious structure, sensing coherence in its fractures and adapting their visions accordingly.<sup>9</sup> The intellectual weight attributed to marble is also supported by Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic study of the statue of Moses in Rome and his complex relationship with antiquity as paternal power.<sup>10</sup> What is often described as a “hidden order” within marble is an effect of this stabilising object-regime, revealing how nature’s capacity to configure itself under pressure is retrospectively read as an intentional pattern.<sup>11</sup> Patterned formations that assemble through internal processes, drawing dispersed particles into temporarily coherent structures, and are interpreted as a geometry of fleeting afterimages, often taken to suggest a universal formal order. Over the past 150 years, various disciplines have

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<sup>8</sup> Roger Caillois, *The Writing of Stones* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985).

<sup>9</sup> Alison Leitch, “The Life of Marble: The Experience and Meaning of Work in the Marble Quarries of Carrara,” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1996), 235–57.

<sup>10</sup> Argyro Loukaki, “Central Archaeological Domains of Athens and Rome: Physical, Metaphysical and Moral Aspects of Their Respective Management,” in *Urban Ethics under Conditions of Crisis: Politics, Architecture, Landscape Sustainability and Multidisciplinary Engineering*, ed. Konstantinos Moraitis and Stamatina Th. Rassia (Singapore: World Scientific, 2019).

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Maria Stafford, *Echo Objects: The Cognitive Work of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

converged on the idea that natural formations exhibit coherence.<sup>12</sup> The metaphysical exploration of matter has its roots in the pre-Socratic era. Plato and Aristotle examined the relationship between form and matter.<sup>13</sup> Hermetic texts urged listening to “the great voice of things,” and the god Mithra was depicted as emerging from a rock. Jesus uses a stone metaphor in the Gospel of Thomas: “Split a piece of wood. I am there. Lift the stone, and you will find me there.”<sup>14</sup> Romantics imagined such patterns as evidence of inherent mentality, further reinforcing the marble object as a vessel of meaning.

The quasi-metaphysical dimension attributed to marble in this chapter does not arise from any inherent essence, but from a genealogy of perceptual practices that merge material encounter with idealisation. The apparent unity of the marble block is an accomplishment of interpretation, not a natural given. It emerges instead at the interface of geological formations, architectural practices, and historically sedimented modes of perception. What appears as depth, essence, or unconscious order is approached as an effect, produced within material relations where matter and interpretation remain inseparable, yet irreducible to one another. In particular, Pentelic marble exemplifies how these materials actively shape urban environments. Marble’s familiar forms resonate across various urban surfaces, entering immediate relationships with surrounding spaces and establishing associations with corresponding natural forms and their radiance. Its enduring presence contributes to recurring reference points through which social bonds and collective identities are articulated. Through its interplay with colour, Pentelic marble accomplishes formal clarifications, redefinitions, and individualisations while also deepening emotional and cultural connections.<sup>15</sup> The surface and inner qualities of Pentelic marble foster shared, often unarticulated experiences. Its sensor appeal and historical depth contribute to a shared cultural touchstone that captivates individuals and encourages collective appreciation of public aesthetics. It participates in producing urban atmospheres perceived as continuous, classical, or timeless, even when these effects are constructed. Pentelic marble has often been attributed a “noble” significance, whether in complete architectural or sculptural forms or even in fragments. In Greek temples, this marble produces geometrically sharp ruins because its material

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Watson, *Convergence: The Idea at the Heart of Science* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, vol. 7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1933).

<sup>14</sup> James M. Robinson and Thomas O. Lambdin, “The Gospel of Thomas,” in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990), 97.

<sup>15</sup> Dimitris Antonakakis, Δημήτρης Πικιώνης: Δύο Διαλέξεις [Dimitris Pikionis: Two Lectures] (Athens: Domes, 2013), 27–29.

consistency allows structure and surface to coincide. The structural system of marble temples frames the sky with precision, becoming an interface between human measure and cosmic order. Here, marble functions as a durable cultural object, a locus where civic memory, aesthetic authority, and the imagination of continuity become organised. In comparison, Roman brick-and-concrete ruins, often constructed in layered systems and relying on plaster for visual coherence, have been described as ominous and gaping. These contrasts expose how different material regimes resist or reinforce the unified coherence associated with the classical marble object. The stark difference between geometric clarity and porous mystery signals distinct material logics and constructional regimes, separating the archaeological landscapes of Athens and Rome.<sup>16</sup> Modern engagements with classical Greece include innovative restoration programs, new museums such as the Acropolis Museum, and care for the Acropolis landscape, including interventions designed by the Greek architect Dimitris Pikionis. Pikionis weathered and layered marble alongside modern materials, such as concrete, to evoke deep temporal layers.



FIG. 1.2 Reconstruction of the Acropolis in Athens. Painting by Leo von Klenze, 1846. Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

<sup>16</sup> Loukaki, "Central Archaeological Domains of Athens and Rome: Physical, Metaphysical and Moral Aspects of Their Respective Management."

Sculpture often participates in the articulation of collective identity through processes that render forms visible from within matter. With marble statues such as the Nike of Samothrace or the Aphrodite of Melos, interpreted as linking human and transcendent forms, a heavenly world is vividly captured. These figures do not merely represent individuals; they articulate shared ideals across generations. Although carved from Pentelic marble, their perceived continuity with ancient Greek tradition is not given; it is constructed through genealogies of repetition and reinterpretation. These sculptures contribute to a collective framework of analogy, aspiration, and myth.<sup>17</sup> The sensuous beauty of the marble forms creates tension between physical and aspirational domains. Eroticism here is not sexual but refers to attraction toward form, vitality, and presence. Great sculptors, such as Phidias and Michelangelo, work through the resistance of marble to bring forth possibilities. Their work links material transformation with imagination, connecting the physical world to horizons of possibility.<sup>18</sup> Painting explored the pictorial qualities of Pentelic marble and the Acropolis, especially after the founding of the Greek state in 1832. Artists sought to capture the qualities of marble by drawing on the classical past and ancient connections between painting and poetry. The Sacred Rock attracted numerous artists, both Greek and foreign. However, their approaches differ; Leo von Klenze's 19<sup>th</sup> century painting "Reconstruction of the Acropolis" approaches the Acropolis through the study and reconstruction of the East in Athens, or perhaps through the restoration of a brilliant past for the West in Greece (Fig. 1.2). In contrast, the modern Greek painter Spyros Vassiliou explores the continuing presence of the marbles within modern Greek life, examining their role in the community and contemplating on their enduring place within the city despite the passage of time and change (Fig. 1.3). Furthermore, he comments on previous works by foreigners, perceiving the Acropolis as a persistent centre within the city despite the passage of time and change, and poses and answers the question, "To whom does this place belong?"<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ethel Adnan, *The Cost for Love We are Not Willing to Pay* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 9.

<sup>18</sup> David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2000), 127.

<sup>19</sup> To KKE: *Επίσημα Κείμενα 1940-1945* [The KKE: Official Texts 1940-1945], vol. 5 (Athens: Synchroni Epochi, 1981). The slogan *Greece belongs to the Greeks* was used by the Communist Party of Greece (KKE) during the Battle of Athens against British intervention in December 1944. It was first referenced in the Decision of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the KKE dated 17 December 1944 and published in *Rizospastis* on 19 December 1944. On 11 December 1974, Konstantinos Karamanlis, Prime Minister for New Democracy, the liberal-conservative party in Greece, stated in Parliament: *Greece belongs to the Western world*. Andreas Papandreou, former Prime Minister of the Panhellenic Socialist Movement, the social-democratic party in Greece, responded: *We prefer to belong to the Greeks*.



FIG. 1.3 The ruined house of Parthenis. Painting by Spyros Vassiliou, 1978. Published in *Ελευθερία* [Freedom] newspaper, Athens.

The widespread cultural attachment to Pentelic marble in Athens involves the performance of urban rituals, whether during holidays or daily routine, next to, opposite, or even on marble fragments of former architectural components such as columns, capitals, or entablatures. On days of clear brightness, when archaeological sites become urban ecosystems of exquisite beauty, these ancient fragments enrich the local visual landscape. Local Byzantine monuments had already incorporated ancient, recycled marble, sometimes combined with elaborate Byzantine elements, as seen in the central Byzantine church Panagia Gorgoepikoos.<sup>20</sup> Present-day attachment to marble includes its use in burials, following the ancient and neoclassical traditions of pioneers from the Cycladic island of Tinos; marble tabletops in cafés where creative generations of the 1930s and 1960s convened; pavements of the historic centre; and modern facades. The widespread presence of this material distinguishes central Athens from other European cities. It should now be clearer why Pentelic marble, dominant in the monumental art and architecture of Athens, becomes a site where multiple aesthetic, spatial, and cultural processes

<sup>20</sup> Argyro Loukaki, "Assaulting the Archetypes: Urban Materiality and the Current Adulation and Hatred for Marble in Athens," in *Urban Art and the City* (Routledge, 2020), 53.

are assembled and reactivated, why is involved in the production of multiple layers of meaning, including psychic intensities, sensory memories, mythologies of urban formation, daily encounters with archetypes, articulated connections to the past, and the ongoing activation of genealogies of urban identity. Attitudes toward the past, from the most glorifying to the most iconoclastic, demonstrate that it is impossible to avoid measuring oneself against it. The material foundation of a city like Athens shapes its space, art, social life, urban memory, identity, and even national and local pride to an extent yet to be fully recognised.

### 1.1.2 Marble as Cultural Technology

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Seated atop the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis, central site within the city's historical and cultural formations, lie the key reference points of Ancient Greek cultural and artistic civilisation. At the forefront is the Parthenon, renowned for its extraordinary sculptures by Phidias, alongside the Erechtheion, the Temple of Athena Nike, and the monumental entrance, the Propylaea. These structures, crafted from gleaming Pentelic marble, have been historically interpreted as articulating Greek cultural ideals through the stabilisation of marble as an architectural object. This marble has been repeatedly associated with ideals such as beauty, reverence for the human form, democracy, and urban permanence, as evidenced by its cultural and architectural use. The marble for this grand 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Periclean building programme was meticulously quarried from Mount Pentelicos (Pentelikon), located about 17 kilometres north of Athens. Attica is noted for its abundance of building stones, as Xenophon observed. While the Athenians initially imported lychnites, a highly translucent and pure marble with large grains from the Cycladic island of Paros, they later favoured the finer-grained and equally translucent Pentelic marble, noted for the honeyed tones its interface develops over time.<sup>21</sup> This select marble was used primarily for the most prominent civic and religious structures of Athens. The globally admired Pentelic marble, available in massive beds, provided the blocks for the Acropolis's architectural members;<sup>22</sup> thus, on the Periclean Acropolis, walls, foundations, sculptures, and columns are materially continuous with Attic geological formations, composed of accumulated mineral particles over deep time.

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<sup>21</sup> Henry S. Washington, "The Identification of the Marbles Used in Greek Sculpture," *American Journal of Archaeology* 2, no. 1-2 (1898): 1-18.

<sup>22</sup> RE Wycherley, "The Stones of Athens," *Greece & Rome* 21, no. 1 (1974): 54-67.



FIG. 1.4 The Parthenon. Photograph, 1938.  
American School of Classical Studies at Athens Photographic Collection.

Since ancient times, the Acropolis Rock has been closely associated with the goddess Athena and the city of Athens, which has come to function as a key interface for articulating collective identity and resilience amid catastrophes. This strength characterises only the most essential urban monuments, operating as recurring reference points within collective memory and urban permanence.<sup>23</sup> The Acropolis Rock combines spatial, architectural, and cultural significance, as documented in historical texts and artistic representations. The Parthenon, crafted in Pentelic marble, reveals the interplay of material properties and architectural techniques that render the building a coherent object of classical refinement (Fig. 1.4). Its proportions and craftsmanship have often been described as outcomes of technical refinement grounded in the manipulation of local stone. This marble, carefully shaped and fitted, highlights the physicality of classical architecture, its tactile surface and material presence. Simultaneously, the Parthenon's design has been interpreted as engaging with the intellectual and cultural ideals of ancient Greece, a civilisation that valued proportion, harmony, and formal refinement. Thus, the Parthenon demonstrates

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<sup>23</sup> M. Christine Boyer, *The City of Collective Memory: Its Historical Imagery and Architectural Entertainments* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

human effort and ingenuity through careful shaping and architectural practice, a reading that aligns with a genealogy of how material and ideal converge. It has been read as a site associated with ideas of freedom, not only because it offers sweeping views over the Attic basin, the Saronic Gulf, and the Peloponnese, but because it foregrounds the solidity and durability associated with classical architecture. Pentelic marble would later be used in the construction of both neoclassical and modern Athens, extending its use across these contexts. In Mediterranean urban and cultural landscapes, the richness of the natural and cultural subsoil is vital.

Just as the porous tuff of Naples defines its character as a city of volcanic fire, Athens and Greece, more broadly, have often been described through elements such as light, salt, and marble.<sup>24</sup> Greek archetypes have been interpreted as shaping urban imagination and influencing contemporary creators, such as Allen Ginsberg, James Merrill, Giorgos Seferis, and Yannis Ritsos.<sup>25</sup> Ancient marble, through its historical and literary reception, has been associated with ideas of prosperity and cultural identity. National Greek poets like Angelos Sikelianos and Odysseas Elytis have commented on the close bonds between nature and culture, the extent of landscape transformation, and the national debt of the present to the past. For the Greek poet Ritsos, marble is invoked in relation to national freedom and dignity:

*These gleaming white marble blocks no ugly rust will stain  
Nor can a Romios<sup>26</sup> or the wild wind be chained around the ankle.*<sup>27</sup>

To Seferis, marble denotes national elation after critical times:

*Just a little more  
And we shall see the almond trees in blossom  
The marbles shining in the sun  
the sea, the curling waves.  
Just a little more,  
Let us rise just a little higher.*<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Wycherley, "The Stones of Athens."

<sup>25</sup> Argyro Loukaki, *Living ruins, Value Conflicts* (Routledge, 2016).

<sup>26</sup> *Romios* historically refers to Greeks within the Byzantine or Ottoman Empire, emphasizing cultural and ethnic ties, while *Greek* is a broader term for people of Greek descent in contemporary usage.

<sup>27</sup> Yannis Ritsos and Mikis Theodorakis, "Εδώ το Φως [Here is the Light]," in *18 Λιανοτράγουδα της Πικρής Πατρίδας* [*18 Popular Poems of the Bitter Homeland*] (1974).

<sup>28</sup> Giorgos Seferis and Mikis Theodorakis, "Άίγο Ακόμα [Just a Little More]," (1971).

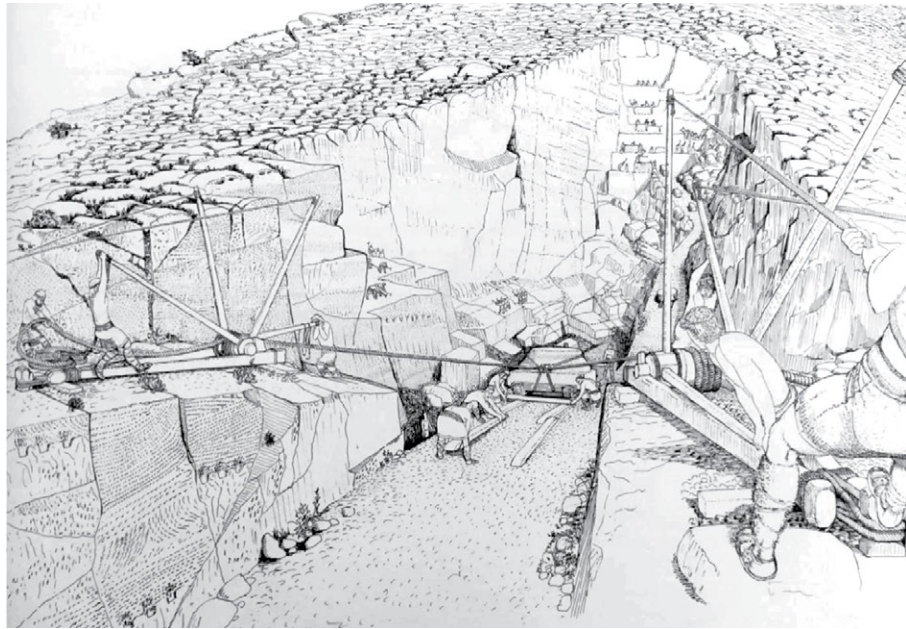


FIG. 1.5 Mount Pentelicus during ancient times. Drawing by Manolis Korres, 1995.  
From *From Pentelicon to the Parthenon*, Athens.

Central Athens exhibits contrasting interpretations of urban order, shaped by historical practices, material presence, and literary representations. Marble and its treatment in historical architecture and literature have been interpreted as conflicting ideals and anxieties regarding Athens' urban identity. The Acropolis and Mount Pentelicus were closely linked in classical times by the rugged road of marble, a material and logistical connection traversed by workers, architects, and artists (Fig. 1.5). This road, descending from Mount Pentelicus and following the natural topography, was used to transport marble blocks from the quarry to the Acropolis.<sup>29</sup> A complex relationship between Mount Pentelicus and the Acropolis emerges through material, architectural, and cultural practices. The first pole, Mount Pentelicus, features partially carved sculptures and quarry sites, where the interplay between extraction and formation becomes visible down to the level of mineral particles exposed by quarrying.<sup>30</sup> Rich in vegetation and running waters, it attracted modern

<sup>29</sup> Manolis Korres, *From Pentelicon to the Parthenon: The Ancient Quarries and the Story of a Half-Worked Column Capital of the First Marble Parthenon* (1995), 33.

<sup>30</sup> Oresivios, Πεντέλη: Από την Ανάδυση της Αιγαίας Γης έως τους Ρωμαϊκούς Χρόνους [Penteli: From the Emergence of Aegean Land to the Roman Times] (2012), <https://www.iranon.gr/PO/penteli.pdf>.

Greek writers and naturalists who regularly visited, dedicating verses and literary accounts in a manner reminiscent of Ruskin's admiration.<sup>31</sup> Spiritual associations have been described in this marble mountain, once crowned by a statue of Athena, as observed by the ancient geographer Pausanias. The bond between Mount Pentelicus and the Acropolis challenges the conventional separation between nature and culture. The Pentelic marble that composes the mountain was used to build the Acropolis, indicating an ongoing engagement between natural resources and human creation. This connection reminds of an ancient Greek belief, seen in the works of Plato<sup>32</sup> and Aristotle,<sup>33</sup> often described as interdependent. For ancient observers, the relationship between marble and cultural production was often described as continuous between material and conceptual realms. The use of marble from Mount Pentelicus in constructing the Acropolis can be read as articulating a conceptual continuity between material resources and cultural practices, in which the natural and the cultural were treated as interconnected in architectural reasoning. Yet, this perceived continuity between material resources and cultural practices was also entangled with exclusionary and hierarchical politics. Access to civic rights, ritual participation, and political decision-making was limited to male citizens of specific lineages, while women, enslaved people, and non-Athenians were systematically excluded. The aesthetic and spiritual perfection celebrated in marble architecture thus coexisted with social and ethnic inequalities, demonstrating that beauty and harmony coexisted with deeply structured hierarchies that were themselves reproduced genealogically. The Pentelicus cave, where the marble for the Parthenon was extracted, is one of these ancient quarries and has acquired dense cultural and interpretive significance.<sup>34</sup>

Possibly inspired by Plato's Allegory of the Cave,<sup>35</sup> the Pentelicus cave, a major site of marble extraction, has been interpreted in philosophical and literary texts as a locus of initiation and cultural significance. It remains a site of continued ritual use across different periods, both ancient and Christian, revealing how cultural spaces and times intermingle or suddenly emerge in Athens.<sup>36</sup> Tragedy, which has

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<sup>31</sup> John Ruskin, *Praeterita* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>32</sup> Plato, *Timaeus* (BoD–Books on Demand, 2019).

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 7.

<sup>34</sup> Korres, *From Pentelicon to the Parthenon: The Ancient Quarries and the Story of a Half-Worked Column Capital of the First Marble Parthenon*, 33.

<sup>35</sup> Plato, *The Republic*, vol. 7 (Wiley Online Library, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Oresivios, Πεντέλη: Από την Ανάδυση της Αιγαίας Γης έως τους Ρωμαϊκούς Χρόνους [Penteli: From the Emergence of Aegean Land to the Roman Times].

been described as a vehicle of ecstasy and a school of democracy for Athenians,<sup>37</sup> was invented by the poet Thespis of the Pentelic demos of Ikaria, now present-day Dionysos. The other pole, the Acropolis, exhibits forms of architectural refinement, evident in optical refinements made possible by the precise qualities of Pentelic marble.<sup>38</sup> The often described as the “breathing” of the Parthenon, likened to a human body and attributed to optical illusions such as the designed bulging of columns (entasis) and the slight curvatures of architectural members,<sup>39</sup> enabled in part by the workable precision of Pentelic marble. But the Acropolis was also intertwined with local myth and ritual practices, with caves serving as ceremonial sites within the urban landscape.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the wider area of Athens exhibits complex interconnections between material structures and practices, yet is always entangled with the contingencies, exclusions, and hierarchies of the society that produced it.

This interconnectedness between Mount Pentelicus and the Acropolis, rooted in ancient heritage, reappeared with modern political and architectural contexts when Athens was chosen as the Greek capital by King Ludwig of Bavaria in 1832, primarily for its classical heritage, which subsequently influenced neoclassicism. The syntactic importance of neoclassicism and its close imitation of classical prototypes, in terms of both morphology and material, especially Pentelic marble, facilitated by immediate proximity, makes Athenian neoclassicism unique. Mount Pentelicus continued to supply marble to modern Athens, rearticulating material practices across periods. The material rootedness of Pentelic marble has been implicated in processes of social cohesion and urban imaginaries. The colour white, through its use in neoclassical architecture, has been historically mobilised and interpreted in cultural discourse as associated with national and racial ideologies.<sup>41</sup> This narrative was rooted in notions of purity, classical heritage, and Western colonialism. The revival of classical antiquity during the 19<sup>th</sup> century emerged as a formative moment in shaping national identities across Europe, with Greece particularly influenced. Ancient Greece, idealised as the cradle of Western civilisation, positioned Athens as the epitome of this revered heritage. The colour white, reminiscent of the

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<sup>37</sup> Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Greek Imaginary: From Homer to Heraclitus, Seminars 1982-1983* (Edinburgh University Press, 2023).

<sup>38</sup> Manolis Korres, “The Construction of Ancient Columns” (National Technical University of Athens, 1992).

<sup>39</sup> Manolis Korres, “Refinements of Refinements,” in *Appearance and Essence. Refinements of Classical Architecture: Curvature.*, ed. Lothar Haselberger (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Eric Robertson Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, vol. 25 (Univ of California Press, 1951).

<sup>41</sup> Theodore G Zervas, *The Making of a Modern Greek Identity: Education, Nationalism, and the Teaching of a Greek National Past* (Columbia University Press New York, NY, 2012).

pristine marble statues and temples, came to be associated with the purity and grandeur of this classical epoch. The enduring imagery of white marble ruins and neoclassical facades in Athens helped shape global perceptions of Greece as the cradle of Western civilisation. During this period, Athens experienced a neoclassical architectural and artistic renaissance, in which the prominence of white was linked to the ideals of beauty, harmony, and rationality of ancient Greek culture.<sup>42</sup> This aesthetic preference not only reconfigured the visual character of the urban landscape but also contributed to associating white with notions of cultural and racial purity, situating these ideas within the broader sociopolitical context. The neoclassical movement, flourishing from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, significantly influenced the use of white in architecture. Inspired by the symmetrical lines and architectural finesse of ancient Greek and Roman structures, architects favoured white marble and white painted surfaces to evoke the splendour and purity of classical antiquity. Moreover, the urban development of Athens in the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed a resurgence of neoclassical architecture following Greek independence. Public edifices such as courthouses, museums, and government buildings designed in the neoclassical style featured white marble or white-painted facades, engaging with the city's classical heritage.<sup>43</sup> This not only reinforced the association of whiteness with cultural purity and national pride but also linked it to democratic ideals, justice, and civic virtue. Pentelic marble, renowned for its use in ancient classical monuments such as the Parthenon, Erechtheion, Propylaea, and Temple of Hephaestus, became closely associated with the aesthetic aspirations of modernism.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Neni Panourgíá, "Colonizing the Ideal: Neoclassical Articulations and European Modernities," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 9, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>43</sup> Dimitris Philippides, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830-1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας [Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830-1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture]* (Athens: Melissa, 1984).

<sup>44</sup> Panayotis Tournikiotis, "The Place of the Parthenon in the History and Theory of Modern Architecture," *The Parthenon and its Impact in Modern Times* (1994).

The notion that ancient Greek temples like the Parthenon were purely white is a misconception stemming from observations by 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century European scholars and art historians. The persistence of this misconception can be understood not only as an art-historical error but also as an effect of a broader regime of representation. Foucault describes Classical knowledge as operating through taxonomic arrangements in which objects acquire intelligibility through visible relations of identity and difference. Knowledge does not emerge from hidden depths but from systems of classification that render objects comparable and legible within ordered fields of representation.<sup>45</sup> The white Parthenon functioned precisely in this way. Marble was transformed into a representational object whose perceived clarity and purity made it available for inclusion within wider classificatory systems linking antiquity, civilisation, beauty, and European cultural identity. The suppression of ancient polychromy therefore did not merely conceal historical evidence; it enabled marble to circulate within an epistemic order that depended upon visual coherence and taxonomic stability. This belief emerged because the surviving marble ruins appeared white after centuries of weathering, which altered the marble's exposed surface. Pentelic marble, valued for its fine grain and bright appearance, was prominently used in these structures, stabilising them as an architectural object that fed 18<sup>th</sup> century perceptions of their whiteness. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, a prominent 18<sup>th</sup> century German art historian and archaeologist, was central in consolidating this view. Winckelmann, often regarded as the father of modern art history and classical archaeology, revered the "pure" white marble of Greek sculpture and architecture. His admiration for Pentelic marble's whiteness informed his writings, which shaped subsequent European interpretations of ancient Greek art. It was only later, through more detailed archaeological studies, that evidence of original polychromy was uncovered, indicating that many ancient Greek temples and statues, including those made from Pentelic marble, were, in fact, vividly painted.

Despite this, the myth of the "white" Parthenon has persisted, continuing to inform popular perceptions to this day. In exploring the works of Winckelmann, Goethe, and Hegel, it becomes possible to trace how, within the neoclassical tradition, arguments emerged that carried explicit racial implications. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, classicism initially marginalised colour as a relevant factor in evaluating beauty, before gradually privileging whiteness, not only marble but also human skin. As I will examine in greater detail, even the most esoteric discussions of Greek art

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<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Routledge, 2005), 55-83.

and architecture were sometimes mobilised in support of claims of European superiority and racial hierarchy.<sup>46</sup> Goethe, for example, compared Winckelmann to Columbus, underscoring his importance in “discovering” a cultural world long absent from European imagination.<sup>47</sup> Winckelmann’s systematic study of ancient art, beginning with 5<sup>th</sup> century Pentelic marble sculpture and expanding to broader Greek culture, can be read as a form of intellectual conquest: a European excavation of a past both materially tangible and intellectually appropriated. These narratives positioned ancient Greece within a European intellectual and cultural discourse, in which marble and neoclassical architecture operated as an interface for aesthetic authority and continuity. This narrative can be understood as participating in the colonisation of Greece within the European imagination, asserting that Greece is the origin of European culture while overlooking the historical continuities and social realities of Greek life under Ottoman rule, a positioning sustained through a genealogy of cultural appropriation. Goethe celebrated these discoveries as intellectual adventures,<sup>48</sup> assembling fragments of Pentelic marble into a cultural object within European imagination. The metaphorical rediscovery of Greece, like Columbus’s voyages, contributed to narratives of European supremacy. Ancient marble functioned as a material reference in Winckelmann’s work, which intertwined aesthetic contemplation with emergent European discourses on race and cultural hierarchy.<sup>49</sup> The whiteness of marble became entangled with the whiteness attributed to European populations, helping stabilise a subtle but persistent racial hierarchy within the framework of neoclassical aesthetics and contributing to genealogies of European self-understanding.<sup>50</sup> While colour could never be fully dismissed from considerations of beauty, whiteness came to be conceived as the absence of colour, the material and intellectual marker of European identity, and the standard against which the “other” was measured.<sup>51</sup> In this sense, the study of

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<sup>46</sup> Daniel Purdy, “The Whiteness of Beauty: Weimar Neo-Classicism and the Sculptural Transcendence of Color,” in *Colors 1800/1900/2000: Signs of Ethnic Difference* (Amsterdam — New York: Brill, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Winckelmann and his Century* (Newcomb Livraria Press, 2023).

<sup>48</sup> Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500–1900*, vol. 63 (New Haven: Yale UP, 1981).

<sup>49</sup> Purdy, “The Whiteness of Beauty: Weimar Neo-Classicism and the Sculptural Transcendence of Color,” 84.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, vol. 2 (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1987).

<sup>51</sup> Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013). <https://books.google.gr/books?id=5f-NAQAAQBAJ>.

Pentelic marble and the reconstruction of ancient Greek art were not purely scholarly or aesthetic projects. They operated within processes that imagined, codified, and legitimised a European genealogy rooted in whiteness.

The neoclassical tradition, from Winckelmann to Hegel, often linked colour and culture, particularly through the use of Pentelic marble in Greek architecture. As I will explore in more depth shortly, the whiteness of Pentelic marble was indirectly linked to the skin colour of Europeans, suggesting that the supposed ideals manifested in ancient architecture were, in some sense, transposable onto European bodies. Moreover, the absence of artificial body decorations, which was correlated with the advancement of civilisation, further reinforced this association. Scholars in the 18<sup>th</sup> century maintained that Greek temples, often made of Pentelic marble, were assumed to be unpainted, because colouring the white marble surface would detract from the form and spatial arrangement of the temple's mass. Only with more extensive archaeological investigations in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century was it established that Greek and Roman buildings, monuments, and sculptures were frequently painted in bright, often unnaturalistic colours.<sup>52</sup> Despite this, the 18<sup>th</sup> century view that Greek temples were originally white has often been treated within the discipline of art and architecture as a misconception engendered by a lack of scientific knowledge.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, the denial of polychromy, especially on Greek representations of the human body, fed into prevailing notions about the cultural significance of cosmetics, tattoos and other bodily decorations. To colour one's skin was frequently associated by 18<sup>th</sup> century European scholars with the activities of children, "primitive" peoples, and, depending on one's class, idle women. This association was rooted in the neoclassical tradition, which prioritised whiteness on both sculptures and bodies as a mark of cultural superiority, enabling an abstracted attention to form. Neoclassical scholars interpreted the whiteness of Pentelic marble as an ideal visual medium, expressing contemporary notions of aesthetic refinement and cultural hierarchy, a view reinforced through a genealogy of aesthetic norms. Winckelmann grappled with the sceptical claim that the variety of human facial features inevitably leads to different ideas of beauty. Despite acknowledging the wide differences between cultures, he insisted that a uniform ideal of beauty could be abstracted from the human body, often exemplified in the forms crafted from Pentelic marble. However, Winckelmann's writings are filled with enthusiastic contradictions and unfinished

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<sup>52</sup> Purdy, "The Whiteness of Beauty: Weimar Neo-Classicism and the Sculptural Transcendence of Color," 86.

<sup>53</sup> Carolyn Loessel Connor, *The Color of Ivory: Polychromy on Byzantine Ivories* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998), 7.

theories.<sup>54</sup> These disjunctures within his elaboration of beauty become apparent, particularly in his treatment of race, where competing claims form a genealogy of shifting aesthetic and racial reasoning.

Winckelmann discusses skin colour and beauty by making an abstract claim about whiteness, as indicated by the white marble he so admired, a claim later complicated by his praise of dark skin. Winckelmann states that colour contributes to beauty but is not beauty itself;<sup>55</sup> it heightens the effect of spatial form. The colour white reflects more light than any other colour, suggesting that white forms are perceived more acutely. A beautiful form appears more pronounced and physically larger when coloured white. From this general discussion of perception, Winckelmann moves to consider the negation of his theory: that the colour black can also be beautiful. In doing so, he shifts from abstraction toward aesthetic theory and into a discussion of human particulars in the form of racial types.<sup>56</sup> Before turning to the visual effect of sculptures in bronze or basalt, he remarks that Africans, described as Moors, might be regarded as beautiful when their features conform to certain formal ideals. Winckelmann is so insistent that the colour of a body's surface does not determine its aesthetic quality that he allows that dark-skinned people could also be beautiful. Here, for a moment, colour in sculpture, as well as on humans, is temporarily suspended within aesthetic judgment. Consequently, Winckelmann initially praised the whiteness of sculptures and architecture for enabling the observer to bracket surface appearance and focus on form. Yet he conceded that dark-skinned individuals might be judged beautiful when their features aligned with certain formal ideals, exposing the tensions and inconsistencies in his thinking about colour and aesthetic value. In his later writings, Winckelmann even argued that one should not censor those who prefer the beauty of brown skin over white, noting that brown skin absorbs more light and seems softer to the touch. This argument laid the groundwork for Johann Gottfried Herder's theory of sculpture, which emphasised the haptic perception of statues, where colour was secondary to spatial form. Winckelmann's wavering between the appreciation of dark skin tones and the dismissal of colour as inessential to beauty reveals the tensions within his aesthetic theory.<sup>57</sup> This suggestion would eventually become a founding assumption of modernist critiques

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<sup>54</sup> Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000), 157–58.

<sup>55</sup> Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Co., 1880), 147.

<sup>56</sup> Purdy, "The Whiteness of Beauty: Weimar Neo-Classicism and the Sculptural Transcendence of Color." 88.

<sup>57</sup> Winckelmann, *The History of Ancient Art*.

of ornamentation, or, as Adolf Loos provocatively argued, that decoration could be framed as a sign of either backwardness or degeneracy.<sup>58</sup> Winckelmann's admiration for classical architecture privileged simplicity, harmony, and proportion, values he associated with the whiteness of Pentelic marble. In Goethe's analysis of skin colour, neoclassical aesthetics becomes explicitly entangled with emerging racial thinking.

Goethe addresses the question that troubled Winckelmann, whether differences in appearance among people undermine the possibility of a single standard of beauty. Drawing on this theory of optical perception, Goethe concludes that light skin is positioned as most beautiful because it is least visually intrusive.<sup>59</sup> This argument aligns the aesthetic valuation of white marble with the valuation of living bodies. Yet the notion of "white skin" here does not operate as an elemental or natural purity. What is classified as white emerges from comparative visual regimes that measure bodies against constructed norms. Skin pigmentation comprises a range of tones and optical effects produced by the distribution of melanin particles within the skin. Whiteness functions not as a biological essence but as a historically produced category within systems of aesthetic and racial classification. Goethe argues that colours arise from the interaction between light and darkness, becoming perceptible through contrast. Human skin, therefore, always appears as a mixture of tonal variations rather than pure chromatic substance. His optical framework inadvertently offers a scientific vocabulary through which whiteness can be naturalised as the most desirable position within a spectrum of visible difference, contributing to a genealogy of racialised aesthetics.

Despite this, the aesthetic principle derived from Pentelic marble sculpture persists in modified form: a white surface is positioned as an ideal medium for displaying the human form. The argument is that whiteness effaces itself, disappearing as a visible feature, thereby allowing the body's shape to manifest more clearly. Goethe, who had a profound interest in art and aesthetics, expressed significant views on colour, sculpture, and architecture. One of his notable comments concerns the whiteness of classical sculptures and architecture. Goethe admired classical Greek and Roman art forms, often carved in white marble, which he read as emphasising clarity, simplicity, and elegance, in line with his aesthetic theories. However, his views on this "whiteness" were complex. Goethe believed that the white colour of classical sculptures contributed to their clarity, allowing their forms to stand out more and emphasising their idealised proportions and artistic perfection. White,

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<sup>58</sup> Adolf Loos, *Ornament and Crime* (Gato Negro Ediciones, 2014).

<sup>59</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethe's Werke*, vol. 13 (Vienna–Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta'schen Buchhandlung, 1817).

in Goethe's interpretation, emphasised clarity, simplicity, and elegance, aligning with his theoretical framework of classical beauty. In his writings, particularly in his work on the theory of colours, Goethe discussed how white contributed to his understanding of light and colour.<sup>60</sup> He argued that white light contains all colours, which added to the significance of white sculptures. In terms of architecture, Goethe appreciated the white buildings of classical antiquity, such as Greek temples, and viewed their whiteness as associated with ideas of purity and timelessness, aligning with his broader aesthetic principles. However, it is important to note that Goethe was also aware that many ancient sculptures and buildings were originally painted in bright colours, which had faded over time. Thus, Goethe's view of white in sculpture and architecture is intertwined with his broader ideas about beauty, purity, and the ideal forms of classical antiquity. Winckelmann's and Goethe's idealisation of white marble not only influenced art and architecture but also participated in the formation of broader cultural narratives linking beauty, race, and civilisation. These narratives would later unfold within modern genealogies of European cultural identity, increasingly entangled with nationalist sentiments.

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<sup>60</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Charles Lock Eastlake, *Goethe's Theory of Colours* (London: Routledge, 2019).

## 1.2 Neoclassical Alignments

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### 1.2.1 Reconfigured Centres

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FIG. 1.6 View of the Parthenon from the Propylea. Drawing by Edward Dodwell, 1819. British Museum, London.

Neoclassicism faced early local resistance in Athens, as conflicting pressures following the Greek War of Independence shaped the small Athenian society. On the one hand, there was a set of emerging drives towards modernity and progress, articulated through alignment with classical paradigms, the adoption of neoclassical street layouts, and the transformation of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century settlement into the capital of Greece (Fig. 1.6). On the other hand, this transformation did not originate from local authorities but from the court of King Otto, son of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. The reorganisation of Athens was thus shaped through plans conceived within Bavarian administrative and intellectual circles, where classical antiquity had already been stabilised as the cultural origin of Europe. Athens became a site

where this philhellenic vision was materially realised, reinscribing the city with an object-image of antiquity filtered through German neoclassical thought. Yet this vision did not unfold on a neutral site: pre-existing Ottoman structures, vernacular building practices, and the organic irregularities of the urban fabric mediated the implementation of imported ideals. This ambivalence can be traced in a simultaneous adherence to the picturesque, irregular spatial code of the existing settlement alongside the newly imposed order. The city came to be organised through partially overlapping urban logics: geometric regularity, carefully imposed in monumental areas, and an organic, irregular fabric persisting elsewhere. This duality can be observed in the differentiated use of Pentelic marble, which adorned the grand neoclassical structures, its deployment negotiated across foundations, local masonry practices, and residual material traces. Marble, in this context, operates not merely as the medium of a reconstructed classical ideal, formulated abroad and institutionalised through state power, but as a participant in the co-constitution of meaning and matter, entwined with vernacular and Ottoman materialities that continued to shape the emerging modern city. The objectregime traced earlier persists here in altered form, as the city is reorganised through the same stabilising impulses that first attached authority to marble's classical coherence. This relation unfolds through a genealogy of material negotiation.

In 1833, Athens, a provincial town of about 12,000 people, was proclaimed the capital of the new Greek kingdom. Despite its modest size, Athens was chosen over other contenders in part because of its historical significance, particularly the allure of its classical past, materialised in monuments crafted from Pentelic marble. Yet this choice was not uncontested. Local interests from other regions had advocated for their territories to become the seat of government, indicating the enduring significance of localism, itself shaped by the Ottoman-era decentralised administrative system and the fragmented geography of seas and mountains.<sup>61</sup> Even after the decision to transfer the capital, opposition persisted: many observers argued that Athens lacked the public buildings necessary for governmental functions, and that resources might better serve the revival of agriculture, commerce, and education. At the same time, the city's existing fabric, including Ottoman-era buildings, vernacular dwellings, and residual infrastructure, continued to structure everyday life, shaping both what could be built and how new forms, such as marble monuments, were integrated.

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<sup>61</sup> Eleni Bastéa, *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 7.



FIG. 1.7 The Parthenon with mosque inside. Drawing by James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, 1751. From *Antiquities of Athens*, Princeton.

Athens' selection as capital thus unfolded cannot be reduced to a simple imposition of classical ideals, but rather to a negotiation between imported visions, pre-existing material conditions, and ongoing local practices, a negotiation that would later form part of the genealogy of its modern identity (Fig. 1.7). Nevertheless, the idea of classical Athens, cherished by the Bavarian government, began to circulate among Greek inhabitants, contributing to ways of seeing the city through the eyes of classicising Europeans, associating it with Attic civilisation, the arts, the sciences, and its immortal military glory. This vision, underscored by the use of Pentelic marble in new constructions, helped consolidate Athens as a preferred choice for the capital.<sup>62</sup> Yet the debate over the transfer of the capital revealed the tension between idealised images of Athens and the material realities of the small town, whose infrastructure and urban fabric many considered inadequate for its new political role. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century observers documented these contrasts vividly. For Christopher Wordsworth,

<sup>62</sup> Georg Ludwig Von Maurer, *Ο Ελληνικός Λαός εις τας Σχέσεις του Δημοσίου, Εκκλησιαστικού και Ιδιωτικού Δικαίου προ του Απελευθερωτικού Αγώνος και μετ'αυτόν μέχρι της 31ης Ιουλίου 1834* [The Greek People in the Relations of Public, Ecclesiastical, and Private Law before the War of Independence and up to July 31, 1834] (Athens: Nomiki Bibliothiki, 1835), 477.

“The town of Athens is now lying in ruins. The streets are almost deserted: nearly all the houses are without roofs. The churches are reduced to bare walls and heaps of stones and mortar. There is but one church in which the service is performed.”<sup>63</sup> Christian Hansen likewise noted, “Only a few of the houses had roofs, and the streets were completely unrecognisable because everything had collapsed into boundless confusion. The surrounding beautiful fields, too, looked as though they had never been cultivated.”<sup>64</sup>

Athens, with its narrow, irregular streets and limited open spaces, was frequently described as a “Turkish” town, framed as lacking the order, symmetry, and hygiene that reformers associated with the ideal European city (Fig. 1.8). Yet such contrasts relied more on normative imaginaries than on empirical realities: many European cities of the period faced congestion, poverty, and the legacies of medieval morphologies. Even as the Ottoman Empire introduced urban modernisation, such as wider streets and neoclassical forms, political animosity and the desire to erase the Ottoman past contributed to framing Athens’ existing fabric as deficient. In 1813, Athens, with a population of 12,000, remained a minor, agriculturally dependent town, split between the Acropolis and the city proper. Since the Ottoman conquest in 1456, the Acropolis had functioned as a fortified settlement, hosting roughly 20,000 houses for the garrison and their families, clustered among ancient ruins, including the Parthenon, which was converted into a mosque.<sup>65</sup> A decade of conflict during the War of Independence left much of Ottoman Athens destroyed and its inhabitants dispersed, fragmenting the urban structure. It was against this material and social backdrop that plans for a New Athens were drafted, envisioning a capital to rise from the ruins as both modern and classically aligned. Pentelic marble became a key material within these plans, not only associating reconstruction with an idealised antiquity but also interacting with the remnants of Ottoman and vernacular infrastructures. The marble did not erase what preceded it; rather, its placement and use were conditioned by foundations, surviving structures, and local building practices, contributing to a cityscape in which classical aspirations were enacted through negotiation with the material realities of the past, a negotiation whose accumulated layers constitute a genealogy of urban transformation.

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<sup>63</sup> Christopher Wordsworth, *Athens and Attica: Journal of a Residence There* (London: John Murray, 1836), 51.

<sup>64</sup> Ida Haugsted, “The Architect Christian Hansen and the Greek Neo-classicism,” *Scandinavian Studies in Modern Greek* 4 (1980): 70.

<sup>65</sup> Ioannis Travlos, *Πολεοδομική Εξέλιξις των Αθηνών: Από των Προϊστορικών Χρόνων μέχρι των Αρχών του 19ου Αιώνος* [The Urban Evolution of the City of Athens: From the Pre-historic Times to the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century] (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2005), 202.



**FIG. 1.8** Plan of Athens. Map by Louis-François-Sébastien Fauvel, ca. 1800. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

In this sense, Athens' reconstruction emerges as a co-constitutive process in which imported ideals, residual Ottoman fabrics, vernacular practices, and Pentelic marble together shaped the city's transformation. Yet by 1900, Athens had transformed into a city of approximately 123,000 inhabitants,<sup>66</sup> featuring well-designed streets, tree-lined squares, and imposing civic and private structures, many adorned with Pentelic marble, articulating a connection to its constructed classical past. This transformation from a minor provincial town to a modern capital, points to the genealogical significance of the built environment in shaping the identity of the modern Greek nation. The regency's task was to modernise the kingdom by introducing Western state machinery; in doing so, they assumed that only Westerners or Greeks who had lived in Europe were suitable for key positions. By assigning critical roles to Bavarians, they sought to secure control over the country's affairs and secure power in a politically volatile climate. Yet even as administrative and architectural reforms advanced, the material realities of Athens' inherited urban fabric, Ottoman foundations, vernacular street patterns, and scattered domestic structures continued to influence where and how new structures, including marble monuments, could be realised. Modernisation thus unfolded through negotiation with, rather than erasure of, these persistent layers.

<sup>66</sup> Leontidou, *Πόλεις της Σιωπής: Εργατικός Εποικισμός της Αθήνας και του Πειραιά, 1909-1940* [*Cities of Silence: Labour Settlement of Athens and Piraeus, 1909-1940*], 48.



FIG. 1.9 Location of new town plans. Map by Eleni Bastea and Mark Forte, 1828–1912. From *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth*, Cambridge.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, over 170 plans were approved for founding new towns and expanding existing ones (Fig. 1.9), including 9 under Ioannis Kapodistrias (1828–31), 40 under Otto (1832–62), and 111 under George I (1863–1913).<sup>67</sup> These plans were generally based on regular, geometric grid patterns, articulating a genealogical ideal of homogenous urban space and a unified national culture. Yet, in practice, their implementation was mediated by topography, pre-existing streets, and surviving Ottoman and vernacular infrastructures, resulting in a cityscape where imported geometries intersected with inherited material conditions, a field shaped through genealogies of adaptation rather than imposition. Building legislation reinforced the state's ambitions, but even as the government sought to shape land, architecture, language, history, and religion, the entanglement of old and new, local and imported, persisted materially in streets, plots, and buildings.<sup>68</sup> The proposed plans for Athens included straight streets, town squares, and public spaces, with new towns designed on orthogonal grids of varying complexity; coastal grids were often aligned with the shoreline. Many of these plans remained in force for decades,

67 Kyriaki Kafkoulia, Nikolaos Papamichos, and Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis, Σχέδια πόλεων στην Ελλάδα του 19ου αιώνα [Town Plans in 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece], Scientific Yearbook of Polytechnic School, (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki Press, 1990), 103.

68 Vilma Hastaoglou-Martinidis, "City Form and National Identity: Urban Designs in Nineteenth Century Greece," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 13, no. 1 (1995): 110.

imposed order upon irregular street patterns and created major and minor squares that did not always align with the pre-existing layouts. In this context, the grid served both as a tool for surveying and establishing settlements and as a marker of the state's independence from Ottoman rule. As Stamatis Voulgaris, a Corfiot engineer of the French army, described, these plans marked a transition “from barbarity to civilisation,”<sup>69</sup> yet this transition was never unilateral: it was enacted through the interplay of state ideals, local practices, and enduring material conditions.

The orthogonal grid plans stemmed from a long tradition of urban planning connected with the legacies of Hippodamian and Roman planning, primarily associated with the founding of new towns or the expansion of existing ones. Similar challenges were encountered by colonial powers in Asia, Africa, and South America under different political conditions, where imported planning principles were invariably mediated by local material and social realities. The rebuilding of Greek towns paralleled the extensive reconstruction efforts undertaken in the Italian states after major earthquakes. For instance, the new towns in Calabria, built after the 1783 earthquake, were laid out on regular orthogonal grids with symmetrical configurations, incorporating open spaces, squares, and essential institutions such as markets, governors' palaces, churches, orphanages, schools, and hospitals. The new Greek towns closely resembled these urban solutions, while similar principles also informed early 19<sup>th</sup> century Napoleonic planning in France and Italy. Orthogonal grid planning thus became the preferred method for urban rebuilding in Greece, associated with processes of westernisation.<sup>70</sup> The grids were inscribed onto terrains already structured by vernacular practices and, in many cases, by residual Ottoman infrastructures, which conditioned their realisation. The newly planned cities, adorned with neoclassical civic structures often made from Pentelic marble, were mobilised in relation to aspirations towards an “enlightened” Europe, internal political and cultural unity, and a perceived break from Ottoman rule. At the same time, marble's deployment remained entangled with local construction practices and material constraints, situating these aspirations within a field of ongoing negotiation rather than complete rupture.

While the legacies of Hippodamian and Roman orthogonal planning were not forgotten, there were also more immediate precedents. Obeying an ideal of urban beauty, discipline, and uniformity, the neoclassical city was conceived through

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<sup>69</sup> Bastéa, *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Wolfgang Braunfels, *Urban Design in Western Europe: Regime and Architecture, 900-1900* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 176-339.

geometric order, with streets subordinated to a centre and distributed symmetrically. Nevertheless, theoretical knowledge alone cannot fully account for the production of specific plans. As the urban historian Leonardo Benevolo has shown in his analysis of 16<sup>th</sup> century Spanish colonialism, Spanish surveyors did not simply apply predetermined principles to new territories; they responded to the particularities of each site and to the programmatic demands of specific ways of living.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, the surveyors and architects who designed the new cities of modern Greece had to negotiate between their training and the material realities they encountered, including pre-existing plots, ownership patterns, and local building traditions. Many of these conditions, often rooted in Ottoman and vernacular spatial practices, persisted within the emerging urban fabric, shaping outcomes beyond planners' intentions. Problems of this kind were likewise addressed by colonial powers in Asia, Africa, and South America under different political conditions. What emerges, then, is not the straightforward application of a universal model, but a genealogical process in which planning ideals, material conditions, and social practices co-evolved, producing urban forms that were at once imposed and contingent.

What emerges from this account is not a singular narrative of imposition, but a more genealogical field of negotiation in which classical ideals, state ambitions, and material conditions intersect. If vernacular and Ottoman material cultures are understood not as elements displaced by neoclassicism but as co-constitutive elements in the formation of modern Athens, the notion of a seamless classical continuity is unsettled. The orthogonal grid, the neoclassical facade, and the marble monument as an architectural object can no longer be read as instruments of a totalising transformation, but as interventions that were continuously mediated by pre-existing spatial logics, construction practices, and material residues. In this light, the emergence of modern Athens can be read less as the restoration of a supposed classical origin and more as a process of uneven alignment, where imported forms and inherited conditions were brought into provisional correspondence without ever fully coinciding. Such a reading shifts the emphasis from representation towards process, foregrounding how meaning and matter are co-produced through ongoing adjustments, frictions, and accommodations. The city does not simply receive the classical; it reworks it through its own material continuities, even as these are partially obscured. What appears, then, is a landscape marked by overlapping regimes of form and matter, where the classical persists not as a stable ground but as one trajectory among others within a broader movement of reterritorialisation that remains incomplete.

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<sup>71</sup> Leonardo Benevolo, *The Architecture of the Renaissance*, vol. 1 (Psychology Press, 2002), 474.

### 1.2.2 Imported Ideals, Local Grounds



FIG. 1.10 Reception of King Otto of Greece in Athens. Painting by Peter von Hess, 1839  
Neue Pinakothek, Munich.

In December 1834, a 21-gun salute marked the arrival of young King Otto at Piraeus, signalling the transfer of the Greek capital from Nafplion to Athens (Fig. 1.10). Athens, suddenly assuming a central political role, became a site where the broader conditions of the new state were materially articulated. Concerns emerged that the city was not as clean, safe, or ordered as a European capital should be, prompting state intervention. The first planning effort, initiated in 1833 by Stamatios Kleanthis and Eduard Schaubert and later revised by Leo von Klenze, laid the groundwork for Athens' transformation into a modern capital. Centred on the Acropolis as a visual and spatial anchor, the plan drew from nearby ancient monuments, such as the Temple of Hephaestus and Hadrian's Library, to inform new neoclassical constructions, including the Athenian Trilogy. The extensive use of Pentelic marble contributed to producing this alignment with antiquity. Yet this alignment did not operate through simple substitution. The plan unfolded within an already inhabited and materially stratified landscape, where Ottoman-era structures, vernacular dwellings, and existing property relations conditioned what could be built and where. Even as the Acropolis was repositioned as the centre, its surroundings bore

the traces of prior occupations and uses, including its role as a fortified Ottoman settlement. The emerging neoclassical city was therefore not only conceived as a projection onto the site but as the gradual formation of a classical urban object negotiated through it in practice, a negotiation whose layers form a genealogy of the capital's material reconfiguration. Marble, while central to the articulation of a classical architectural order, was deployed within these constraints; foundations, craft practices, and the persistence of earlier spatial logics shaped its presence. New Athens was designed for 35,000–40,000 inhabitants, with a symmetrical layout intended to harmonise with both the topography and existing structures. While the old city clustered around the Acropolis, the new extensions spread across flatter terrain, structured by axial roads and focal monuments. The royal palace, positioned north of the Acropolis, became the compositional centre, overlooking a landscape that included Lykabettos hill, the Panathenaic Stadium, and the port of Piraeus. The modern city unfolded through orderly boulevards, gardens, and civic institutions. Yet even within this ordered vision, the existing fabric persisted, shaping alignments, constraining expropriations, and leaving traces that would continue to inform the city's development.

By 1900, Athens had expanded and reconfigured from a small Ottoman town of 11,000<sup>72</sup> into an elegant capital with a population of about 125,000.<sup>73</sup> New buildings, including the palace, parliament, cathedral, university, academy, and national library, emerged alongside tree-lined squares and marble-paved streets. These developments helped shape a relatively coherent civic object-image, fostering a perception of continuity and permanence. Yet this apparent coherence was also produced at the surface level, where facades articulated stability while deeper spatial logics persisted. Monumental architecture, often read as masking the internal instability of the new state, did not simply conceal underlying conditions; it coexisted with them. Behind the neoclassical facades, patterns of landownership, vernacular spatial practices, and remnants of earlier urban formations continued to structure everyday life, generating a genealogy of overlapping spatial orders. Marble thus functioned within a layered material field, rather than merely as a medium of projection, where aspirations and inherited conditions were held in tension rather than

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<sup>72</sup> Dimitris N. Karidis, "Πολεοδομικά των Αθηνών της Τουρκοκρατίας [Urban Issues of Athens during the Ottoman Rule]" (National Technical University of Athens, 1981).

<sup>73</sup> Leontidou, Πόλεις της Σιωπής: Εργατικός Εποικισμός της Αθήνας και του Πειραιά, 1909–1940 [Cities of Silence: Labour Settlement of Athens and Piraeus, 1909–1940].

resolved. Initially, the scale of the building appeared at odds with the Great Idea,<sup>74</sup> which remained oriented towards Constantinople. By the turn of the century, however, the cultural epicentre of Greece had gradually shifted from Constantinople to Athens. Substantial investment in building programs, together with the development of arts and letters in Athens, strengthened the capital's position among Greeks, both within and beyond national borders. Given the limited size of the Greek kingdom, the royal palace and the Athenian Trilogy might have seemed oversized and extravagant. However, contemporary Greek commentary reveals a more complex agenda. These new buildings were not just meeting the needs of a small agrarian state; they were designed to stand as cultural beacons for all Greeks of the diaspora, heralding the birth of New Athens and encouraging immigration. As the newspaper of Athens declared in 1861, Athens was the “focal point and centre of light and culture” for both the liberated Greek nation and the larger nation of greater Hellenism, still under foreign rule.<sup>75</sup> The new civic architecture served this broader cultural and political mission of the Great Idea. Over time, Athens began to operate through ceremonies, anniversaries, and rituals that activated its architecture into the city's life. While the reception of this new architecture was not always unanimous, most buildings garnered public support once completed. Greeks participated in state functions on newly marble-paved and tree-lined streets in the presence of the king, the Church, and the government. They gathered in newly established squares, celebrating religious and national holidays in the new cathedral. Thus, civic architecture in Athens came to serve as civic education, embedding the beliefs and rituals of the new capital into its urban fabric and contributing to a genealogy of civic identity.

However, the Kleanthis and Schaubert design for New Athens was never fully realised. As the architects foresaw, shortly after the plan's approval, land prices increased manyfold, and the new state's limited funds were unable to meet the rising expropriation costs. In response, King Ludwig I, Otto's father, commissioned the German architect Leo von Klenze to review the plan and make the necessary adjustments (Fig. 1.11). Klenze, already a seasoned architect with a notable career, was best known for designing Walhalla, a German pantheon inspired by Greek and

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<sup>74</sup> *Great Idea* was a nationalist concept that emerged in 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece, aiming to revive the Byzantine Empire by uniting all ethnic Greeks under one nation-state, with Constantinople (Istanbul) as its capital. The concept symbolised not just territorial expansion but also a return to Greece's imperial past. It fueled foreign policy throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, culminating in various military campaigns aimed at reclaiming Greek lands under Ottoman rule. While its early focus was on Constantinople, over time, Athens grew as a new cultural and political center, particularly by the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shifting focus toward consolidating the Greek identity within its modern borders.

<sup>75</sup> Εφημερίς των Αθηνών [The Newspaper of Athens] 14, 1196 (1861): 291.

Roman temples.<sup>76</sup> Klenze believed that the new city would have been better situated on the west and south sides of the Acropolis, offering greater protection from the sea winds.<sup>77</sup> His design retained the triangular layout of Piraeus, Stadium, and Hermou Streets proposed by Kleanthis and Schaubert, maintaining the three major boulevards that connected the palace with the Acropolis. Klenze's primary change was relocating the palace and surrounding ministries from Otto's Square to the area between the Areopagos and the hill of the Nymphs, near Theseion. He also recommended narrowing most of the proposed streets and squares to align with the scale of the southern city, likely in response to landowners' complaints. Kleanthis and Schaubert had proposed extensive interventions in the old town, introducing straight streets and regular alignments. Klenze, however, chose to preserve much of the existing street pattern, limiting major interventions to the city's expansion (Fig. 1.12). As a result, the irregular fabric of the old quarters became encircled by modern, orthogonal blocks. This decision, often read as pragmatic, also points to the persistence of earlier material and spatial orders within the emerging city. The Ottoman street network, rather than being erased, was partially retained, continuing to shape movement and urban experience. Over time, these fragments were no longer seen solely as remnants of a disavowed past but as elements contributing to the city's evolving character, forming a genealogy of spatial persistence within the modernising city. The separation between "old" and "new" Athens was thus never absolute; it was maintained as a distinction while materially traversed in practice. While contemporary planning emphasised axuality and symmetry, ancient Greek architecture was characterised by a more plastic, "organic" development, in which relationships between buildings were shaped by experience rather than by strict geometry. The fabric of the pre-liberation city did not easily conform to early 19<sup>th</sup> century planning ideals, particularly as Athens became the capital. Kleanthis, Schaubert, and Klenze therefore opted for partial separation, leaving much of the old city intact. Consequently, the main routes of Ottoman Athens were preserved, gradually acquiring a quality that was not legible to the modernising gaze of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In August 1834, three months before Athens officially became the capital, Klenze initiated the restoration of the Parthenon. The ceremony was elaborately staged and attended by King Otto, the regency, members of the government, and the civic and military authorities of Athens and Attica. Klenze addressed the king and those present in his native German, while a Greek translation of his speech was distributed:

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<sup>76</sup> David Watkin and Tilman Mellinghoff, *German Architecture and the Classical Ideal* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

<sup>77</sup> Leo von Klenze, *Aphoristische Bemerkungen: Gesammelt Auf Seiner Reise Nach Griechenland* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 1838), 419.

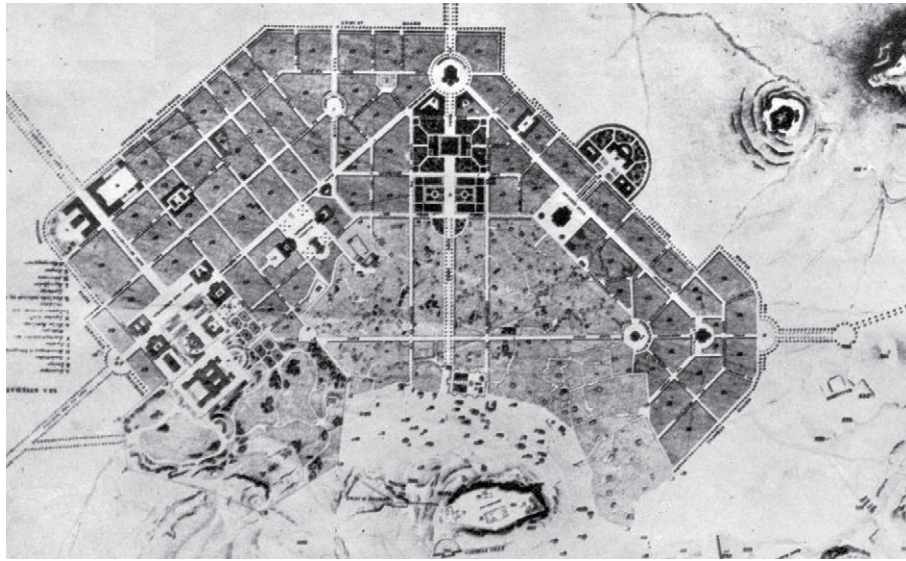
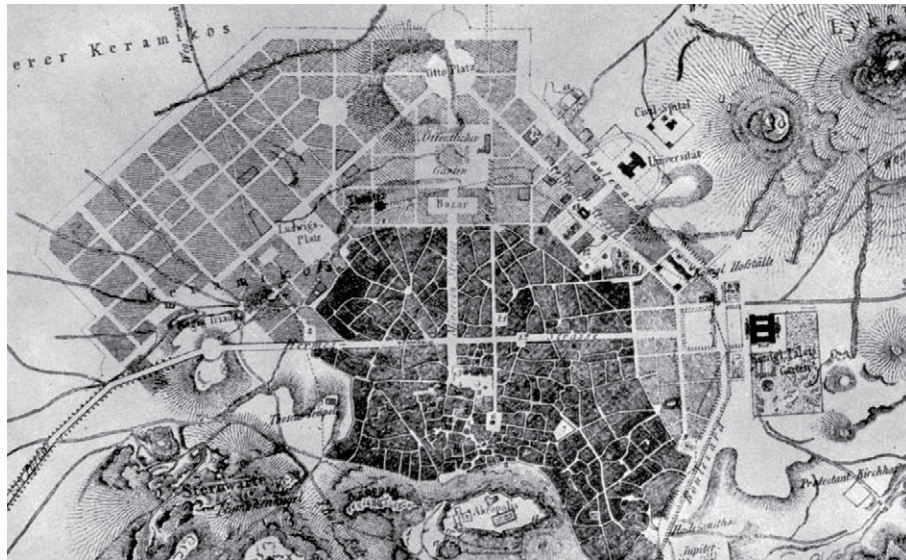


FIG. 1.11 First plan for the new city of Athens. Drawing by Leo von Klenze, 1834. Stadtmuseum, Munich.

*Your Majesty stepped today, after so many centuries of barbarism, for the first time on this celebrated Acropolis, proceeding on the road of civilisation and glory, on the road passed by the likes of Themistocles, Aristeides, Kimon, and Pericles, and this is and should be in the eyes of your people the symbol of your glorious reign ... All the remains of barbarity will be removed, here as in all of Greece, and the remains of the glorious past will be brought in a new light as the solid foundation of a glorious present and future. I dare request Your Majesty, in the name of Greece and of the whole world, to sanctify, as is customary, the first marble [drum] that is being restored in the reborn Parthenon, being the best assurance that this undertaking will proceed successfully.<sup>78</sup>*

Indeed, King Otto inaugurated the restoration of the Parthenon by tapping thrice on a Pentelic marble column drum, followed by the regency members and government ministers present. Close to 6,000 people attended the ceremony. That night, both the city and the Acropolis were illuminated for the occasion. The elaborate ceremony communicated to the inhabitants that the care of antiquities now rested with the state. Clothing them in an air of sanctity, it reinforced the notion that their destruction was not only illegal but also sacrilegious.

<sup>78</sup> Antonis Miliarakis, "Τελετή επί της Ακροπόλεως των Αθηνών [Ceremony on the Acropolis of Athens]," *Estia* 18, no. 447 (1884).



**FIG. 1.12** Final plan for the new city of Athens. Drawing by Leo von Klenze, 1834  
Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Klenze, Schinkel, and many of their contemporary European architects were inspired by the image of a classical city, a romantic reconstruction developed through drawings, texts, and architectural discourse. Like Goethe, the father of German Romanticism, Schinkel never visited Greece, practising what has been ironically called “Greek abstinence,” avoiding confrontation with real Greece to preserve an idealised vision of it.<sup>79</sup> Klenze, who spent only four months in Greece in 1834, also produced a speculative “Reconstruction of the Acropolis.” Like most of his contemporary travelling architects, Klenze made realistic, detailed drawings depicting the Greek landscape, antiquities, and residents.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, his Athens falls within the romantic tradition of imaginative reconstructions that inspired both Schinkel and the Beaux-Arts students of the time. One wonders whether Klenze’s work in Greece influenced his image of ancient Athens. “A design for Athens is a European affair,” Klenze proclaimed in his memoirs.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, it was executed

<sup>79</sup> Alexander Papageorgiou-Venetas, *Hauptstadt Athen: Ein Stadtgedanke des Klassizismus* (Munich / Berlin: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1994), 14.

<sup>80</sup> Leo von Klenze, *Ein griechischer Traum: Leo von Klenze, der Archäologe* (Munich: Glyptothek Munich, 1986), Exhibition from 6 December 1985 to 9 February 1986, 318–19.

81 von Klenze, *Aphoristische Bemerkungen: Gesammelt Auf Seiner Reise Nach Griechenland*, 420.

by foreign-trained architects, who designed according to the international urban theories of the time. Neither the government nor the citizens participated directly in the design process. However, once approved, the plans for Athens transitioned from the original creators to the jurisdiction of the state, municipal government, and citizens.

The plan for New Athens gradually materialised, acquiring local significance and being perceived as “naturalised,” without erasing its contingent formation. As the plan took shape, it was gradually taken up and reworked by the Greek population, much as colonial-era buildings are gradually integrated into the local vernacular and become inseparable from it.<sup>82</sup> The planning of Athens must be understood in both its international and national contexts. While inspired by international currents, the design gradually acquired unique significance in Greece, indicating the country’s rebirth, connection to antiquity, and integration into the European cultural sphere. Paradoxically, however, the success of Athens contradicted the irredentist aspirations of the Great Idea, which aimed at territorial expansion and the eventual establishment of Constantinople as the capital of Hellenism. During the debate over the choice of a Greek capital in 1834, Greek politician Ioannis Kolettis proposed that the kingdom should only have a temporary capital until Constantinople’s liberation. Although Athens became the showcase of Greek reconstruction, throughout Otto’s rule, many Greeks within and outside the kingdom continued to view it as a temporary capital. The real capital, Constantinople, today’s Istanbul, remained outside the national borders. In many respects, then, “Athens, a European affair” meant just that: Athens, at least at its inception as the Greek capital, was a European, a Bavarian, but not a Greek affair, though this was not the meaning Klenze intended to convey.

The regency’s task was to modernise the kingdom by introducing the machinery of a Western state. In this effort, the regency deemed that only Westerners or Greeks who had lived in Europe were suitable. The demolitions of houses and expropriation of properties for excavations; the opening of new boulevards, notably Panepistimiou and Athenas Streets; the widening of existing ones, such as Cathedral Street; and the design of major new structures, such as the Athenian trilogy and the cathedral, produced a recognisable urban configuration of Athens: modernity, cultural unity, and connection with antiquity. However, this image came to coexist with, rather than replace, that of the earlier city with its ancient, Byzantine, and Ottoman roots. Although 19<sup>th</sup> century literature emphasised new buildings, the legacy of the earlier city, including its culture, way of life, spatial claims, and architectural

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<sup>82</sup> Bastéa, *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth*, 118.

order, also persisted. After its liberation from the Ottoman Empire in 1832, Greece began calibrating its progress, measuring its distance from its immediate Ottoman past and its closeness to “civilised Europe.” Three major aspirations characterised the cultural and intellectual orientation of 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece: acceptance in the family of modern European nations, internal political unity and gradual territorial expansion, and a strong connection with the classical past. Attention to the critical juncture in the country’s modern history, particularly its transition from Ottoman rule to national independence, remains central to understanding Greece’s development. What becomes visible across these interventions is not a straightforward staging of classical continuity, but a more uneven process in which processes of projection and material persistence unfold together. If vernacular and Ottoman material cultures are understood as co-constitutive rather than displaced, the neoclassical transformation of Athens appears less as the imposition of an external image and more as a situated negotiation. Pentelic marble, the grid, and the monumental ensemble do not simply overwrite what precedes them; they take form through their material conditions. This shifts the reading from a hermeneutics of representation to an attention to process, where meaning and matter are produced together, and where reterritorialisation remains partial, contingent, and materially entangled.

### 1.2.3 Building the National Image

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The initial city planning, developed by Kleanthis and Schaubert and later adjusted by Klenze, set the foundation for transforming Athens into the capital of the new state. This plan positioned the Acropolis as a visual anchor within the emerging city rather than a stable object of meaning. The production of this visual order can be read through Foucault’s account of representation. The Classical episteme, as he argues, depends upon arranging objects within legible systems of classification, comparison, and ordered visibility rather than understanding them through historical becoming.<sup>83</sup> Neoclassical Athens assembled precisely such a field of representation. Through urban planning, architectural typologies, and the repeated use of Pentelic marble, antiquity was reorganised into a visible and classifiable system capable of supporting emerging narratives of national identity. The Acropolis thus operated not only as a historical monument but also as a representational centre through which Athens could be spatially ordered. Temples and nearby structures, such as the Thesaeion and Hadrian’s Library, inspired the “high” neoclassical complexes like the Athenian

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<sup>83</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Routledge, 2005), 55–83.

Trilogy.<sup>84</sup> Neoclassical architecture circulated across Athens for nearly a century, its forms recognisable yet never fully fixed in significance. This instability continues a dynamic encountered earlier: a form appears stable only momentarily, before being reworked within new genealogical alignments. Introduced through Bavarian administrative and architectural networks, it did not simply establish a connection between Athens and other European cities; it operated through shared practices of design, construction, and material supply, contributing to a broadly recognised urban vocabulary across northern Europe, its colonies, and parts of the Ottoman Empire. While these public structures shared stylistic elements with other European buildings, they were read within local historical and cultural references. Thus, although the Athenian Trilogy's formal characteristics were not unique to Athens, their significance accumulated through repeated use and citation. This aligned with Greece's evolving architectural ideology, which sought to create a national identity that portrayed the international neoclassical style as distinctly Greek. This took material form through the use of Pentelic marble, which did not secure a return to antiquity but intersected with existing labour systems, quarrying practices, and building economies, producing an urban fabric in which continuity and rupture remained entangled.

Neoclassical Athens did not emerge on an empty ground. Ottoman and vernacular material practices continued to operate within and alongside the new architectural order, not as survivals but as active conditions shaping it. What took form was less a replacement than a reorganisation of hierarchies, in which some practices were marginalised. In contrast, others persisted in altered roles, creating a genealogy of shifting material and spatial orders. Walking through Athens at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, one would encounter a series of monumental buildings, all adorned with gleaming Pentelic marble whose surface foregrounded the benefaction of wealthy Greeks from the diaspora. Notable examples included the Arsakes School for Girls (1846), the Varvakes Lyceum (1857), the Sinas Academy (1859), the Metsovon Polytechnic (1862–76), the Zappas Exhibition Hall (1874–88), the Vallianos National Library (1884–1902), the Averof Youth Prison (1894), and the ancient stadium, meticulously restored with funds from Evangelos Zappas, a Greek businessman living in Romania, and Georgios Averof, a Greek businessman living in Egypt. These buildings, often clad in Pentelic marble, redistributed diaspora wealth across the city's avenues and squares. Athens was not exceptional in this regard. Other new or refashioned capitals, such as St. Petersburg and Washington, D.C., had also undergone periods of accelerated monumental construction before their urban infrastructures were fully consolidated.

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<sup>84</sup> Hermann J. Kienast, "Athener Trilogie: Klassizistische Architektur und ihre Vorbilder in der hauptstadt Griechenlands," *Antike Welt* 26, no. 3 (1995).

In this sense, Athens participated in a broader 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon in which architecture accompanied the political consolidation of emerging or reconfigured nation-states, including the United States. Still, this participation unfolded through a genealogy of local adaptations rather than uniform imitation. What distinguishes Athens is not the presence of monumental construction, but the particular temporal tension between a projected classical past and the still-unsettled material aftermath of Ottoman rule. The architectural transformation of the city thus coincided with the fragile and ongoing formation of modern Greece, forming a genealogy of tensions between inherited material conditions and aspirational classicism.

In July 1839, King Otto laid the cornerstone for the new university on the Boulevard, which was later renamed Panepistimiou (University Street).<sup>85</sup> A committee of prominent Athenians oversaw the construction and appointed Danish architect Hans Christian Hansen (1803–83) to design the building. Hansen, who had been in Greece since 1833, was initially drawn to the country to study the Parthenon. Athens and its marble monuments formed a central focus of his study during this period.<sup>86</sup> Having studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen under Gustav Friedrich Hetsch,<sup>87</sup> Hansen's architectural style was deeply influenced by his admiration for ancient Greek architecture<sup>88</sup> and his expertise in contemporary neoclassical buildings. Hansen's design in the university building, completed in 1864, engages with classical forms, informed by both archaeological study and contemporary architectural training. At the same time, even if the university's construction did not address the most urgent educational need, namely, elementary schools, its establishment contributed to Athens' emerging position as an educational centre, drawing students from across the Balkans.<sup>89</sup> Rather than fulfilling a pre-given cultural mission, the university became one site among many through which educational, political, and architectural agendas were negotiated, contributing to a genealogy of institutional formation. The Bavarian administration, aiming to transmit Western civilisation's ideals to the East,<sup>90</sup> found in Hansen's design a perfect materialisation of classical ideals for the university's cultural and political mission.

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<sup>85</sup> Εφημερίς των Αθηνών [*The Newspaper of Athens*] 8, 638 (1839).

<sup>86</sup> "Το εν Αθήναις Θώδιον Πανεπιστήμιον [Otto's University in Athens]," Πανδώρα [*Pandora*] 16 (1866): 474.

<sup>87</sup> Lisbet Balslev Jorgensen, "The Copenhagen School of Classicism," *Architectural Design* 57, no. 3–4 (1987).

<sup>88</sup> Haugsted, "The Architect Christian Hansen and the Greek Neo-classicism," 73.

<sup>89</sup> Athanasios Argyros, *Ιστορία των Αθηνών: Από των Αρχαιστάτων Χρόνων μέχρι της Σήμερον* [History of Athens from the Most Ancient Times until Today] (Athens: Saliveros, 1896), 42.

<sup>90</sup> Von Maurer, *Ο Ελληνικός Λαός εις τας Σχέσεις του Δημοσίου, Εκκλησιαστικού και Ιδιωτικού Δικαίου προ του Απελευθερωτικού Αγώνος και μετ'αυτόν μέχρι της 31ης Ιουλίου 1834* [The Greek People in the Relations of Public, Ecclesiastical, and Private Law before the War of Independence and up to July 31, 1834], 421.

Through his newspaper, poet and writer Panagiotis Soutsos proposed that the new building be rectangular, two stories high, with the first floor featuring “columns of white Parian or Pentelic marble” to house an archaeological museum, and the second floor adorned with “red marble from Laconia” to serve as an academy.<sup>91</sup>

The wealthy Greek Baron Simon Sinas, residing in Vienna, expressed his desire to donate a significant structure in Athens and ultimately decided to fund the construction of an academy (Fig. 1.13).<sup>92</sup> Sinas commissioned the design to Theophil Hansen, Christian Hansen’s younger brother, who had also worked in Athens. The academy’s site, spanning 9,900 square meters, was donated by the municipality of Athens and the Petraki Monastery.<sup>93</sup> The municipal council justified the donation by emphasising the academy’s anticipated contribution to the city’s ethical and material development, further enhanced by the beauty of Pentelic marble. However, the lavishness of the academy’s construction, marked by its extensive use of fine marble, often drew criticism from the press, which noted the contrast between Greece’s modest resources and its ambitious architectural projects.<sup>94</sup> The completion of the library building next to the university solidified University Street as the cultural axis of the new capital. In 1885, the Vallianos brothers, residents of Russia, donated 1,000,000 drachmas toward the construction of the national library. Theophil Hansen once again led the design, completing the architectural trilogy of the Hansen brothers: the academy, the university, and the library. University Street organised a sequence of institutional buildings whose alignment suggested a coherent institutional object-sequence, yet this effect depended on ongoing maintenance, use, and perception. Pentelic marble contributed to this continuity, though its quality, sourcing, and execution varied. Hansen’s designs privileged style, form, and composition, though their realisation remained contingent on funding, labour, and site conditions.

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<sup>91</sup> Panagiotis Soutsos, *Ἡλῖος* [Helios] 71 (1856): 144.

<sup>92</sup> Kostas Biris, *Αἱ Αθήναι: Από του 19ου εις τον 20ον Αἰώνα* [Athens: From the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Athens: Melissa, 2005), 151.

<sup>93</sup> Georgios Laios, *Σίμων Σίνας* [Simon Sinas] (Athens: Academy of Athens, 1972), 182.

<sup>94</sup> *Αἶων* [Aion] (1858): 76.



FIG. 1.13 East facade of the Academy of Athens under construction. Photograph, 1874.  
Τσίλλερ-Χάνσεν Αλληλογραφία, 1859–1890 [Ziller-Hansen Correspondence, 1859–1890].

Read as a continuous narrative, neoclassical Athens appears coherent. Yet this coherence dissolves when approached through its surface conditions and deeper material logics. The city's transformation unfolded through interactions among design, labour, and use rather than through a singular ideological programme. The widespread availability of printing and photographic reproductions today often encourages an overemphasis on stylistic similarities between contemporary buildings constructed in different parts of the world. But how important was it to the residents of Athens that some of their buildings resembled those in other countries? On a general level, such resemblance did matter. The straight streets and public buildings, frequently built of Pentelic marble, were widely regarded as visible signs that Greece had entered the circle of European states. In this sense, the new architecture did function as a model, not simply in formal terms, but as an institutional and political horizon toward which the young kingdom oriented itself.



FIG. 1.14 The Academy of Athens. Photograph by Thomas Wolf.



FIG. 1.15 The Austrian Parliament building. Photograph by IC Group.

Yet contemporary Greek commentary rarely engaged in detailed stylistic comparisons with buildings abroad. The most evident architectural parallel is between Theophil Hansen's Athenian Academy (Fig. 1.14) and his later Vienna Parliament (Fig. 1.15), the latter closely mirroring the former.<sup>95</sup> The recurrence of similar forms across cities suggests that these buildings participated in a shared architectural language of governance and learning. Resemblance across cities mattered, but it did not determine meaning. Buildings were reinterpreted through local use, criticism, and the passage of time. As these buildings settled into the Athenian landscape, their outlines gradually lost their initial foreign inflexion. Through everyday use and local criticism, they became part of the city's everyday spatial and cultural horizon. "Most of the time when we speak about the Greekness of a work of art, we are speaking of the Academy building," wrote the 20<sup>th</sup> century poet George Seferis.<sup>96</sup> What began as a transnational architectural idiom gradually settled into local practices and interpretations, without ever fully shedding its external references. This process complicates accounts that treat architectural importation as a straightforward instrument of colonial domination. While foreign architects and political elites may have sought to guide the direction of building activity, reception was never fully governed by intention. Buildings are continually reinterpreted through use, adaptation, criticism, and contestation. Resistance may manifest in various forms, from indifference to new structures to organised revolt against the government that commissioned them. The limits of architectural authority became evident in 1862, when a widespread popular insurrection led to Otto's deposition. The royal palace, the earliest and most imposing of the new Athenian monuments, could not stabilise the regime it housed. The building survived, later serving as the residence of King George and eventually as the parliament of the constitutional monarchy established in 1864.

The relationship between people and space remains unsettled, shifting through use, conflict, and reinterpretation. If vernacular and Ottoman material cultures are treated not as what neoclassicism displaced but as co-constitutive elements, the image of a unified neoclassical Athens begins to fracture. Athens emerges less as a neoclassical project than as a field of overlapping material regimes shaped by financing structures, labour conditions, and land speculation, constituting a genealogical assemblage rather than a design project. Who built 19<sup>th</sup> century Athens? The reliance on private patronage redistributed architectural agency, entangling state

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<sup>95</sup> Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 40–46.

<sup>96</sup> Giorgos Seferis, *Δοκιμές* [Experiments], vol. 1 (Athens: Ikaros, 1984), 101.

ambition with diasporic capital and local construction practices. Lacking the necessary funds, the state welcomed the generosity of wealthy Greeks from the diaspora. The patrons chose the building type and the architect, while the state or municipality provided the site and oversaw the construction process. The actual construction was initially carried out by Bavarian and later Greek subcontractors, with Pentelic marble often favoured for its durability and aesthetic appeal. When funds ran out before a building's completion, the state was forced to step in, once again blurring the lines between public and private patronage. The financing of Athens' buildings, though unique in its scope and expenditure, was similar to the conditions for building throughout Greece. The model of the "neoclassical town" in 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece emphasised public space and civic buildings, but legislation failed to provide adequate state financing. "One might say that, in general terms, the modern Greek town that developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was planned on a national level and brought into being on an individual level, with the public aspect being considerably downplayed in the final result."<sup>97</sup> Wealthy Greeks abroad, who were the state's primary moneylenders, were also the major patrons of architecture. Their profits were often funnelled into stocks, conspicuous consumption, and real estate, causing land prices to rise and farmland to be incorporated into the urban centre.<sup>98</sup> In fact, not only was some of the most elaborate architecture initiated by the diaspora Greeks, but the rest of the major architecture was also carried out. The frequent refrain of the period, "What are the foreigners thinking?" was directed to the Greek foreigners whom Athens hoped to impress. The widespread and successful presence of Hellenism around the world filled the Greeks of the kingdom with national pride.<sup>99</sup> Urban form thus emerged through these negotiations rather than through a controlled national plan, producing a genealogy of urban development.

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<sup>97</sup> Kafkoulas, Papamichos, and Hastaoglou-Martinidis, *Σχέδια πόλεων στην Ελλάδα του 19ου αιώνα* [Town Plans in 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece], 231–39.

<sup>98</sup> Giorgos Dertilis, *Ελληνική Οικονομία (1830–1910) και Βιομηχανική Επανάσταση* [Greek Economy (1830–1910) and Industrial Revolution] (Athens: Ant. N. Sakkoula Editions, 1984), 79.

<sup>99</sup> Bastéa, *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth*, 150.

## 1.3 Tradition under Pressure

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### 1.3.1 Negotiating the Ottoman Past

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The experience of 19<sup>th</sup> century Athens did not divide neatly between premodern and modern forms; older spatial practices persisted alongside new interventions, producing uneven and sometimes conflicting ways of inhabiting the city. The premodern experience was shaped by Athens' long history, with traditional, organic ways of inhabiting the city embedded in evolving customs, spatial arrangements, and meanings. In contrast, the modern experience followed a rational, formalised approach, evident in urban planning, straight boulevards, and neoclassical buildings that presented Athens as a modern European capital. Yet this emerging order did not simply replace earlier formations; it introduced new criteria for evaluating and hierarchising space, form, and material, and it reorganised them through a genealogical layering of practices. While modernity eventually took hold, resistance to change and the persistence of earlier spatial references remained. The cultural landscape of Athens during this period, characterised by a blend of ancient traditions and modern aspirations, revealed an absence of sharp divisions between high and low culture, setting it apart from cities like Vienna and Paris. Behind the new boulevards lay remnants of Athens' long, multifaceted past,<sup>100</sup> expressed materially in Pentelic marble and in the dispersed stone particles embedded in older structures. Marble became increasingly present within this changing environment, not as a fixed object linking antiquity to the present but as a material repeatedly drawn into new architectural and urban contexts, where its surfaces participated in the organisation of visibility, value, and distinction, producing a genealogy of urban perception. The evaluation of buildings and cities often hinges on architectural precedent, the authority of their designers, and the perceived centrality of their location, stabilising certain buildings as urban objects of value and reference. Architectural styles tend to circulate from metropolitan centres to peripheral contexts, where they are assessed according to their proximity to recognised intellectual and aesthetic origins. Although Athens was frequently positioned as peripheral within European narratives of neoclassicism, such distance was not necessarily experienced as such by its inhabitants, for whom these materials and forms were encountered through everyday

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<sup>100</sup> Bastéa, *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth*, 2.

use rather than abstract comparison. In this sense, architectural normativity did not simply arrive as a fixed model. Still, it was negotiated through situated practices, in which marble served as an interface between imposed standards and lived spatial experience, generating a genealogical relation between form and habit. These residues of colonial ordering will resurface differently once marble's surface becomes implicated in the modern institutions discussed later.

Town planning and civic architecture contributed to the reorganisation of urban space, redistributing authority and visibility across the emerging capital. Rather than fully controlling space, these interventions interacted with existing attachments and local practices. This emphasis on nation-building paralleled developments in other new nations, including the rest of the Balkan countries and Turkey, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The adoption of contemporary Western urban principles in Greece can also be compared to the extensive planning projects of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, where regular, orthogonal planning was applied in European colonies across Africa, Asia, and South America. These planning interventions often articulated contemporary urban theories rather than the realities of the colonising nations. French, British, or Dutch architects and engineers were not attempting to recreate Paris, London, or Amsterdam in the colonies. Instead, they imposed a regular, rational grid on cities, separating functions and residents into distinct zones. While colonial cities became playgrounds for European planners, the adaptation and incorporation of these models into the existing built environment often involved local administrators and inhabitants.<sup>101</sup> Greece, though not a colony, was a sovereign kingdom administered by the Bavarians and influenced by France, Great Britain, and Russia. Nevertheless, it had to transform its built environment in line with contemporary European principles. In this context, Pentelic marble circulated within broader construction and planning processes, participating in the reconfiguration of the built environment without determining its meaning. Other established urban centres, such as Constantinople (Istanbul), were also changing during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, indicating internal reorganisation. Despite these particularities, the development of major cities throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was derived from the same planning theories and formal prototypes developed by Western European academies and administrations. Even when local architects were primarily involved in urban design projects, they were often trained according to Western models, making it difficult to detect coherent “native models” that resisted Western influence. Local opposition to planning undertakings often did not question Western principles but rather their implementation methods.

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<sup>101</sup> Lawrence Vale, *Architecture, Power and National Identity* (Routledge, 2014), 38–42.

European planners faced the challenge of laying the foundations for modern cities in newly liberated regions such as Greece. Athens functioned as an interface where new urban principles met inherited spatial and social conditions, thus shaping the modern identity of the Greek nation. The political significance of urban design in the nation-building of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is especially evident in the Italian peninsula after unification. Similarly, when the rest of the Balkan nations claimed independence, they also chose planning as one manifestation of their national identities. The plan for New Athens projected a future beyond the material conditions of its implementation. Its realisation unfolded unevenly, as urban design became entangled with property, governance, and social organisation, engaging with national identity and intertwining ideals of antiquity and European modernity with Athens' material and social conditions. It was during the plan's implementation, rather than its inception, that urban design began addressing issues of nationalism, modernity, private property, and national visions, ultimately redefining the relationship between the individual and the government. In his essay on the politics of memory, anthropologist Jonathan Boyarin warns against viewing states as individual "actors," emphasising instead how individual and collective human agents operate within, through, and often against states.<sup>102</sup> Rather than treating the state as a singular actor, it becomes possible to trace how architects, builders, labourers, and residents participated in shaping outcomes, sometimes aligning with official agendas, sometimes diverging from them. This perspective is particularly relevant to the Greek government's efforts during this time. While the state aimed to Europeanise Athens and reconnect with antiquity through Pentelic marble, the outcome depended on architects, builders, stonemasons, and residents, whose actions actively shaped the city's evolving identity. Boyarin's view encourages us to consider how these actors, both aligning with and resisting state-driven projects, influenced the outcome of Athens' transformation.

For the Greek government, Pentelic marble became a tool not just to erase the Ottoman past but also to materialise a vision of national unity and European belonging. At this point, the increasing use of Pentelic marble also raises a more specific question concerning the role of whiteness within architectural normativity. The association of classical architecture with white marble, consolidated through 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century art historical narratives despite evidence of ancient polychromy, did not remain a neutral aesthetic preference. In this way, whiteness became stabilised as a surface condition aligned with clarity, order, and rationality, qualities through which neoclassicism operated as a broader European project.

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<sup>102</sup> Charles Tilly, *Remapping Memory: The Politics of TimeSpace*, ed. Jonathan Boyarin, NED - New edition ed. (University of Minnesota Press, 1994). <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttt82h>.

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, whiteness can be understood as a moment of genealogical reterritorialisation,<sup>103</sup> in which the historically contingent materiality of marble is fixed within a normative visual regime. Within the Greek context, this stabilisation acquired additional force. The preference for white marble surfaces did not simply recall antiquity; it contributed to differentiating what was legible as “European” from what was associated with the Ottoman and vernacular past, often cast as irregular, excessive, or impure. Marble’s whiteness thus functioned as a material and visual sorting criterion through which architectural value was organised, naturalising certain forms while displacing others. The hinge between aesthetic preference and broader processes of racialisation does not operate through explicit statements, but through the repeated alignment of whiteness with cultural legitimacy, allowing distinctions first articulated at the level of materials and surfaces to extend into wider regimes of differentiation. While these distinctions were articulated at the level of materials and forms, they resonated with broader 19<sup>th</sup> century European discourses that associated whiteness with civilisation and progress, extending beyond architecture into conceptions of cultural and, implicitly, human difference.

Against this stabilisation, responses to these transformations were uneven. For some observers, the new marble-clad buildings were associated with references to antiquity, while for others they disrupted established patterns of everyday life. The relationship between these buildings and the surrounding city was unstable, shifting over time through use and perception, preventing the formation of a fixed architectural object within urban experience. The construction of the new capital unfolded through material processes in which Pentelic marble informed both building practices and urban perception. Philosopher Michel Foucault observed that in France before the Napoleonic period, cities began to serve as models for state government.<sup>104</sup> Planning decisions made in Athens often extended outward to other cities, while difficulties in implementing them exposed limits within the state’s administrative capacity. In this way, the capital functioned both as a testing ground and as a reference point for broader governance. The challenges in finalising Athens’ plan or agreeing on the palace’s location were seen as indicative of the national government’s struggles to manage the country effectively. In 1896, the esteemed poet, writer, and intellectual Kostis Palamas highlighted and embraced the diverse forces that shaped Greece and its people. Palamas referenced the folk hero Digenes Akritas, the legendary son of an Arab father and Greek mother, whose superhuman

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<sup>103</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 167–81.

<sup>104</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (Vintage, 1984), 243–45.

strength arose from the union of these two races. Palamas referenced the folk hero Digenes Akritas,<sup>105</sup> the legendary son of an Arab father and Greek mother, whose superhuman strength arose from this union:

*And they do not understand that the memories of the era of national slavery and ignorance are and ought to be as sacred and as important to us as the memories of the victories at Marathon, of the Platonic Academies, and of the Parthenons; the reason being that the seed of the Greek psyche, buried under the snow, exists and works as powerfully as the indomitable vegetation that unfurls at springtime. ... Modern Hellenism is not some direct, metaphysical and immutable continuation of ancient [Hellenism]; if we are still alive, we are alive because we underwent the wonderworking bath of renascence in the fiercely whirling currents of racial crossing, blood mixing, religious, ethnic and linguistic changes, of conquest, and intercourse with other peoples.*<sup>106</sup>

This position complicates narratives of continuity, suggesting instead a history formed through mixture, interruption, and transformation, articulating a genealogy of modern Hellenism rather than an unbroken lineage. The drive to be “modern” was indeed a central topic in Greece’s rhetoric of the period. At the same time, emphasis was placed on integrating with the West while also articulating a distinct national voice and identity. Pentelic marble became a material manifestation of Greece’s storied past, bridging the ancient with the contemporary. However, in a newly formed, small state on the periphery of Europe, these ambitions were layered with inherent complexities. While northern European modernity was often associated with the secularisation of art and life,<sup>107</sup> in Greece, religion remained deeply embedded in the lives of its inhabitants. Several intellectuals emphasised the importance of religion in nation-building, including the essayist and novelist Alexandros Papadiamantis, who wrote in 1893:

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<sup>105</sup> *Digenes* comes from the combination of two Greek words: “di,” meaning “two,” and “genes,” meaning “race” or “origin.” So, *Digenes* literally translates to “born of two races.” In the case of Digenes Akritas, his mixed heritage—an Arab father and a Greek mother—symbolises the blending of cultures and identities, which was a common theme in Byzantine border regions. Palamas uses this figure as a metaphor for the modern Greek identity, emphasising how it is shaped by a blend of diverse influences, just as Digenes Akritas’s strength came from his dual heritage. By invoking this name, Palamas suggests that modern Greeks, like Digenes, are a product of both Eastern and Western cultural and historical forces.

<sup>106</sup> Kostis Palamas, *Το Παλληκάρι* [The Brave Young Man], ed. Vlasīs Gavriilidis, 2 vols., vol. 1, *Η Ελλάς κατά τους Ολυμπιακούς Αγώνες του 1896* [Greece during the Olympic Games of 1896], (Athens: Estia, 1896), 112–13.

<sup>107</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Verso, 1983), 157.

*The Englishman, German, or Frenchman is allowed to be cosmopolitan, anarchist, atheist, or whatever. He did his patriotic duty and built a great country. Now he is free to announce, because of this luxury, his absence of faith and his pessimism. But the little Greek of today, who wants to appear in public as a cosmopolitan or atheist, resembles a dwarf reaching on the tips of his toes and stretching in height to appear as a giant, too. The Greek nation, that which is enslaved, but no less than that which is free, has and will always need its religion?*<sup>108</sup>

These tensions were also articulated in debates around religion. Paul Ricoeur, focusing on postcolonial nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, articulated the same dilemma: “There is the paradox: how to become modern and return to sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilisation and take part in universal civilisation.”<sup>109</sup> Deep divisions and contrasts marked Fin-de-siècle Greece, yet it also began to acknowledge and accommodate these tensions. Rather than resolving them, Athens’ architectural landscape made them visible, staging the coexistence of competing spatial logics and value systems. Approaching the Athenian Trilogy through Pentelic marble does not settle the question of whether these tensions were mitigated or intensified; instead, it reveals how material practices participated in organising them. Marble did not secure continuity, nor did it simply mediate between past and present. Rather, its surfaces became sites where distinctions between antiquity and modernity, centre and periphery, and what could be recognised as European or otherwise were drawn, negotiated, and at times unsettled. The emergence of architectural normativity in 19<sup>th</sup> century Athens did not produce a stable object of order, but a field of uneven alignments in which materials, forms, and practices were continuously evaluated and repositioned. The city thus appears not as a resolved synthesis of temporal layers, but as an ongoing genealogy of visibility, value, and distinction, partly stabilised through marble’s whiteness, and remained open to contestation, reconfiguration, and uneven inhabitation.

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<sup>108</sup> Alexandros Papadiamantis, Λαμπριάτικος Ψάλτης [Easter Chanter] (Athens: Parrisia, 2011), 118.

<sup>109</sup> Paul Ricoeur, “Universal Civilization and National Cultures,” *History and Truth* 271 (1965): 277.

### 1.3.2 Racialised Aesthetics of Whiteness

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The political importance of regional geographies, such as Mount Pentelicus, extended beyond their physical attributes to their value in constructing a national identity. By emphasising Pentelic marble, closely associated with ancient Greek heritage, the state leveraged its cultural weight to assert a connection to classical antiquity as a civilisational archetype. This alignment with classical ideals strengthened the perception of continuity, helping integrate diverse local populations into a unified national identity<sup>110</sup> and presenting the neoclassical aesthetic as a common cultural foundation. This process echoes Eugen Weber's notion of colonisation, in which rural communities, often distant from narratives of classical grandeur, were cast as inheritors of an idealised past.<sup>111</sup> Folkloric studies and regional histories were employed to harmonise their traditions with the broader national narrative, centring Athens as the cradle of Hellenism. The use of Pentelic marble in neoclassical architecture served a dual purpose: solidifying the newly defined nation-state through monumental works while also uniting its heterogeneous population under a shared ideological and cultural framework.

Following Greece's liberation from Ottoman rule, Pentelic marble became central to the construction of the modern Greek state, a process deeply entangled with 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonial ideologies. Pentelic marble, extracted from Mount Pentelicus, was not merely a resource. It became a medium through which a national identity was articulated, situating Greece within the imagined continuity of classical antiquity and aligning it with Western cultural hierarchies. Pentelic marble's association with classical Athens naturalised Greece's difference from its Ottoman past, while simultaneously legitimising the authority of European powers over the newly independent state. This differentiation was not only historical or cultural but also operated through an aesthetic regime in which whiteness acquired normative force, forming a genealogy of visual hierarchy. The 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century art historical construction of classical antiquity, most notably through the erasure of polychromy, recast ancient Greek architecture as intrinsically white, associating marble with ideals of purity, clarity, and formal order. In the context of post-independence Greece, this aesthetic coding did not remain confined to questions of style. Rather, it functioned as a classificatory logic through which both space and population were organised. Neoclassical marble architecture established

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<sup>110</sup> Robert Shannan Peckham, "Internal Colonialism: Nation and Region in Nineteenth Century Greece," in *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memories*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: New York UP, 2004), 41.

<sup>111</sup> Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1976).

whiteness as the visual and material index of civilisation, with its surface contrast implicitly opposing the perceived opacity, irregularity, and “excess” attributed to Ottoman and vernacular formations. In this way, the aesthetic privileging of marble’s whiteness participated in a broader process of cultural and political racialisation, where architectural form and materiality contributed to distinguishing between a Europeanised national subject and its internal and external “others.” This appropriation was similar to European colonialist practices, in which subdued populations were rendered intelligible through colonisers’ frameworks of knowledge. Here, marble functioned as an ethnographic artefact, materialising a past of supposed greatness against which the present was evaluated and structured. Moreover, the selective valorisation of Pentelic marble as a neoclassical icon was accompanied by discourses of progress and advancement. The process of quarrying, shaping, and erecting marble monuments materialised the colonialist impulse to survey, regulate, and sanitise. Athens, reimagined as the capital of the Greek state, became an “object to be surveyed” in urban planning projects that aimed to impose order and a particular vision of civilisation. This use of Pentelic marble was part of a broader genealogy of colonial modernity,<sup>112</sup> embedding the emerging nation-state within a European ideological framework. Through its integration into public buildings and monuments, the marble became a medium of documentation, an enduring testament to both the imagined disorder of the Ottoman past and the reformist ambitions of a Europeanised Greece.

Examining Pentelic marble in Athenian neoclassicism indicates how modernity intersected with colonial and disciplinary knowledge systems, with marble operating as an interface between material practice and state knowledge. Just as the modern prison system exemplifies how knowledge production about inmates is intertwined with mechanisms of control,<sup>113</sup> the use of Pentelic marble in neoclassical Athens formed part of a broader state-sponsored project of cultural governance. This process involved not only the extraction and technical manipulation of marble but also its aesthetic framing as the privileged bearer of national continuity and civilisational legitimacy. Valued for its perceived purity and historical resonance, Pentelic marble became a medium through which the modern Greek state articulated its national identity. Through architectural commissions, public institutions, and visual representation, the material was positioned as the tangible proof of an uninterrupted link to classical antiquity. Read through Michel Foucault, the

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<sup>112</sup> Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1994), 4.

<sup>113</sup> Michel Foucault, “Discipline and Punish.”

“knowing, mastering, and using”<sup>114</sup> of Pentelic marble parallels the cataloguing of folklore practices in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece, where rural traditions were recorded, classified, and integrated into a national archive. The neoclassical revival in Athens further illustrates this dynamic. Institutional actors, architects, and intellectuals framed the material not simply as construction stone but as a cultural essence to be preserved, displayed, and refined. This framing romanticised marble and its classical associations, isolating them from the complex historical layers of Greek territory. In this way, it resembled colonial regimes, which constructed idealised images of the “other” through selective representation and aestheticisation.<sup>115</sup> The analogy works at the level of practice. Both processes operate through classification, visual idealisation, and institutional control over representation, forming a genealogy of selective preservation. Nicholas Thomas’ observation that colonialism functions simultaneously as destructive and “progressive” becomes relevant here, since preservation itself can operate as a mode of governance. In this context, Pentelic marble is not merely a passive heritage material but a site through which national identity is curated and disciplined within a broader global modernity structured by colonial epistemologies.

In postindependence Greece, neoclassicism became the aesthetic framework for articulating “Greekness,”<sup>116</sup> establishing a connection between the newly formed nation-state and its ancient heritage. Pentelic marble, a material closely associated with the monuments of classical Athens, served as both a tangible link to antiquity and a medium through which Greek elites, political leaders, intellectuals, and architects constructed notions of authenticity and national continuity. By emphasising Pentelic marble, they positioned the Greek state as heir to ancient Greek culture, asserting continuity with the ideals and grandeur of classical antiquity. The authenticity of Pentelic marble was not just tied to its historical significance but also to its deep association with the local craftsmanship. This narrative produced a genealogical claim to purity, grounded in land, labour, and tradition. Marble was seen as a product of the Greek soil, linked to the very fabric of the nation’s past. As the quarries of Mount Pentelicus had supplied the materials for iconic monuments such as the Parthenon, the use of this marble was framed as a reclamation of Greece’s ancient glory, aligning the modern nation-state with its classical heritage. In this way, Pentelic marble became associated with Greekness,

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<sup>114</sup> Foucault, “Discipline and Punish,” 143.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government*.

<sup>116</sup> Robert Shannan Peckham, *National Histories, Natural States: Nationalism and the Politics of Place in Greece* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004).

grounded in the land, its traditions, and its historical significance. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these quarrying operations remained largely dependent on the extraction of substantial blocks destined for structural and monumental use, a production regime that differed significantly from the panelised and veneer-based applications that would characterise marble's 20<sup>th</sup> century incorporation into modern construction systems. The authority of Pentelic marble therefore rested not only on its association with antiquity but also on specific techniques of extraction, transport, carving, and masonry through which architectural mass and permanence were materially produced. This claim to purity was particularly potent in an era when Greece was navigating the complexities of modernisation. In a predominantly agrarian society with limited industrialisation, Greek elites sought to emphasise the authenticity of local, artisanal labour, contrasting it with the growing mechanised processes of industrial Europe. Quarried by hand in local communities, marble was regarded as more authentic than the impersonal industrial methods emerging in Europe. The connection to local labour was not only a claim to authenticity but also to a vision of Greece that resisted the forces of rapid industrialisation, which were seen as alien to the country's values and heritage. The materiality of Pentelic marble thus became a powerful tool in constructing a cohesive national narrative, forming a genealogy of artisanal authenticity. Buildings clad in Pentelic marble did more than celebrate the timeless glory of antiquity; they projected a stable image of Greek identity, grounded in tradition and local craftsmanship. This vision stood in contrast to the disruptions of modernisation within the broader European cultural landscape. In this way, the Greek state's use of Pentelic marble paralleled the regionalist impulses found in other European nation-building contexts, just as England's countryside was romanticised as a moral counterbalance to industrial progress,<sup>117</sup> the marble quarries of Mount Pentelicus were imbued with a sense of purity and authenticity, highlighting a vision of Greek identity that was rooted in artisanal labour and local tradition. Through this intertwining of material, architecture, and ideology, Greek elites strategically mobilised Pentelic marble to construct a cohesive narrative of "Greekness" that not only claimed a direct link to antiquity but also positioned Greece within the broader European project of identity formation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

While Pentelic marble was integral to the architectural identity of classical Athens, its renewed significance in neoclassical projects suggested an ideological convergence: the marble's origin in the rural region of Mount Pentelicus contrasted with the emerging metropolitan culture of Athens as a national capital. This interplay between material provenance and metropolitan aspiration illustrates a shifting interface

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<sup>117</sup> James Vernon, "Border Crossings: Cornwall and the English (Imagi)Nation," *Imagining Nations* 153 (1998): 154.

between local and national scales. As capitalist development, particularly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, accelerated the processes of industrialisation and modernisation, economic forces began to unify and standardise disparate localities across Greece.<sup>118</sup> Consequently, the movement of raw materials and labour from rural areas to the urban centre, facilitated by burgeoning infrastructure such as railroads and factories, further entwined the material, social, and ideological dimensions of Pentelic marble. This period saw the intensification of economic activity, particularly the movement of raw materials and labour from rural areas to the urban centre, facilitated by burgeoning infrastructure, such as railroads and factories. Pentelic marble relied on a nostalgic valorisation of regional specificity, even as it was incorporated into the capitalist logic of commodification and appropriation. The marble's "immemorial" qualities, linked to ancient craftsmanship and an unbroken material lineage, were appropriated to construct a narrative of authentic national identity, producing a genealogical reconciliation between periphery and centre. Pentelic marble, now laden with ideological weight, was reframed as an enduring testament to an original Hellenic essence rather than merely a raw material subjected to industrial exploitation and metropolitan appropriation. In line with sociologist Michael Hechter's concept of internal colonialism,<sup>119</sup> this process unveils a form of cultural extraction: the marble's association with rural labour and "primitive" customs was subsumed into the ideological project of the Greek state, with its capital at the core. By imposing metropolitan aesthetics on the regions and turning local resources into national prestige, the state reinforced its dominance while masking the socioeconomic disparities of centralisation. Pentelic marble thus exemplifies a genealogy of internal colonial appropriation.

The association of Pentelic marble with ancient Athens, celebrated as the cradle of Western civilisation, operated as an "inverted" rather than a "subverted" hierarchy.<sup>120</sup> While neoclassical architecture in Athens appropriated the marble to evoke the glory of antiquity, this act served to legitimise the metropolitan centre of the modern Greek state as a rightful inheritor of that past. In doing so, the state and its intellectual and political elites marginalised the labouring communities who quarried and worked the marble, relegating them to the periphery of the national narrative. As Chapter 3.2, *Entangled Grounds*, demonstrates, quarrying on Mount Pentelicus relied heavily on migrant workers, whose working conditions were

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<sup>118</sup> Elizabeth Mary Wright, *Rustic Speech and Folk-Lore* (London and New York: Oxford UP, 1914), 1.

<sup>119</sup> Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536–1966*, vol. 197 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977).

<sup>120</sup> Thomas, *Colonialism's Culture: Anthropology, Travel, and Government*, 30.

marked by precarity, accident, and periodic labour conflict. The material continuity celebrated through Pentelic marble thus depended upon forms of labour that entered national narratives only during moments of dispute, injury, or interruption. These workers and the quarrying landscape were erased from the celebratory discourse of Greek identity in favour of a romanticised image of a glorious past. Much like the rural peasantry described by Philip Dodd,<sup>121</sup> these actors and landscapes were visible only insofar as they served the needs of the emerging national culture. The Pentelic quarries, romanticised as timeless yet associated with a “lost world,” were simultaneously positioned as a resource to be controlled and exploited by the centralised state. In this way, the labourers who toiled in the quarries and the places that produced the marble were reduced to an invisible, secondary role, essential to the materialisation of national greatness but excluded from the narrative that claimed that greatness (Fig. 1.16). This dynamic corresponds to James Vernon’s observation of the “savage within,” a remnant of a bygone era whose existence underscored the modernity of the centre.<sup>122</sup> Edward Said’s work on colonisation<sup>123</sup> aptly illuminates the condition of Pentelic marble, articulating greatness, yet this depended on excluding the labourers and local contexts that produced it. The quarry workers and the peripheral landscape became an internal “other” within the state; their cultural and material contributions were subsumed under the broader narrative of national modernity. The marginalisation of quarry workers and regional populations can thus be read not only as economic or spatial exclusion but also as an effect of this aesthetic regime. In this proximity, the “white” ideal of classical form aligns with proximity to cultural legitimacy. The marble’s value in this context was not just a passive appropriation of antiquity but an active means of constructing a national identity that erased the very people and places that made its use possible. Thus, the legacy of Pentelic marble encapsulates the tensions of a nation asserting modernity while grounding its identity in a curated vision of the past. Marble became a tool for national building. Still, its connection to the labouring classes and the local landscape was deliberately obscured, rendering them invisible in the process of nationhood’s construction.

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<sup>121</sup> Philip Dodd, “Englishness and the National Culture,” in *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>122</sup> Vernon, “Border Crossings: Cornwall and the English (Imagi)Nation,” 156.

<sup>123</sup> Edward W. Said, “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors,” *Critical Inquiry* 15, no. 2 (1989).



**FIG. 1.16** Marble parts during the construction of the Academy of Athens. Photograph, ca. 1872–73. Τσίλλερ-Χάνσεν Αλληλογραφία, 1859–1890 [Ziller-Hansen Correspondence, 1859–1890].

Before the establishment of the modern Greek state in 1830, the area now known as Greece was governed by the Ottoman Empire under a decentralised system<sup>124</sup> that fragmented the country politically and culturally. The Ottoman administration divided territories into several *vilayets* (provinces) and *sanjaks* (districts), each with varying degrees of autonomy. Local communities were often governed by landowners, church leaders, or community heads, rather than directly by Ottoman authorities. This decentralised governance fostered strong regional identities, with local customs, dialects, and economic practices taking precedence over any unified national consciousness. One key aspect of the Ottoman Empire was the millet system, which granted religious communities, such as the Greeks, substantial autonomy over their internal affairs. Under this system, the Orthodox Church was involved in managing local affairs, maintaining a distinct identity, and serving as an intermediary between the Greek population and the Ottoman authorities. This reliance on local, ethnoreligious governance further reinforced the fragmented nature of Greek society, where regional differences, whether in religion, customs, or economic specialisation, remained prominent. Local communities were allowed to manage their economies, leading to the development of distinct regional specialities, such as shipbuilding in coastal towns and marble quarrying around Athens, where

<sup>124</sup> John Anthony Petropoulos, *Politics and Statecraft in the Kingdom of Greece, 1833–1843*, vol. 2053 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2015), 171–72.

labour engaged directly with stone particles and extraction debris. The labour and craftsmanship associated with materials like Pentelic marble became relevant to these regional identities, connecting landscape, resource, and labour to local traditions, forming a genealogy of regional material practice. These economic and cultural practices formed the backbone of regional identities that persisted long after the collapse of Ottoman rule. However, with the creation of the independent Greek state in 1830, the need for national unity quickly became evident. Athens, as the capital of the new kingdom, sought to centralise power and construct a unified Greek identity, particularly through the use of Pentelic marble in neoclassical buildings such as the Academy of Athens and the National Library. Pentelic marble, sourced from a single quarry near Athens, became a key material in asserting Athens' claim as the epicentre of Hellenic identity and modern governance, stabilising this claim as a national object of reference. Its widespread use, even in distant regions, indicated an attempt to transcend the local and regional identities that had characterised Greece before independence through a shared surface aesthetic, advancing a centralised understanding of national heritage and unity and producing a genealogy of statecentred identity.

In contrast to this centralising project, the satirical works of Dimitrios Vyzantios highlighted the regional diversity that persisted in Greek society,<sup>125</sup> critiquing the fragmented and diverse local identities. Vyzantios mocked the absurdities of a country struggling to reconcile its rich cultural diversity with the ambition to create a cohesive national identity. His satire underscored the tension between the localised identities of Greece's diverse regions and Athens' efforts to impose a singular national vision. Pentelic marble thus reinforced Athens' claim to express the newly unified nation's cultural heritage, especially through its highly visible surface qualities. The materiality of Pentelic marble was also engaged with tensions between local traditions and the national project. It became a reminder of the complex relationship between Athens and the peripheries. On the one hand, its widespread use in public buildings across Greece, often transported far from its source, expressed the imposition of a centralising vision that sought to homogenise disparate regional identities into a cohesive national image. On the other hand, its extraction and processing were carried out by local labour and artisanal practices rooted in regional identities. This duality highlights the dialectic between local traditions and the national project that defined 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece, thereby preventing the formation of a singular national identity.

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<sup>125</sup> Dimitrios Vyzantios, *Η Βαβυλωνία, ή η Κατά Τόπους Διαφθορά της Ελληνικής Γλώσσης* [Babylonia, or The Local Corruption of the Greek Language] (Athens: Ekati, 2020).

The processes of centralisation, modernisation, and the redefinition of relations between state and society run parallel to transformations of Pentelic marble within the Athenian neoclassical project. Following the establishment of Athens as the capital of the modern Greek state in 1834, Pentelic marble became a central material in the construction of neoclassical monuments and public buildings, indicating the nation's cultural continuity and aspirations toward modernisation. Just as the centralisation policies under regent Georg Ludwig von Maurer sought to dismantle entrenched local structures and align the periphery with the metropolitan centre,<sup>126</sup> the systematic use of Pentelic marble reinforced Athens as the material and intellectual core of the new Greek state. The quarrying and distribution of this marble articulated the administrative unification of the provinces, prefectures, and municipalities, forming a genealogy of administrative consolidation.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the infrastructural advancements, such as railways and public works,<sup>127</sup> similarly resonated with marble's evolving production and consumption patterns, from dispersed quarry particles to finished monumental forms. Expanded railways facilitated the transport of marble from Mount Pentelicus to urban sites, transforming it from a local building material into a material associated with national identity. The aesthetic prominence of Pentelic marble also paralleled the changing societal conditions sociologist Nikos Mouzelis identifies: the influx of foreign capital and the creation of a unified market.<sup>128</sup> Public buildings like the Academy of Athens or the National Library, constructed in neoclassical styles with Pentelic marble, visually articulated Greece's modernisation and connection to Western European cultural ideals while reinforcing the centrality of Athens in the national imaginary, producing a genealogy of material modernity. Thus, Pentelic marble was more than a material; it became a medium through which the modernisation of Greece and the redefinition of its regional and national relationships were articulated, signifying the shifts in economic, political, and cultural life that characterised late 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece through a genealogical constellation of material, labour, and state formation.

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<sup>126</sup> Georg Ludwig von Maurer, *Das Griechische Volk in Öffentlicher, Kirchlicher und Privatrechtlicher Beziehung, Vor und Nach dem Freiheitskampfe, Bis Zum 31 Juli 1834*, vol. 2 (Heidelberg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1835).

<sup>127</sup> Vasilas Tsokopoulos, *Μεγάλα Τεχνικά Έργα στην Ελλάδα Τέλη 19ου – Αρχές 20ου Αιώνα* [Major Technical Projects in Greece Late 19<sup>th</sup> – Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1999), 31.

<sup>128</sup> Nicos P. Mouzelis, *Modern Greece: Facets of Underdevelopment* (London and Basingstoke: Springer, 1979), 21.

The tension between nationalism and colonialism, as described by Homi Bhabha, can be applied to the case of Pentelic marble in Athenian neoclassicism, where the forces of identity are marked by ambivalence and contradiction. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the newly independent Greek state sought to assert its identity and sovereignty through the revival of classical forms. This process both drew upon and contested the colonial histories of Europe. Pentelic marble, a material synonymous with classical antiquity, expressed this duality. Just as Bhabha argues, nationalism is a dynamic between the call for progress and the evocation of a timeless, immutable culture.<sup>129</sup> This tension is materialised in the neoclassical project in Athens, where marble functioned as an interface between a revived antiquity and the modern state. On the one hand, the neoclassical buildings constructed after Greek independence sought to express a stable national identity rooted in the ideals of antiquity. This identity was tied to a historical origin that was seen as the defining essence of the nation. On the other hand, this idealised past had to be reformulated to meet the modern needs of state building, international diplomacy, and political consolidation. This created a “double time” experience, in which the timelessness of antiquity was invoked alongside the lived realities of a post-Ottoman state, resulting in a paradoxical architecture that both affirmed and subverted national identity. Marble, sourced from the same ancient quarries that supplied the Parthenon, was reappropriated in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, producing a genealogy of reuse that exposed the distance between past and present. However, the very act of quarrying, from the extraction of fine stone particles to the cutting of monumental blocks, signalled the gap between the idealised past and the demands of modernity.

The marble’s materiality became a site of negotiation between a stable national identity and the forces of change involved in the construction of the modern state. While ancient Greece was celebrated as the origin of Europe’s cultural and intellectual heritage, the use of Pentelic marble also aligned Greece with European modernity, which was characterised by industrialisation, political consolidation, and the colonial ambitions of European powers. Building a modern state involved the construction of institutions, infrastructure, and diplomatic relations. These efforts conflicted with the romanticised vision of ancient Greece and formed a genealogy of competing temporal demands. The Greek state had to balance the desire to honour classical Greece with the pragmatic need to engage with contemporary political and economic systems. This resulted in a tension between preserving the legacy

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<sup>129</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *Literary Theory and Criticism* (Routledge India, 2021), 153.

of ancient Greece and responding to modern realities, such as industrialisation, international trade, and governance. Reusing Pentelic marble acknowledged that while ancient Greece served as inspiration, its materiality had to be adapted to the needs of a new national project still defining itself within modern Europe. This gap reveals the contradictions inherent in the Greek nation-building, namely the desire to connect with an idealised ancient past while responding to the pressures and constraints of modernity. The renewed use of marble demonstrates the intricate intertwining of national identity with modernity and generates a genealogy of classical reference within modern statecraft. In this way, the architectural use of Pentelic marble serves as a metaphor for the complex dynamics of nationalism and its entanglement with European colonial histories, producing a space where identity is both affirmed and subverted.

Pentelic marble, a material deeply tied to Greece's classical heritage, was repurposed in the neoclassical period with national pride and historical continuity. However, much like the literary utopias that romanticised the Greek village, the marble's connection to the ancient past became a form of metonymic freezing,<sup>130</sup> a static idealisation of Greek identity, locked in time and reduced to a singular narrative. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Greek literature often idealised the rural village and its inhabitants as the timeless heart of the nation's cultural identity. Central to this romanticisation was the figure of the Greek peasant, celebrated as the noble custodian of tradition, untainted by modernity, and deeply connected to the land. These narratives constructed a genealogy of rural authenticity, abstracted from the material realities of labour, soil, and the stone particles worked by local communities. The peasant was portrayed as embodying authenticity, simplicity, and moral integrity, qualities positioned as the essence of Greekness. In these narratives, the rural village became a utopian space of cultural continuity and moral virtue, in contrast to the perceived corruption, foreign influence, and disconnection of urban centres like Athens. Yet, this idealised portrayal of the peasant and the village masked the complexities of rural life, including economic hardship, social inequalities, and the transformations brought by migration and modernisation. These literary and cultural strategies were part of broader challenges 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece faced in defining and unifying national identity. Emerging as an independent state, Greece grappled with the tension between modernising in line with European ideals and preserving its distinct traditions. The romanticised return to a mythical rural past served to balance these tensions, producing a genealogical fiction of purity that could unify the nation. At the same time, this selective emphasis on the rural and classical

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<sup>130</sup> Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, vol. 1 (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota UP, 1996).

obscured the diversity of Greece's regional identities, flattening them into a singular, essentialist narrative. The monumental works built from Pentelic marble, such as the Athenian Trilogy, project a vision of Greek national identity as a unified cultural object that simultaneously embraces an ancient legacy while constructing a modern, centralised state. Just as the rural village became a literary utopia of authenticity, Pentelic marble was employed to reinforce a singular narrative of classical purity. This narrative, grounded in the materiality of marble, erased regional complexities and the country's Byzantine and Ottoman histories. The reliance on Pentelic marble and rural idealisation expresses the deeper tensions in Greece's national project: between modernisation and tradition, urban centralisation and regional diversity, and the aspirations for unity against the realities of social and cultural plurality. As Artemis Leontis<sup>131</sup> and Dimitris Tziouvas<sup>132</sup> note, these cultural strategies often masked the ideological contradictions between rural and urban, past and present, and local and centralised identities. The architecture of Athens, with its iconic marble structures, framed the ancient past as both an empowering heritage and a limiting construct, freezing identity within a genealogy of classical ideality. Like the romanticised rural village in literature, these neoclassical monuments served both as affirmations of national pride and as mechanisms of exclusion, rendering invisible the nuanced realities of local and regional identities. While Pentelic marble's use in neoclassical Athens has often been framed through nationalism and classical revival, its whiteness also operated as a racialised aesthetic standard, establishing an implicit hierarchy of civilisation within the architectural imaginary. This racialised ideal not only structured local perceptions of Greek cultural authority but also intersected with European colonial discourses, shaping the ways Western powers assessed and guided Greece's material and symbolic ambitions. The whiteness of the marble was deeply normative, reflecting European art historical ideals that valorised pale stone as a sign of perfection, moral virtue, and civilisation, a standard traced back to Winckelmann and other 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century theorists of classical art, as discussed in Chapter 1.1, *Material Athens*. In practice, marble put this ideal into effect: the bright surfaces of the Athenian Trilogy and other monuments erased traces of original polychromy and articulated a purified vision of antiquity, producing a genealogy of racialised aesthetics. Such architectural choices simultaneously marked a boundary between the "civilised" Greek nation and the Ottoman or non-European past, inscribing racialised hierarchies into the city's spatial and visual order.

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<sup>131</sup> Artemis Leontis, "The Diaspora of the Novel," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 2, no. 1 (1992).

<sup>132</sup> Dimitris Tziouvas, "Heteroglossia and the Defeat of Regionalism in Greece," *Kampos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 2 (1994).

Marble thus continued to function as a conduit through which classical revival, national imagination, and colonial aesthetics intersected, rendering whiteness within a genealogical structure of inclusion and exclusion.

The exploration of Pentelic marble's relationship to antiquity and national identity can be understood through the lens of both colonial and national imaginaries, particularly in how marble, as a material, was associated with cultural continuity and political agendas. In Athens, the use of Pentelic marble was entangled with the construction of the Greek national identity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ideological colonisation of the Greek nation by Western European powers,<sup>133</sup> particularly through the influence of Bavarian and other Western European authorities, is evident in the appropriation of Pentelic marble to serve the political and cultural ambitions of the new Greek state. Pentelic marble became a powerful tool for Western and Greek elites alike, generating a genealogy of appropriated heritage that expressed not only the pinnacle of classical culture but also a colonial gaze that elevated ancient Greece as a beacon of Western civilisation. This colonial influence was not just intellectual but also material. The marble was extracted and repurposed for European projects, influencing the construction of national identities within the West while also shaping the Greek state's aspirations to be recognised as the rightful heir to that classical past. At the same time, the practice of building monumental structures in Athens from Pentelic marble in the 19<sup>th</sup> century served to solidify the idea of Greek exceptionalism within Europe. This process was both an act of colonial influence and an attempt to reaffirm Greek cultural identity, blending external colonial narratives and internal nationalist discourses into a genealogical assemblage.

The national discourse in Greece evolved from an initial colonial appropriation to a reworking of cultural identity through the Helleno-Christian narrative, which emphasised a continuous lineage from classical antiquity to the present. In this process, Pentelic marble helped construct the idea of an unbroken connection between Greece's ancient past and its modern identity. This material operated as a genealogical hinge linking antiquity, Byzantium, and modern nationalism. The discovery of Mycenaean material culture and the integration of Macedonia into the historical narrative in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries deepened this continuity, expanding the spatial and temporal dimensions of Hellenism. The marble, thus, acted as both a material manifestation of this imagined continuity and a key element in constructing a national identity that transcended colonial legacies, offering a vision of a Greece whose ancient glory was reborn and preserved in the modern state.

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<sup>133</sup> Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 291-95.

Architecture and the materials that compose it, such as Pentelic marble, participate in the shaping of national identity, foregrounding physical and sensory qualities that bring past and present into relation. Pentelic marble has been crucial to the construction and expression of Hellenic nationalism. Historically linked with ancient Greece, its use in neoclassical architecture reinforced its association with national identity. Due to its durability and its direct connection to Greek antiquity, this material serves as a powerful physical remnant of the past. These remnants, particularly through architectural works, provide a tangible link to national narratives. Thus, architecture does not merely serve as a passive backdrop to national identity; it actively participates in its formation, particularly through materials such as Pentelic marble, which instantiates historical continuity. In this sense, the marble is not just a material object but a witness to historical processes, carrying the nation's memory and aspirations within a genealogical continuum. It transforms architectural space into a record of national dreams and struggles, constantly reproduced through the marble's physical presence in contemporary buildings and monuments.

National identity, therefore, is not only the product of folklore, literature, or historiography but also of physical materials. In the case of Pentelic marble, it serves as an agent of transformation for this identity, connected to both the nation's past, its classical heritage, and its present. Through architecture, this material helps produce a national locality, an imagined space that connects the past, present, and future, grounding the national *topos* (landscape). It is the material, sensory, and experiential qualities of Pentelic marble that make it indispensable in the creation of national identity, the shaping of the national *topos*, and the formation and reformulation of the national dream. If national dreaming is iconographic and topographic, as Stathis Gourgouris<sup>134</sup> and Artemis Leontis<sup>135</sup> suggest, then Pentelic marble forms the iconographic landscape and defines the national *topos* through its surface visual, tactile, and enacted characteristics within a genealogical production of locality. As Appadurai reminds us, localities must be produced, and the national locality is a continually reproduced construct.<sup>136</sup> Architecture takes part in the production of these national localities, where references to the national past are enacted materially, for instance, through the continued use of Pentelic marble as a stabilised cultural object. Pentelic marble is more than a construction material. From its fine geological

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<sup>134</sup> Stathis Gourgouris, *Dream Nation: Enlightenment, Colonization, and the Institution of Modern Greece* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996).

<sup>135</sup> Artemis Leontis, *Topographies of Hellenism: Mapping the Homeland* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2020).

<sup>136</sup> Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 1.

particles to its monumental forms, it shapes the built environment while contributing to the nation's collective memory. Beyond its role in monumental architecture, it establishes tangible markers of cultural continuity and participates in the crafting of a unified national myth. Pentelic marble recollects fragments of the past, reassembling the dismembered ruins into a mnemonic landscape that is simultaneously a site of oblivion and forgetfulness. The marble operates within a carefully curated architectural language, creating an environment where certain histories are preserved and others are suppressed, presenting a sanitised national memory that obscures the diverse, fragmented history that preceded it, functioning as an interface between curated memory and historical omission. This dynamic forms a genealogy of selective remembrance. This is particularly evident in how Pentelic marble, as part of the neoclassical revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became a tool for nationalistic expression. Its use in monumental architecture, epitomised by structures such as the Parthenon and other public buildings in modern Athens, exemplifies the fusion of colonial and nationalist ideals. In this way, Pentelic marble becomes an instrument in establishing national boundaries, not only in the physical landscape but also in shaping national history and identity, producing a genealogical architecture of inclusion and exclusion.

The practices of purification and demarcation that accompany this use of the material are not just architectural but also political, in which the marble serves to solidify the notion of pure Greek heritage, distinct from Ottoman, Byzantine, and other external influences.<sup>137</sup> At the same time, Pentelic marble has a dual character. It is valued for its physical properties as a durable building material and for its strong cultural association. This combination creates a tension between its material durability and its role within ideological processes of state formation. It is presented as a truth grounded in physicality, yet this truth is inextricably linked to national ideology. This duality forms a genealogy of material sacralisation. The marble, though universally claimed as a national resource, simultaneously distances itself from the everyday life of the citizens, forming an interface between material presence and public inaccessibility. It must be handled with care and reverence, ensuring it is separated from the mundane. This process elevates it beyond the material world and into the realm of the sacred, controlled by expert practitioners rather than the people it is purported to express. In this way, Pentelic marble operates both as a physical manifestation of national identity and a tool for its construction, materialising the contradictions inherent in how nations curate their histories and manifest their collective memories. The story of Pentelic marble and Athenian architecture offers a compelling lens to explore the multiplicity of modernities and

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<sup>137</sup> Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece*, 291–95.

the polyvalent discourses that shape national identities. The use of Pentelic marble in the construction and restoration of neoclassical Athens exemplifies how resources were mobilised to craft the modern Greek nation-state, asserting continuity with an idealised classical past. Yet, this narrative, often framed as a rational reconstruction of antiquity, conceals a complex interplay of competing interests, hybrid practices, and subjugated knowledge. Pentelic marble became more than a material; it served as a foundation for the authority of the modern Greek state, producing a genealogy of legitimising practices. Its deployment in monumental restorations, such as the Parthenon, and the construction of neoclassical buildings was a deliberate effort to situate Greece within a European framework of cultural heritage. However, this process was far from straightforward. As with Ann Laura Stoller's observations on the polyvalence of racial and national discourses,<sup>138</sup> the narrative of Pentelic marble drew its power from the density of the histories it harnessed, the diverse interests it served, and the sedimented knowledge it carried. This polyvalence becomes evident when we consider the layered histories embedded in Pentelic marble. Its use traverses ancient Greek, Byzantine, Ottoman, and modern periods, each contributing distinct meanings and practices. While the neoclassical project sought to erase these layers to construct a purified vision of antiquity, the marble itself bears the traces of its multiple trajectories. For instance, the labour of artisans who worked in quarries and on monuments remains largely obscured in the official narrative, yet it constitutes an integral part of marble's history. Moreover, the materiality of Pentelic marble, its extraction, transport, and transformation, reveals the economic and political dimensions of its mobilisation. The restoration of classical monuments in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries involved modern technologies, global heritage funding, and colonial frameworks of cultural valuation. These hybrid architectures, combining modern and premodern forms of knowledge, challenge the notion of a singular modernity. Instead, they suggest that Greece's integration into global systems of economic, political, and cultural exchange was marked by diverse and overlapping modes of engagement with its past, forming a genealogy of hybrid modernities. Pentelic marble thus functions as a site of sedimentation, both literally and metaphorically. Its material layers, historical associations, and mobilisations underscore the complexity of modernity as a multifaceted and contested process. To rethink the relationship between architecture and modernity is to recognise these hybrid and multivalent trajectories,<sup>139</sup> acknowledging the subjugated knowledge and alternative histories that lie beneath the polished surface of Athenian neoclassicism.

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<sup>138</sup> Ann Laura Stoller, *Race and the Education of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1996), 204–05.

<sup>139</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993).

The preceding chapters have examined the historical production of Pentelic marble as a classical object. Rather than approaching marble as a self-evident material inheritance from antiquity, they have traced the heterogeneous operations through which its authority was assembled and maintained. Across geological formations, urban imaginaries, aesthetic discourses, architectural practices, and state projects, marble emerged as more than a building material. It became a privileged object through which continuity, cultural legitimacy, and historical authority could be articulated. The coherence of the classical object was therefore not found but produced, stabilised through recurring alignments between material practices and systems of representation. Viewed genealogically, this stabilisation depended upon multiple and overlapping operations. In Chapter 1.1, *Material Athens*, Pentelic marble appeared as a material around which cultural and aesthetic investments accumulated, transforming geological matter into an object of collective imagination. In Chapter 1.2, *Neoclassical Alignments*, that object became implicated in the formation of the modern Greek state, where marble participated in projects of urban reorganisation, nation-building, and historical reconstruction. In Chapter 1.3, *Tradition under Pressure*, the apparent naturalness of these formations was unsettled through an examination of the exclusions, displacements, and hierarchies that accompanied them. Whiteness, coloniality, and national identity emerged as constitutive dimensions of the object itself. Across these movements, several themes returned repeatedly. Whiteness first appeared as an aesthetic ideal, then as a principle of national representation, and finally as a racialised technology of distinction. Antiquity appeared as a cultural inheritance, a political resource, and a colonial construct. Likewise, Pentelic marble functioned simultaneously as a geological substance, an architectural material, a heritage object, and a national symbol. These returns do not indicate repetition so much as transformation. Each chapter approached the same object through a different configuration of forces, exposing how apparently stable categories are continually reassembled in response to changing material and historical conditions.

What emerges from this genealogy is that the classical object was never as coherent as it appeared. Beneath the narratives of continuity that connected antiquity to modern Greece lay a field of tensions: between geology and representation, labour and monumentality, regional difference and national unity, colonial projection and cultural self-definition. The authority of Pentelic marble depended precisely on the partial concealment of these tensions. The object could appear timeless only insofar as the historical conditions of its production receded from view. Yet these tensions remained within marble itself, within the institutions that mobilised it, and within the forms of visibility organised around it. The stabilisation of marble as a classical object, therefore, establishes a particular regime through which the material becomes intelligible, valuable, and authoritative. The question that follows

is how this authority persists once marble is no longer primarily encountered as a monumental object but increasingly operates through other architectural and political configurations. If *Classical Object* has traced the emergence of Pentelic marble through representational systems that stabilised it within taxonomies of form, whiteness, civilisation, and national identity, the following part examines a different configuration. As Foucault argues, Classical knowledge organised objects through representation, classification, and ordered relations of identity and difference.<sup>140</sup> The marble object was one effect of this epistemic arrangement. Yet marble's genealogy does not end with its stabilisation as a classical substance. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, marble increasingly operates through surfaces, interfaces, and circuits of visibility whose logic cannot be reduced to the classificatory regimes discussed thus far. The shift is not a replacement of one episteme by another, but a reorganisation of the conditions through which marble acquires architectural, political, and cultural intelligibility.

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<sup>140</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (Routledge, 2005), 55-83, 136-79.

## 2 Modern Surface

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The classical object established in the preceding part appeared as a coherent material formation. Through architecture, archaeology, aesthetic discourse, and national historiography, Pentelic marble acquired the status of a privileged object of civilisation, historical continuity, and cultural authority. Yet the stability was never complete. The object depended upon acts of maintenance, classification, restoration, and representation. Once these stabilising practices are examined genealogically, marble no longer appears as a self-contained substance endowed with fixed meaning. Its authority rests less upon the material itself than upon the conditions through which it is rendered visible, legible, and desirable. This shift introduces the problem of the surface. If the object directs attention toward coherence, unity, and permanence, the surface directs attention toward appearance, mediation, and circulation. The architectural surface is neither merely an exterior layer nor a decorative addition to form. It functions as a zone of encounter through which materials enter regimes of perception, institutional authority, political representation, and cultural value. Surfaces organise visibility and participate actively in the production of architectural meaning. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Pentelic marble became increasingly detached from its previous role as a monumental and structural material and incorporated into new architectural systems, technical infrastructures, and global circuits of exchange. Marble appeared less frequently as mass and more frequently as cladding, veneer, panel, pavement, and polished facade. Attention began to shift from the coherence of the block to the effects produced by the surface.

The chapters that follow examine this reconfiguration through a series of interconnected developments. Chapter 2.1, *Recasting Antiquity*, investigates the continued mobilisation of antiquity within modern architectural discourse. The classical inheritance was reformulated through abstraction, reproduction, and circulation. Pentelic marble became increasingly detached from specific historical contexts and reintroduced within broader systems of architectural representation. The question is no longer how marble became classical, but how classical authority continued to operate under modern conditions. Chapter 2.2, *Urban Modernities*, turns to the transformations of Athens during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Urban expansion, mass housing, migration, modern planning, and changing forms of everyday life generated new environments in which marble acquired different functions and meanings. Here, the surface is part of urban processes that extend beyond monumental

architecture. The material enters apartment blocks, public infrastructure, commercial buildings, and suburban developments, participating in the production of modern urban identities while remaining entangled with inherited narratives of Hellenism and national continuity. Chapter 2.3, *Colonial Modernity*, examines the geopolitical dimensions of these transformations. Marble surfaces increasingly appear in institutions whose authority extends beyond national borders: embassies, hotels, museums, government buildings, and international organisations. In these contexts, Pentelic marble operates within broader systems of visibility, diplomacy, and cultural representation. Its whiteness, historical associations, and apparent neutrality contribute to the production of architectural authority while simultaneously concealing the material, political, and labour conditions that sustain it.

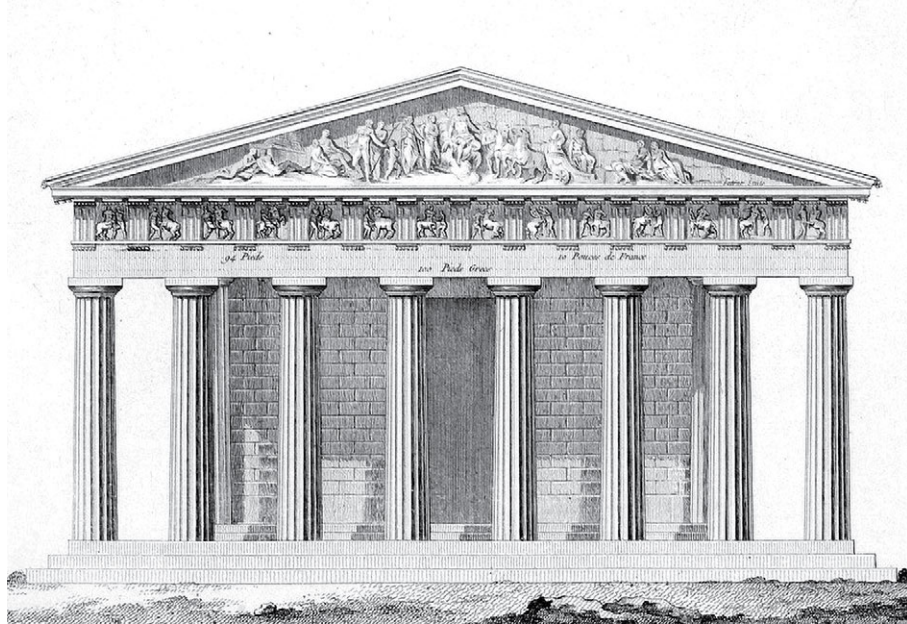
Several concepts continue to return throughout this part. Whiteness, coloniality, authority, territorialisation, and circulation remain central, but they perform different analytical work than they did within the classical object. In *Classical Object*, these concepts helped explain how marble achieved coherence as a stable architectural object. Here, they illuminate how that coherence is projected, reproduced, and circulated through surfaces. The emphasis therefore shifts from formation to mediation; from the production of authority to its dissemination across different architectural, institutional, and geopolitical contexts. The surface is important because it reveals a paradox at the centre of modernity. The more marble appears purified, neutral, and universal, the more extensive the historical and material operations required to sustain that appearance become. Modern surfaces project clarity while concealing complexity. They produce impressions of transparency while obscuring the labour, extraction, infrastructures, and political arrangements that make them possible. The very success of the surface depends upon its capacity to hide the conditions of its own production. For this reason, the surface should not be understood as a reduction of marble's significance but as an expansion of its field of operation. Pentelic marble no longer derives its authority exclusively from antiquity, national heritage, or monumental form. It increasingly functions through networks of circulation that connect local geologies to global architectures of governance, consumption, and diplomacy. The material continues to organise cultural meaning, yet it does so through different mechanisms and at different scales. The chapters that follow, therefore, approach Pentelic marble as a modern interface rather than a classical object. They investigate how surfaces mediate between matter and representation, locality and globalisation, memory and abstraction, visibility and concealment. In doing so, they trace the emergence of a new configuration of material authority, one no longer grounded primarily in the permanence of the monument but in the circulation of images, institutions, and forms of visibility through which marble continues to acquire meaning in the modern world.

## 2.1 Recasting Antiquity

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### 2.1.1 Constructing Classical Antiquity

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**FIG. 2.1** West Facade of the Parthenon. Drawing by Julien-David Le Roy, 1770.  
From *Les ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce*, Paris.

The belief that the Parthenon expresses the pinnacle of architectural achievement and perfection is deeply rooted in modern architectural thought. What appeared earlier as a stabilised classical object returns here as a surface through which modernity negotiates its abstractions. A closer examination of this perspective reveals that, beyond admiration and interpretations of genius, the Parthenon is frequently referenced to legitimise substantial shifts in architectural direction. This influence ranges from straightforward emulations of its forms to highly individual compositions in materials like concrete or steel. Interestingly, the Parthenon's status as an architectural standard is a relatively recent construct (Fig. 2.1), largely

arising after Julien-David Le Roy publicised detailed drawings in 1758.<sup>141</sup> Central to this development was the allure of its Pentelic marble, which became associated with an ideal that architects sought either to emulate or reinterpret, consolidating a genealogy of architectural authority. The resemblance to the actual Parthenon was of no significant concern. In modern depictions, the temple was often reduced to a rudimentary type of ancient propylon. Notably, these portrayals stripped the Parthenon of its environmental context, leaving it devoid of any distinct sense of place. While the temple was technically situated in Athens, these images emphasised the structure as an isolated entity, a generic propylon, a temple abstracted from its Athenian roots and applicable to any locale. In this sense, Athens itself became an imagined site, displaced by a mobile construct of antiquity that could be re-situated wherever architectural authority was required, be it Nuremberg, Flanders, or elsewhere, rather than the actual city, which the draughtsman had never laid eyes upon.<sup>142</sup>

The Parthenon remains a monument, universally recognised as a manifestation of cultural heritage. Rising from the Acropolis in weathered Pentelic marble, from microscale stone particles to monumental blocks, it is perceived to embody the height of Athenian democracy and the meticulous craftsmanship that gave it form. Its enduring marble surfaces evoke the revered accomplishments of ancient Greek civilisation, foundations often credited to modern Western ideals. “To see the Acropolis is a dream one treasures without even daring to realise it,” wrote Charles Edouard Jeanneret, later known as Le Corbusier, during his 1911 journey to Athens with Auguste Klipstein. From quarantine on Ayios Yeorgios, a small island off Piraeus, he confided a mix of eager anticipation and awe, “I have high hopes for the Acropolis! I shall preen myself like a vain and fragile lover. I shall wait to land at Piraeus, and, in the solitude of the night, I shall go to pay homage [to the Parthenon].”<sup>143</sup> Even at a distance, Le Corbusier was captivated by the radiance and finesse of Pentelic marble, sensing in it both the meticulous precision of Athenian artisanship and the ideological weight it carried. Yet his anticipation of the Parthenon was marked by hesitation. Upon arriving in Athens, he admitted to “crafting hundreds of pretexts” to postpone his encounter with the monument, perhaps daunted by its perceived historical weight. Thinking later on this moment, he wrote:

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<sup>141</sup> David Le Roy, *Les Ruines Des Plus Beaux Monuments de la Grece: Considérées du Côté de L'Histoire et du Côté de L'Architecture* (Paris: Chez HL Guerin & LF Delatour, 1758).

<sup>142</sup> Tournikiotis, “The Place of the Parthenon in the History and Theory of Modern Architecture.”

<sup>143</sup> Le Corbusier, *Κείμενα για την Ελλάδα [Texts about Greece]* (Athens: Agra, 2009), 167.

*I don't know why this hill harbours the essence of artistic thought. I can appreciate the perfection of these temples and realise that nowhere else are they so extraordinary, and a long time ago I accepted the fact that this place should be like a repository of a sacred standard, the basis for all measurement in art. Why this architecture, and no other? For how much have I already been led by an absolute enthusiasm for the works of other peoples, other times, other places? Yet why must I, like so many others, name the Parthenon the undeniable Master, as it looms up from its stone base, and yield, even with anger, to its supremacy?<sup>144</sup>*

Le Corbusier's response reveals both admiration and tension. His admission that he yields “even with anger” reveals an uneasy recognition of the Parthenon's overwhelming authority. The monument appears to demand submission as the ultimate architectural reference point, provoking both reverence and frustration in a modern architect striving to articulate a new architectural language. Thus, the Parthenon functions for Le Corbusier as an epistemic foundation, a “sacred standard” against which value is measured. Yet his acknowledgement is marked by ambivalence. Admiration is intertwined with constraint, as the monument's canonical status threatens to overshadow the autonomy of modern architectural thought, asserting a genealogical dominance. Le Corbusier nevertheless continued to emphasise the enduring authority of the Parthenon. When he returned to Greece in 1933 for the IV International Congress of Modern Architecture, he was already recognised as the foremost pioneer of architectural modernism. He famously remarked on his visit, “I did what I did with that Acropolis in my bowels.”<sup>145</sup> The visceral nature of this expression suggests that the encounter with the monument was deeply embodied. The Parthenon was at the same time an external reference and something internalised, absorbed physically and emotionally into the architect's own creative consciousness. Such language points to the monument's powerful mythic status within modern culture. Yet it also raises a question: does the myth of the Parthenon precede and shape the experience of encountering it, or does the monument's physical reality exceed the expectations created by its reputation? For those drawn to its idealised image, the encounter with the luminous surfaces of Pentelic marble does not dissolve the myth. Rather, sensory experiences appear to reinforce one another, blurring the boundary between material presence and architectural legend in a genealogical circulation of image and encounter. This circulation replays, at another register, the stabilising perceptual habits encountered in the classical object-regime.

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<sup>144</sup> Le Corbusier and I. Žaknić, *Journey to the East* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 216–17.

<sup>145</sup> Corbusier, *Κείμενα για την Ελλάδα* [*Texts about Greece*], 131.



FIG. 2.2 Le Corbusier next to a Parthenon capital. Photograph by August Klipstein, 1911. From *Le Corbusier: Texts on Greece*.

The persistence of this continuum with antiquity, however, demands closer scrutiny. It does not operate in a singular register. It appears as a form of genealogy, carried through anticipation and embodied encounter. Le Corbusier's hesitation before the Acropolis (Fig. 2.2), his sense of awe and resistance, suggests a relation that exceeds simple historical reference, as if the monument were encountered as something already internalised, sedimented within architectural consciousness. Yet this apparent immediacy is never unmediated. The Parthenon that is remembered is already shaped by prior representations, by drawings, texts, and disciplinary canons that organise how it can be seen and felt. The same continuum functions as an institutional interface, mediating between embodied memory and disciplinary technique. Through processes of abstraction, reproduction, and circulation, the Parthenon is stabilised as a reference point that can be mobilised across contexts, detached from its material and geographical specificity. In this sense, continuity is not simply inherited but actively produced, serving to authorise new architectural languages by anchoring them in a constructed lineage. What appears as memory and what operates as technique are not opposed conditions but mutually constitutive processes, reinforcing one another in the ongoing consolidation of the idealised Parthenon within an architectural genealogy. In 1922, Le Corbusier revisited his pilgrimage on the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis since 1911, recalling Greece, and especially the Parthenon, as the pinnacle of pure intellectual creation, a work where "profile and contour" achieved perfection.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>146</sup> Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (Courier Corporation, 2013), 202.

Why, during the most iconoclastic era of the modern movement, did one of its fiercest proponents praise the Parthenon in such reverent terms? Every revolution selectively mines its past to lend prestige to its vision, constructing a genealogy of authoritative precedent. However, a closer examination of the modern movement reveals that Le Corbusier and many of its pioneers were deeply shaped by classical ideals,<sup>147</sup> which they sought to reinterpret through an abstract vocabulary suited to the industrial age and, in their view, aligned with its demands. Le Corbusier provocatively juxtaposed images of the Parthenon with those of cars, ocean liners, aeroplanes, and electric generators, a comparison that caused outrage. Even Jacobus Johannes Pieter Oud, a fellow modernist, reacted with indignation, asserting, “I bow to the marvels of technology, but I cannot equate a liner with the Parthenon.” This reaction underscores the Parthenon’s enduring aura as an expression of supposedly universal and elemental values, a genealogical anchor within modernist discourse. For Le Corbusier, this classical monument conveyed a harmonious order, an alignment with nature and, possibly, with the cosmos itself, a resonance he sought to achieve through a new visual language stripped of historical precedent but rooted, like Pentelic marble, in a genealogical ideal of timeless perfection.

Analysing the influence of ancient Greek architecture on 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture calls for a redefined approach. Unlike neoclassicism, the theoretical and aesthetic principles of modernism discouraged direct invocation of classical forms. During this period, there were no direct reproductions of Parthenon-inspired porticoes, columns, or other overt stylistic elements, even though leading architects such as Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius often referred to classical architecture in their writings.<sup>148</sup> This makes it challenging to identify a visible or explicit presence of the ancient temple within modernist architecture. This ambiguity is not incidental. It is precisely through its apparent convergence with structural rationalism that the Parthenon’s authority persists, no longer as a visible model but as a latent framework that appears indistinguishable from necessity. The shift from explicit references to implicit allusions between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries indicates more than an ideological transformation; a fundamental shift in construction methods drove it, as stone and brick gave way to reinforced concrete. This change reduced the importance of static, expressive forms like the octastyle portico. With slender columns now spaced further apart, yet supporting the same weight, the potential for resemblance to ancient structures diminished. Despite these inherent ambiguities, two notable instances emerge in which modern architecture appears to subtly conceal a “Parthenon.”

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<sup>147</sup> Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York: Praeger, 1980), 157–58.

<sup>148</sup> Walter Gropius, *The New Architecture and the Bauhaus*, vol. 21 (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 1965).



FIG. 2.3 Villa Savoye, Poissy. Photograph by Céline Clanet.  
Fondation Le Corbusier, Paris.

These moments mark key intersections where the essence of the classical temple resonates meaningfully with modernist design. Le Corbusier's Villa Savoye at Poissy (Fig. 2.3) represents the pinnacle of his theoretical and aesthetic exploration of the 1920s, an exploration profoundly shaped by the architectural legacy of the Parthenon. Key elements such as the austere horizontal composition, the precisely rectangular floor plan, and the regular colonnade of pilotis, where concrete and glass panels alternate between solidity and void, can be read as sustaining a subtle yet persistent dialogue with the Parthenon's formal logic. This parallel becomes clearer through the villa's isolated position within an open landscape. This spatial condition recalls a temple, one that urban contexts such as Villa La Roche could not produce. In this sense, Villa Savoye can be read as a modern reinterpretation of Parthenonic ideals, positioning it within Le Corbusier's broader effort to translate classical proportion into modern construction through a reconfigured architectural object.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> William JR Curtis, "Le Corbusier: Ideas and Forms," (Phaidon, 1986).

Since the mid 1960s, critiques of modernism have coincided with a renewed engagement with historical references in architectural practice.<sup>150</sup> However, this engagement does not operate as a return to the past. Rather than recovery of genealogical meaning, it often takes the form of citation, repetition, and recombination, producing an accumulation of historical fragments detached from their original contexts. What emerges is not continuity, but a dispersal of references across architectural surfaces circulated as signs. In such cases, genealogy becomes a repertoire of forms that can be mobilised without sustained attention to their architectural, material, or political implications. Within this framework, the Parthenon frequently appears as a site of condensation, invoked as a locus of origin, tradition, or cultural legitimacy. Pentelic marble, integral to Parthenon's logic, is thus abstracted from its geological and genealogical specificity and absorbed into an image economy in which historical forms circulate as recognisable visual tokens. Its material depth is flattened as it is circulated as representation, where even displaced marble particles are abstracted into commodified architectural signs. Such practices express contemporary modes of production in which historical forms are disengaged from their contexts and transformed into portable signs within a global system driven by visibility and stylistic recognition.

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<sup>150</sup> P. Portoghesi et al., *The Presence of the Past: First International Exhibition of Architecture* (Venice: La Biennale de Venezia, 1980).

### 2.1.2 Abstractions of Form

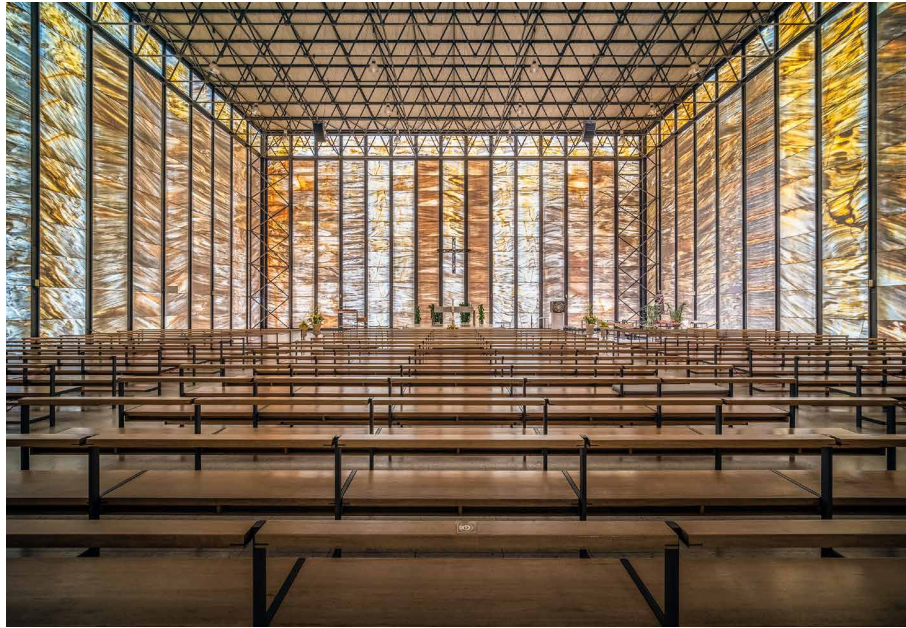


FIG. 2.4 The Pius Church, Lucerne. Photograph by Dominik Gehl.

With the expansion of European colonial power from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onward, new global systems of extraction and circulation began to reorganise the material foundations of architecture. Stones, mineral particles, and labour were increasingly mobilised across imperial networks, incorporating building materials within wider regimes of territorial control and economic exploitation. Although Pentelic marble remained geographically rooted in the quarries of Mount Pentelicus, the architectural meanings attached to stone were gradually reshaped within this expanding global order (Fig. 2.4). Materials that once signified local traditions and geological specificity were increasingly incorporated into transnational production systems. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this shift became particularly visible in the treatment of marble in quarrying and fabrication practices. The large blocks extracted for classical and 19<sup>th</sup> century construction required extensive cutting, shaping, and transport in order to function as structural elements within buildings. By contrast, 20<sup>th</sup> century marble production increasingly supplied thin slabs, tiles, and veneers designed for attachment to reinforced-concrete and steel frames. Mechanised extraction methods, diamond cutting technologies, and expanded transportation networks enabled larger volumes of stone to circulate more rapidly between quarry, processing facility,

and construction site. These shifts altered not only the material form of marble but also the organisation of labour. The artisanal skills associated with quarrying, carving, and masonry increasingly became supplemented by specialised industrial processes of cutting, finishing, and installation. Marble's transition from object to surface was therefore also a transformation in the technical and labour regimes through which the material entered architecture. No longer primarily employed as structural mass, it increasingly appeared as thin cladding applied to modern concrete and steel construction systems. Smoothed into facades, walls, and floors, marble became a surface, a literal flattening of stone into veneer. In this form, Pentelic marble was effectively deterritorialised from its ancient and geological context and reterritorialised within a modern architectural language associated with progress, civility, and international order. The terms deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are used here in the sense developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari to describe the processes through which materials, practices, or meanings are displaced from their original contexts and reconfigured within new assemblages of power and signification.<sup>151</sup> In diplomatic architecture, Pentelic marble functioned as a material through which these processes of reterritorialisation became spatially legible. Embassies, government buildings, museums, and corporate headquarters deployed their luminous surfaces to project neutrality, clarity, and rational authority, consolidating these institutions as architectural objects of geopolitical legitimacy. Yet these architectural gestures did not erase the genealogies of extraction and power following the material; rather, they transposed them into new geopolitical contexts. Transported far from its Athenian quarries and installed within the infrastructures of diplomacy, development, and international governance, Pentelic marble participated in a global aesthetic that naturalised European and North American authority while presenting itself as universal and timeless.

The categories that structured colonial difference, racial, ethnic, and national, were also reinscribed within this new visual order. Once theorised as scientific or anthropological truths, these divisions were given renewed authority through modern material culture. The surface of Pentelic marble, detached from the specificity of the Parthenon and embedded in minimalist grids and curtain wall systems, became a carrier of this transformed yet persistent coloniality, mediating a genealogy of visual power. It appeared clean, objective, and apolitical, a neutral material, even as it continued to organise distinctions of class, power, and cultural belonging. To read the modern white surface of Pentelic marble is to trace this entanglement down to the displaced stone particles that circulate within global architectures of power.

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<sup>151</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 508–10.

It is to recognise how matter remains shaped by the systems it has served, even when displaced into new architectural contexts. At the same time, such displacement introduces instability. The marble surface no longer merely represents an ideology, but it is exposed to new technical assemblages, environmental conditions, and modes of perception. Through these shifts, processes of deterritorialization begin to unfold, loosening the fixed alignment between material, origin, and meaning. In this chapter, marble operates not simply as a surface but as an interface, not a passive exterior layer, but a relational zone where material properties, institutional frameworks, and ideological projections interact. Unlike surface, which implies exteriority, interface suggests mediation and exchange. It is within this mediated zone that meanings are negotiated, transformed, and occasionally disrupted. The marble thus becomes a contested interface where ideologies pass through matter, and where matter, perhaps, begins to respond.

If we observe the dominant configurations of exploitation and social stratification across the globe today, the distribution of labour, value, and visibility, a persistent pattern emerges. Those exposed to the most precarious conditions and the enduring exclusions are disproportionately drawn from populations historically categorised and governed through colonial systems of power, groups named as races, ethnicities, or nations within a Eurocentric framework. These designations were never neutral descriptors but technologies of classification, instruments that organised difference in ways that enabled administration, extraction, and control. Classification in this sense is not merely epistemic. It is a mechanism of domination that translates knowledge into hierarchy and hierarchy into material reality. It continues to structure the world not only through legal and economic frameworks but also through aesthetics, spatial organisation, and material surfaces. Within this system, Pentelic marble, now operating as a surface, has played and continues to play an active role, reinforcing a genealogy of whiteness as a structural norm. It has adorned institutions that asserted Western universality while simultaneously marginalising alternative epistemologies, rendering whiteness both a material appearance and a structural norm. Modernism, with its polished restraint, grids, and refined veneers, did not dismantle colonial power but rearticulated it in abstract form. The site of domination shifted from overt political control to more subtle and internalised mechanisms, including the colonisation of perception and imagination.<sup>152</sup> Marble, once monumental and structurally central, becomes a backdrop, a smooth white field onto which notions of order, progress, and development are projected as self-evident. This colonisation extends beyond territory and labour.

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<sup>152</sup> Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 169, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>.

It concerns worldviews and how meaning is produced, how knowledge is authorised, and how the visible is structured, processes that follow a genealogy of epistemic extraction. European aesthetics and epistemologies did not simply replace existing systems. They selectively appropriated elements of them while disqualifying the frameworks from which they emerged. Extraction thus operated at multiple levels. Material extraction in mining and construction, and epistemic extraction in the appropriation of knowledge detached from its social and cultural grounding.

Pentelic marble, in its smoothness, was made to participate in a specific configuration of modern power. In embassies, state institutions, and cultural buildings, marble often functioned as a material signifier of alignment with Western epistemologies, contributing to the marginalisation of local and indigenous intellectual frameworks, which were either aestheticised as folklore or excluded altogether from institutional representation. Its whiteness became an instrument of legibility for Western power, a polished silence that replaced multiple forms of knowing with a singular, universalising aesthetic. Beneath or outside its surface lay the residues of extraction and expropriation, yet these histories were rendered invisible through architectural framing and institutional discourse. However, such dynamics were not ubiquitous. In different postcolonial trajectories, for example, Mexican nationalism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, where endemic materials and indigenous iconography were strategically mobilised as pedagogical tools, material choices operated differently. There, local materials and mural practices were used to foreground indigenous pasts rather than suppress them, demonstrating that postcolonial materiality did not follow a single logic. The imposition of Western modes of expression was therefore not simply aesthetic but strategic, and its effects varied across geopolitical contexts. Where marble functioned as a medium of aspirational Europeanisation, it became a promise of inclusion that simultaneously reproduced exclusion, operating as an interface between projected universality and structural marginalisation. In other contexts, alternative materials and visual regimes challenged that dominance. Even as colonial power shifted from territorial control to more dispersed forms expressed in surfaces and institutions, its structures persisted, sometimes through concealment, sometimes through complete omission. In the smoothness of modern white surfaces, we encounter not neutrality but the traces of historically situated power relations that shape visibility, representation, and belonging.

Colonial material histories do not follow a simple trajectory of extinction and recovery but persist through transformation, reconfiguration, and strategic reuse within modern regimes of representation. The forms and intensities of cultural coloniality have differed across regions. Yet, they converged on a shared project: the aligning and homogenisation of global aesthetics, knowledge, and material

expression under Eurocentric regimes. In Latin America, this project produced devastating violence, genocide on such a scale that entire populations, cosmologies, and visual systems were violently disrupted and profoundly transformed.<sup>153</sup> However, these traditions were not simply extinguished. They persisted in altered forms, resurfacing through processes of suppression, adaptation, and later revival. Even where marble did not physically circulate, its ideological weight did, not as an ancient relic but as a modern surface, reanimated and repurposed within new architectural logics. In Greece and across Europe, Pentelic marble became central to this rearticulation. Rather than standing in opposition to modernism, it often functioned in continuity with it. In 20<sup>th</sup> century Greece, marble remained materially present, not only in restoration projects that sought to recover an idealised past, but also in new constructions that aligned modernity with purity, order, and national identity. Its white surface, stripped of ornament yet saturated with historical sediment, became the material threshold through which national narratives entered modernity. Architects working under modernist principles transformed Pentelic marble into an abstracted architectural skin used in civic buildings, museums, ministries, and cultural institutions.

The continuity with antiquity that Pentelic marble appears to sustain is neither singular nor stable. It operates across different registers that remain in tension. It may be understood as a form of memory, not as the recovery of an intact past, but as a sedimented persistence of material practices, quarrying, carving, and assembling that carry traces across time. In this sense, continuity is not secured by form or style. Still, it emerges through the ongoing life of the material itself, even as this persistence is selectively framed, preserved, and narrated. Yet this memory does not cohere into a narrative. It persists in fragments, in residues, in discontinuous survivals that are never entirely free from the conditions that render them visible. Continuity also operates as an institutional technique, where antiquity is not recalled but actively stabilised, mobilised through architectural form, restoration practices, and state discourse to secure authority. Pentelic marble participates in this operation. Its whiteness and its association with the Parthenon enable the projection of an unbroken lineage, even where rupture, displacement, and geopolitical reconfiguration are evident.<sup>154</sup> What appears as continuity is therefore inseparable from the mechanisms that produce it, stabilising antiquity as an

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<sup>153</sup> Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 170.

<sup>154</sup> Dimitris Philippides, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830-1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας [Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830-1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture]* 72.

architectural object fabricated through power. The marble surface becomes the site where these registers meet, carrying traces of material duration while simultaneously participating in the fabrication of historical coherence as an effect of power. The material was reconfigured. Carved bodies and mythic scenes gave way to tiles, panels, and sheets. Its grain and depth were flattened into planar surfaces, yet its historical weight remained operative. Important parallels can be observed elsewhere. The Mexican indigenist revival of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century demonstrates how materials associated with pre-invasion Mesoamerica, such as basalt and red tezontle, were reactivated within modern architectural and artistic programmes. Later movements, such as Mexican brutalism, combined indigenous materials with techniques like bush-hammered concrete and incorporated marble fragments. Here, pre-colonial material traditions were not treated as relics but were reinterpreted as modern surfaces, reanimated and embedded within contemporary construction. Thus, the modern white surface enacts a deep politics of visibility. In appearing neutral, it organises what becomes visible and what remains obscured. By smoothing material difference and abstracting texture into surface, modernism did not undo coloniality; it displaced and rearticulated it through aesthetic form, producing a genealogy of whitened modernity.

The surface of Pentelic marble, especially in Greece, participated in reproducing a Western aesthetic order in which matter seems disinterested yet remains structured by exclusion. Within this order, continuity with antiquity operates less as inheritance than as alignment, a technique through which historical depth is condensed into a legible surface that supports the authority of the present. Through embassies, ministries, museums, and hotels such as the Hilton Athens and the Embassy of the United States in Athens, Pentelic marble was used to articulate a purified modernity, a seamless continuity between antiquity and the present, Greece and the West, stone and state. This modernist use of marble was also infrastructural. It embedded hierarchies of knowledge and value within the built environment. The smooth white surface was deployed to articulate authority, transparency, and objectivity, ideals that supported Greece's continued alignment with Western Europe and its systems of power. In this process, the marble's classical associations were neither erased nor repeated; they were repurposed and reterritorialised within modernity, forming a genealogical recoding of antiquity. The material's agency was narrowed to a visual role, a backdrop for new ideologies, new forms of governance, and new imperial gestures. Yet the abstraction of marble into surface depended upon material and social processes that remained largely outside the visual field of modern architecture. The white interfaces of embassies, ministries, universities, and hotels concealed not only geological depth but also the labour required for extraction, transport, cutting, and installation. As Chapter 3.2, *Entangled Grounds*, examines, quarry work at Mount Pentelicus relied heavily on migrant labourers, particularly

from Karpathos and the Cyclades, whose conditions were often precarious and whose presence entered public visibility primarily through accidents, wage disputes, or legal conflicts. The 1907 strike against the British-owned Marmor Ltd quarry illustrates how labour intermittently interrupted the apparent continuity between marble and national prestige. While architectural discourse celebrated the material as a bearer of classical permanence, extraction communities experienced it through risk, bodily exhaustion, and economic uncertainty. The modern marble surface therefore functioned not only as an aesthetic and institutional interface, but also as a mechanism through which the conditions of its own production were displaced from visibility. The neutrality projected by marble's whiteness depended, in part, upon the historical marginalisation of the workers whose labour enabled its circulation. And yet, even in its apparent passivity, the marble resists complete capture. The surface, though disciplined, is never entirely inert; it acts as an interface where material genealogy and modernist abstraction confront one another. Its grains persist beneath the polish. Its fissures return over time. As buildings weather, the strain between material genealogy and modernist abstraction becomes visible. In civic halls, banks, and universities, the marble remains at once a surface of power and a repository of tension. It carries the pressures of quarrying and labour, of extraction and craft, down to the stone particles of local geologies mobilised in the service of universal ideals.

Pentelic marble is not simply the material of modern architecture; it is the medium through which modernity articulates itself and organises visibility. The modern white surface functions as an interface: a relational zone in which material properties, institutional frameworks, and ideological claims are mediated and made perceptible. It is also the zone in which continuity is negotiated, where traces of material memory intersect with its strategic organisation as an institutional effect. As an interface, the surface does not merely conceal or display; it communicates, structures perception, and aligns built form with broader systems of authority and knowledge. In modernist architecture, whiteness operates through this communicative logic, functioning as an interface between aesthetic authority and institutional legitimacy. It projects purity, order, transparency, and rationality while expressing these values within institutional spaces such as ministries, embassies, and cultural buildings. The surface thus enables ideology to appear self-evident and natural, rather than imposed, producing a genealogy of legibility. In contrast, postmodern architectural surfaces operate through different logics. Rather than projecting continuity and universality, they foreground quotation, historical reference, and formal fragmentation. Classical motifs may be reproduced, exaggerated, or recontextualised, often as ironic citations. Surfaces become layered with signs that do not seek coherence but expose the constructed nature of architectural meaning. This produces distance rather than alignment, visibility rather than seamless integration. Fredric Jameson's analysis of

the Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles captures this condition with precision.<sup>155</sup> He argues that the building's reflective glass facades and interior spatial complexity generate a sense of disorientation and spatial depthlessness characteristic of late capitalist culture. The surface reflects its surroundings while simultaneously deflecting orientation, producing an environment in which meaning circulates through images rather than through structural legibility. In this context, the surface no longer functions as an interface that organises authority through clarity, as in modernism, but as a reflective system that mediates experience through repetition and abstraction. Where modernist marble operates as an interface that communicates stability, purity, and institutional legitimacy, postmodern surfaces tend to disrupt those claims through visual excess, collage assemblages, and the juxtaposition of heterogeneous materials. Meaning is no longer anchored in material continuity but in stylistic citation and play, producing a genealogy of fractured reference. The result is not simply fragmentation, but a transformation in how surfaces participate in the production of value and perception within late capitalist urban space.

The invention of "race" as a primary organising principle of the colonial world marked a decisive transformation in how difference was classified and governed. As argued earlier in Chapter 1.1, *Material Athens*, colonial power operates through technologies of classification that translate epistemic distinctions into spatial and material hierarchies. In this shift, previous distinctions grounded in religion, language, or culture were progressively rendered biological, visual, and spatial. The human body was divided into hierarchical categories imagined as natural and self-evident: "White," "Black," "Indian," "Yellow," "Olive."<sup>156</sup> These categories were not merely descriptive; they were expressed in space, in the layout of cities, in the architecture of institutions, and in the facades of power. In Europe, such racial classifications were being globally institutionalised; Pentelic marble was deployed across ministries, embassies, courts, and parliaments as a material reinforcement of whiteness as the norm. The smooth white surface functioned as a visual and tactile infrastructure for Eurocentrism. It materialised a world in which Western order appeared grounded in texture, light, and stone rather than in political imposition. Architecture thus did not simply house colonial power; it performed it. Pentelic marble, geologically rooted in a specific territory, was simultaneously reactivated as an imperial aesthetic that projected Greece as the timeless cradle of Europe. A site of origin rather than entanglement. Crucially, this whiteness was itself a

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<sup>155</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," in *Postmodernism* (Routledge, 2016), 38-45.

<sup>156</sup> Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 171.

genealogical construction. Ancient Greek marble was originally polychromatic, with colour integral to its sculptural and architectural life. The later erasure and systematic ignoring of this chromatic dimension reveals how the ideal of whiteness required material purification and genealogical rewriting. The suppression of polychromy became part of the broader whitening of classical heritage, reinforcing the association between marble, purity, and civilisational genealogy. Thus, the modernist white surface recoded the nation as continuity, purity, and lineage, folding it into the global Eurocentric imaginary. At the same time, coloniality, once established as a structuring logic of world power, extended beyond race to modulate labour, citizenship, democracy, and aesthetics, embedding these hierarchies into the material fabric of built environments.

The distribution of work across the global capitalist system is structured along racialised lines that determine who labours, who governs, and who counts. The white surface of Pentelic marble, as it appeared in institutional buildings, national banks, museums, and academic halls, offered an illusion of universality while concealing profoundly exclusionary conditions. Marble became a smooth ideological screen, codifying hierarchies even as it obscured them. Even as global capitalism shifted after World War I, adapting to anticolonial resistance and economic reconfiguration, the material grammar of coloniality persisted. Its images endured. Its textures codified power. The marble surface continued its quiet work, rendering Eurocentrism acceptable, even beautiful. It became the visual sediment of racialised authority, maintained long after colonial flags were lowered. Yet coloniality of power, though anchored in race, does not end there. It permeates epistemology, law, nationhood, and aesthetics. It becomes the condition through which modernity itself is understood. Pentelic marble, in this sense, is not simply a construction material; it is an epistemic surface. It codifies space, value, and legitimacy. It structures perception through material presence. At the same time, it cannot be reduced to an instrument of domination alone. It operates as an analogical archive, not as a passive container of history, but as a material field that registers geological formation, labour, and extraction. These traces are not preserved intact; they persist in microfractures and dispersed particles that register the stone's conditions of formation. Instrumentalised by systems of power, marble nevertheless retains the capacity to expose its own conditions of production. This chapter lingers on that surface, not to celebrate its polish but to expose its depth, the centuries of classification and erasure that run through its veins. The modern white surface is a field in which continuity is both enacted and unsettled. It holds together the claim to an unbroken past while, through its material tensions, exposing the fractures and techniques required to sustain it.

### 2.1.3 Global Imaginaries and the Classical

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The consolidation of European colonial domination was inseparable from the emergence of what came to be defined as modernity, a cultural and epistemic paradigm organised around rationality, order, and universality. This convergence was not incidental. The colonial matrix of power shaped the conditions under which modern thought could claim coherence and authority.<sup>157</sup> Rationality, as formalised in European philosophy, science, and aesthetics, developed within the same genealogical field as colonial expansion, drawing upon the infrastructures of empire that enabled new forms of classification, measurement, and governance. Within this epistemic reorganisation, Europe also reconstructed its own genealogy. Antiquity was not simply inherited but selectively assembled as a privileged point of origin, repositioning classical Greece and Rome at the centre of a narrative that stretched from the ancient world to modern Europe. Yet this continuity with antiquity does not operate in a single register. It can be understood as a form of cultural memory, a persistence of material practices, spatial imaginaries, and sensory recognitions that traverse time without being fully reducible to discourse. Marble does not arrive in modernity as a blank object or surface; it carries with it residues of prior uses, techniques, and encounters that cannot be entirely re-scripted. This same continuity is actively produced as an institutional technique. Through architectural discourse and practice, state formation, and colonial epistemologies, antiquity is stabilised, curated, and instrumentalised as an origin that authorises the present. What appears as inheritance is, in this sense, also a construction: a selective alignment of past and present that secures authority by projecting lineage. This tension does not resolve itself into a stable distinction. Rather than choosing between genuine memory and constructed continuity, it becomes necessary to follow how they fold into one another, how material persistence enables ideological capture, and how institutional frameworks attempt to fix what, at the level of matter, remains unstable. In doing so, other intellectual and cultural trajectories were displaced or rendered peripheral. At the same time, Europe recentered itself within a carefully constructed geography of history that extended even into its medieval past. Similar operations unfolded across political theory, where concepts of sovereignty, order, and governance were stabilised through analogous appeals to classical precedent.

Within this broader field, the modern use of Pentelic marble must be understood as part of the epistemic and aesthetic project. Its white surface, reactivated in the architecture of ministries, embassies, and institutions, materialised the visual

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<sup>157</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, "The Colonial Matrix of Power," in *Talking About Global Inequality: Personal Experiences and Historical Perspectives* (Springer, 2023), 2.

language through which modernity presented itself: clarity, neutrality, purity. Yet this surface did more than reference antiquity; it helped construct an idea of antiquity aligned with modern European self-understanding. Marble stabilised a vision of order that resonated with the rationalised spatial logic of capitalist urbanisation and the epistemic authority of Eurocentric knowledge systems. This aesthetic order, clean, linear, and white, rendered the structures of coloniality materially present while appearing neutral. Today, however, the crisis of this cultural formation reveals its constructed nature. The polished surface strains under scrutiny. Its universal claims begin to falter. Through this tension, the hidden labour of its formation, historical, material, and colonial, starts to reemerge. What once appeared seamless now shows a fracture. And it is in these fractures that the argument begins to shift: from surface to matter, from form to particle.

The crisis of the modern European paradigm of knowledge is also a crisis of its foundational assumptions, most notably the notion of knowledge as a product of a subject–object relation. In this configuration, the knowing subject is imagined as an autonomous, self-reflective individual, detached from the social and material fields in which knowledge emerges.<sup>158</sup> Meanwhile, the object is posited as something external, self-identical, defined by fixed properties that mark it out as distinct. This binary structure, so central to the rationalist episteme, underpins not only Western science and philosophy but also the aesthetics and spatial practices of modernity. Pentelic marble, as a surface within modern architecture, participates in this logic. Yet even here, what appears as fully legible is sustained by a material persistence that exceeds its epistemic framing, traces of extraction, labour, and geological formation that cannot be fully stabilised within the subject-object relation. Its smoothness, its luminous surface whiteness, and its abstraction into cladding and facade all echo the presumed clarity and separateness of objectivity. The marble becomes the object par excellence: stable, legible, externally knowable. It reflects the Cartesian fantasy, *cogito ergo sum*, whereby thought and matter are split, the subject elevated, the object fixed and mute.

Yet this paradigm increasingly no longer holds. Contemporary scientific and philosophical thought suggests that what we once took as properties are in fact relational expressions, temporary stabilities within fields of interaction. The object is not outside the subject, nor identical to itself. Rather, it is constituted within ongoing processes of relation. Identity is not essence, but position, always in motion, always contingent. In this light, the modern marble surface takes on a different

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<sup>158</sup> Mignolo, “The Colonial Matrix of Power,” 6.

appearance. Its apparent neutrality is a fabrication, not only aesthetic but epistemic. It materialises a worldview structured by separation: reason from nature, subject from object, Europe from the rest. Even the idea of the individual subject, once a marker of emancipation from fixed social roles, now seems inadequate to describe the distributed, intersubjective conditions of knowing and being. Like knowledge, the individual is not a self-contained unit but a node in a relational field. The analogy extends to material practice. Just as knowledge was long conceived as property, something possessed by one subject over an object, so too marble surfaces were used to stabilise authority, ownership, and legitimacy within the built environment. Yet if knowledge is better understood as a relation among subjects rather than a possession, the same question must be posed of materials: what relations do they organise, and through what genealogies? These histories do not survive as intact memories waiting to be recovered. They persist unevenly, as material traces and discontinuous residues that both enable and resist their organisation within architectural and epistemic frameworks. Pentelic marble, when approached only as a sealed surface, appears as a finished expression of modern authority. Smooth, complete, and self-evident. But when treated as an interface, it opens onto the archive of practices that produced it and the epistemic frameworks that rendered these operations visible. In this sense, marble does not simply mirror the logic of modernity; it registers and materialises the extractive relations through which that logic was expressed, functioning as an interface between material formation and epistemic power. As the surface weathers and fractures, these relations begin to emerge. What once appeared as a unified plane becomes a field of traces, geological, genealogical, and social.

The modern white surface, once a screen of separation, begins to disintegrate. Its fragments do not vanish; they disperse into material particles, exposing the multiplicity from which the surface was assembled. In this shift, another ontology of matter becomes visible, one grounded not in purity and separation but in entanglement and transformation. The Cartesian paradigm of knowledge, grounded in the dualism of subject and object, was not simply the outcome of internal European conflicts or cultural shifts. It was shaped through the structural conditions of colonial expansion. The emergence of the modern European subject, understood as autonomous, rational, and self-reflective, was made possible by the simultaneous exclusion of the non-European other.<sup>159</sup> The continuity with antiquity mobilised within this formation thus operates less as remembrance than as a technique of alignment, one that selectively organises the past while displacing other material

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<sup>159</sup> Mignolo, "The Colonial Matrix of Power," 4.

and epistemic lineages that continue to persist beyond its frame. This exclusion was not only geopolitical or material but epistemological. The other could not exist as a subject, only as an object of study, classification, governance, or extraction. The modern surface of Pentelic marble, rational, clean, and unmarked, was drawn into this logic. In the architecture of ministries, embassies, museums, and universities, it materialised a world in which only one form of subjectivity was recognised: European, male, white, rational. The marble facade did not merely reflect light. It reflected the assumptions of its own epistemic structure, one in which difference was rendered as inequality and in which other knowledges were systematically denied subjecthood. This surface, then, is not only aesthetic. It is deeply political. It manifests an architecture of knowledge in which communication between cultures was precluded from the outset. The relationship between Europe and the rest was configured as one of externality, a subject observing an object, a civilised gaze studying the primitive. There was no reciprocal exchange, no shared production of knowledge, no mutual becoming. The marble surface's structure reinforced this condition. Smooth, hard, and reflective, it offered no entry and no permeability.

Even as Europe defined itself in relation to the world it colonised, as the West, as modern, as rational, this identity was produced through a complex ordering of difference; the other was not only excluded but positioned as a constitutive counterpart, necessary for the consolidation of European self-definition yet systemically subordinated within it. Cultural difference was admitted only as hierarchy: a system of essentialised inequalities, naturalised through race, language, and presumed capacity for reason. This logic extended from colonised populations to Europe's own constructed genealogies, where earlier histories and "barbaric" ancestries were selectively recast to stabilise the narrative of continuous civilisational ascent. Within this framework, only Europe could appear as the locus of fully realised subjectivity. Others were rendered mute, available primarily as objects of knowledge, administration, or domination. This condition was not incidental to the rise of modern rationality. It was one of its enabling operations. Marble, in its modern architectural function, silently participates in this epistemic formation. It is not a passive backdrop but a material participant in the subject-object divide.<sup>160</sup> Disciplines such as anthropology and ethnology have long reproduced this same structure: the West as knowing subject, the rest as objects of study rather than interlocutors. The architecture of modernity, both in its disciplinary institutions and in its material forms, reinforced this asymmetry. The polished white surface thus becomes an epistemological screen, sustaining the image of a world already

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<sup>160</sup> Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 172.

organised by coloniality while obscuring the conditions of its production. It operates simultaneously as representation and infrastructure within a knowledge system that suppresses relationality, plurality, and co-agency. Yet as the cracks in this paradigm widen, the marble surface begins to lose its hold. Beneath the reflective plane lies quarried, fractured, weathered material, a different ontology altogether. It is within this shift, from fixed object to relational matter, from surface to particle, that another encounter becomes possible.

Despite its absence from the Cartesian paradigm, the concept of totality, particularly in relation to social reality, has long occupied the European intellectual tradition. From early formulations in Iberian legal and theological thought to later revolutionary critiques in France, the idea of society as an interconnected whole emerged as both a response to atomistic individualism and a tool for reimagining power.<sup>161</sup> But this totality was rarely open or plural. Instead, it was often imagined through organicist metaphors, society as a body coordinated through a single logic and ruled from the head. Modernist architecture, including its deployments of Pentelic marble, inherited and reinforced this vision. The marble-clad surfaces of ministries, parliaments, and academic institutions projected a carefully unified image, not of fragmentation or multiplicity but of coherence, stability, and order. Even when claiming to break with classical hierarchies, these surfaces often reiterated them in new form. Clean geometries replaced ornament, yet the underlying logic of centralisation and hierarchy remained. The structure was preserved, only simplified. The whole was never truly questioned, only restyled. This image of totality, framed as harmonious and necessary, was instrumental in legitimising both social hierarchy and aesthetic coherence.

Just as the organic body presumes a controlling centre, a brain that commands and limbs that obey, so too did these architectural forms suggest a society governed by rational coordination, with each part functioning in accordance with the whole. In this logic, there could be no surplus, no unruly excess, no peripheral agency. The difference was either absorbed or subordinated. Pentelic marble, with its historic ties to classical balance and its modern reappearance as a sleek surface, became a material through which this closed totality was naturalised, even as the stone itself retained discontinuities that exceeded the image of unity imposed upon it. Even when used in modernist or nationalist projects that sought transformation, the marble surface often masked a continuity of systemic thinking. The arms and the head, the facade and the state, the worker and the planner, all were folded into a single

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<sup>161</sup> Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," 173.

structure of necessity. But the material resists. Beneath the image of wholeness, the marble itself is not continuous. It fractures. It is veined. It strains under weather, time, and use (Fig. 2.5). As the social and epistemic formations built upon this closed vision of totality begin to unravel, so too does the surface. The transition from surface to particle is not only material but conceptual, a movement from system to field, from organic unity to dispersed agency. The next part turns to this fragmentation. It will not search for another whole, but will instead follow the dispersal: particles, residues, shifting forces. A different way of thinking matters, and a different way of thinking with marble becomes possible.

The organicist vision of social totality, though seemingly opposed to atomistic individualism, never fully escaped the foundational paradigm of modern rationality. Like the subject–object model it supplemented, it operated through a logic of closure, hierarchy, and externality. Yet throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this model enabled critiques of power by rendering visible the mechanisms through which social life was organised. It exposed the role of the “brain,” the ruling element, in articulating and coordinating the body politic.<sup>162</sup> But the metaphor of the social body, unified and functionally ordered, carried within it a fundamental exclusion. It presupposed a homogenous historical totality that colonial reality continually disrupted, stabilising Europe itself as the central object of historical coherence. The colonised world, though rhetorically invoked within narratives of universal progress and civilisation, remained structurally outside the domain those narratives described. Enlightenment categories such as “humanity” and “society” were not simply unevenly extended to non-European peoples; they were conceptual devices through which inclusion and exclusion were defined. Rather than functioning as universal containers, these categories worked to delimit who could properly belong within the social body and who could only appear at its margins. At most, colonised populations were positioned as incomplete participants, figures of lack, deficiency, or deferred development, whose presence served to stabilise the hierarchy through which European modernity understood itself.

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<sup>162</sup> Quijano, “Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality,” 178.



FIG. 2.5 Pentelic marble parts at the Parthenon. Photograph by Kostas Tsiambaos, 2023.

The white marble surfaces of modern architecture participated in the reproduction of this hierarchical order. In Greece and Europe, and later in the Americas, Pentelic marble was reappropriated in the architectural language of state power, appearing as facade cladding, interior panelling, and monumental architectural form. In these uses, marble lent material expression to a vision of society governed from the head, acting as an interface between architectural form and ideological hierarchy. Embassies, ministries, and institutional buildings presented themselves as coherent and polished wholes, articulating a worldview in which history advanced along a singular rational axis: from tradition to modernity, from savage to civilised, from colony to development. Within this narrative, Europe cast itself as the historical vanguard and ontologically prior, the model toward which all other cultures were presumed to mature. This fantasy was articulated in philosophy and policy, as well as in the textures and tones of architectural materials. The white surface, luminous and seemingly timeless, made this historical logic appear self-evident. Its polish masked the fractures that sustained it.

And yet the illusion holds. Even now, the mirage of Europe as a future endures, seductive in its simplicity and resilient in its promise. Pentelic marble, repolished and reapplied, continues to surface in the imaginaries of progress, order, and civility as a recurring national object of aspirational modernity. Beneath that surface, however, another genealogy persists, not as continuous memory, but as dispersed material traces that never fully entered the narrative of continuity in the first place. The surface begins to strain under its own weight. In fine dust, dispersed stone particles, stress lines, and discolourations, the first signs of undoing appear. The movement away from the closed totality of modernity, toward the particulate, dynamic, and material complexity of marble itself, is therefore not just conceptual but grounded in the shifting particles that compose the stone. It is already happening. The next section enters this field; from smooth surface to volatile matter, from structural image to scattered particle.

The idea of totality, once central to Europe's image of society and history, now finds itself increasingly discredited within the very traditions that produced it. In postmodern European thought, totality is often cast as a relic of Enlightenment hubris, a false unity linked to domination, reductionism, and the failed promise of social rationalisation. Yet, to reject totality outright, as if all such imaginaries were inherently oppressive, risks conflating critique with erasure. It is not totality itself that must be abandoned, but the specific form it assumed within colonial/modern thought, a closed system, governed by one logic, centred in Europe and extended outward as destiny. Pentelic marble, when used in modernist architecture, came to carry this structure both literally and ideologically. Its white surface echoed the image of a singular rationality, a smooth unity imposed upon complexity. But this totalising gesture was never universal. It was colonial. Its surface coherence relied on the exclusion of other ways of knowing, relating, and constructing reality. It rendered itself as the only logic, silencing the pluriversal.

Outside the West, other visions of totality have always existed, ones that do not demand homogeneity, hierarchy, or reduction, offering an interface for relational forms of worldmaking. These totalities do not deny difference but require it. They begin from the recognition of heterogeneity, contradiction, and copresence. They make room for multiplicity without dissolving into relativism. They do not imagine one centre but many relational points, a constellation of ways to inhabit, think, and shape the world. This shift also unfolds materially. The surface begins to crack. Marble no longer sustains the reflective plane through which European rationality recognised itself; instead, it refracts and disperses that image, exposing the heterogeneity within the stone itself. In its veining, weathering and unpredictable fractures, another ontology becomes legible. One that does not seek purity or

containment but acknowledges entanglement and relational becoming. The movement from surface toward particle signals a departure from the dualisms that structured modern thought: subject and object, centre and periphery, civilisation and nature.

The critique of European rationality cannot simply negate its categories, nor dissolve reality into language alone. What becomes necessary is an act of unbinding, a political and epistemic departure from the colonial fiction of totality that organised modern knowledge. Coloniality operated through the assumption that the world could be fully ordered, mapped, and contained within a single epistemic horizon. Unbinding interrupts this claim, opening thought to plural ontologies and relational forms of knowing. Pentelic marble occupies a revealing position within this shift. As a material substance, it bears the geological and extractive genealogies of its formation. Yet within architectural discourse, it has also functioned as a diagrammatic device, a kind of abstract machine through which modernity codified authority, order, and universality. The unbinding of this regime, therefore, unfolds both materially and conceptually.

Recent developments in new materialist and posthuman thought have further unsettled the passive status traditionally assigned to matter, as we will further see in Chapter 3.3, *Mediterranean Materialism*. Thinkers such as Karen Barad and Jane Bennett have argued that matter actively participates in the production of worlds, entangled with discursive and social processes rather than merely shaped by them. Under this lens, Pentelic marble no longer appears as a static architectural surface but as a dynamic field of material relations, subject to weathering, dispersion, and transformation across time. Seen in this way, marble becomes a site where multiple genealogies and ontologies are entangled. The polished surface begins to yield to its own material complexity. Dust, fracture lines, and mineral veins reveal processes that exceed the architectural order imposed upon them. What once appeared as a stable surface becomes a threshold, a passage from the closed totality of modern form toward the unstable multiplicity of matter itself. This is the moment when the surface starts to give way. The threshold at which marble ceases to function solely as the image of order and begins to disclose the particulate dynamics that underlie it. The strains visible at the level of the modern surface open onto the particulate dispersals explored in the next part.

## 2.2 Urban Modernities

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### 2.2.1 Expansion and Displacement

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The conclusion of the Greco-Turkish War in 1922 marked a pivotal moment in Greece's history, profoundly reshaping Athens' demographic, spatial, and architectural landscape. Central to these transformations was the enduring presence and evolving significance of Pentelic marble, a material that participates in shaping the city's identity and genealogical narratives through shifting material and institutional conditions. This era was defined by two major developments: the collapse of the *Megali Idea*, which brought Greek expansionist ambitions to an abrupt halt, and the severing of longstanding ties with the East. In 1922, the Greek lyric poet and playwright Angelos Sikelianos published the "Open letter to His Majesty," where he envisions the day when the nation will be reborn, "On this day, Greece had defeated itself, had surpassed its entire past, and before it and around it shone, without the cloud of passion, its clear and great historical destiny, which is encapsulated in a single word: "East.""<sup>163</sup> Later, the Greek architect and painter Dimitris Pikionis would confess the same belief. He, too, was an "Easterner."<sup>164</sup> The Treaty of Lausanne (1923) formalised a population exchange between Greece and Turkey, resulting in the displacement and resettlement of approximately 1,222,000 refugees in Greece. Among them, 643,000 sought refuge in urban centres, dramatically increasing Athens' population from 292,991 in 1920 to 452,919 by 1928.<sup>165</sup> This influx necessitated a rapid and extensive reconfiguration of the city, expanding its boundaries tenfold beyond the limits envisioned in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Kleanthis-Schaubert plan. Within this process, material infrastructures were not secondary but became implicated in the material organisation of urban expansion, stabilising Pentelic marble as a recurrent urban object within Athens' transformation. Pentelic marble became part of this urban transformation, as the rapid expansion unfolded along three primary trajectories:

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<sup>163</sup> Angelos Sikelianos, Πεζός Λόγος [*Prose*], vol. 1 (Athens: Ikaros, 2001), 83.

<sup>164</sup> Dimitris Pikionis, "Αυτοβιογραφικά Σημειώματα [Autobiographical Notes]," Ζυγός [Scale] 27-28 (1958): 7.

<sup>165</sup> Pavlos Drandakis, "Μεγάλη Ελληνική Εγκυκλοπαίδεια [Great Greek Encyclopaedia]," (Athens: Foinix, 1934), 410.

the formal legalisation and annexation of peripheral lands, the spontaneous formation of informal settlements within the existing urban fabric, and the systematic establishment of planned refugee communities through institutional efforts such as the Greek Refugee Relief Fund (1922–1925) and the Greek Refugee Settlement Commission (1923–1930).<sup>166</sup> In this context, Pentelic marble was not merely a remnant of Athens' storied past but an active material shaping the city's response to its unprecedented growth, weaving together the threads of memory, identity, and genealogical transformation. This redistribution of marble into the expanding urban fabric recasts, at a domestic scale, the stabilisations first encountered at the level of the classical object.

Amidst Athens' profound transformations during this era, Pentelic marble retained its significance, shaping new urban identities and architectures. The foothills of Mount Pentelicus, the marble's ancient source, became a focal point of suburban development and modern aspirations. Notably, the garden suburb of Ekali, developed between 1922 and 1923 near the mountain's base, exemplified the intersection of urban planning, material culture, and modern ideals. Designed by Greek engineer and politician Spilios Agapitos, Ekali drew inspiration from garden-city principles presented at an international housing conference in England (1920).<sup>167</sup> While not a pure garden city, its layout of detached single-family homes along winding roads was associated with modern suburban ideals emerging across Europe. However, these aesthetic and ideological visions often remained abstract and were not always aligned with the practical and social conditions of everyday inhabitation. What meaning could be derived from such “renaissance” designs, perceivable primarily from an architect's plans or aerial views? For many residents, these layouts held little practical or aesthetic relevance, lacking an ideological coherence that resonated with their daily lives. Yet Ekali's location near the transitioning marble-quarrying industry underscored a material continuity: the quarrying of Pentelic marble, foundational to Athens' classical genealogy, persisted as a resource even as the city expanded with modernist ambitions. By 1925, the English company Pentelikon Marble Quarries Ltd, established in 1899 at Mount Pentelicus, ceased operations. The marble's extraction was transferred to the Dionysos Quarry, which has operated since 1903 and benefited from new infrastructure such as the Dionysos–Kifisia–Athens–Piraeus

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<sup>166</sup> Philippides, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830–1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας* [Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830–1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture] 159

<sup>167</sup> Spilios Agapitos, *Πολιτεία: Μια Νέα Κηπούπολις στους Πρόποδες της Πεντέλης* [Politeia: A New Garden City at the Foot of Penteli] (Athens: Deputies District at Kokkinara).

railway line (1922–1931). This infrastructure enabled wider circulation of Pentelic marble, extending its reach to ports such as Piraeus and Lavrio. These networks not only facilitated the movement of marble but also operated as an infrastructural interface between extraction sites and the expanding metropolis. Ekali's imported suburban aesthetic contrasted with its grounding in the classical terrain of Pentelic marble. Ekali's proximity to the marble's source highlights how the stone continues to act as an interface mediating modern Greek identity, linking the classical terrain of extraction to emerging suburban forms. During this moment of profound change, Pentelic marble's layered meanings became strikingly evident: its classical whiteness and material presence stood in contrast to, yet also enabled, the realisation of modern urban visions. This interplay between the marble's ancient heritage and its modern applications invites contemplation of how Athens' architectural and material landscape evolved, tethered to both its genealogical foundations and its forward-looking ambitions.

Amidst Athens' interwar transformations, urban planning and architectural practices were part of an intricate negotiation between modern aspirations, administrative demands, and enduring cultural identities. Pentelic marble, with its historical resonance and material presence, participated in shaping these developments. In urban planning, efforts to address the city's growing administrative, infrastructural, and social needs were led by figures such as Petros Kalligas, chair of the urban planning committee from 1921. Ambitious proposals, such as those for civic centres and railway hubs, emerged, including a 1924 draft plan for the Patission area. However, opposition from property owners to expropriations led to the cancellation of some plans. These conflicts echoed earlier tensions from the Kleanthis-Schaubert era, as we saw earlier in Chapter 1.2, *Neoclassical Alignments*, highlighting the persistent friction between modernisation visions and lived realities. The evolution of urban planning legislation culminated in the 1929 General Building Regulation, which aimed to consolidate prior efforts. Yet, the piecemeal nature of implementation, marked by the fragmented division of public spaces and the provisional nature of articles,<sup>168</sup> underscored the complexities of managing Athens' rapid urbanisation. Architecturally, the interwar decades saw the persistence of eclecticism, a stylistic fusion of neoclassical, Byzantine, Art Nouveau, and vernacular elements. Pentelic marble, in its polished white form, featured prominently in facades and decorative schemes, operating as a material through which references to classical heritage were reworked within contemporary stylistic experiments. Architects and critics grappled with this layered identity. In 1925, the engineer Themistocles Charitakis captured the

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<sup>168</sup> Biris, *Αι Αθήναι: Από του 19ου εις τον 20ον Αιώνα* [Athens: From the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century], 297–98.

era's challenges, advocating for a modern Greek style that was “simple, unadorned and still modest,” rejecting the Turkish-Byzantine tradition and shaping the cities of newly annexed territories.<sup>169</sup> Conversely, Dimitris Pikionis criticised much of modern urbanism as “arbitrary constructions” detached from Greece's sacred cultural landscape.<sup>170</sup> The restoration of tradition as a reference point for Hellenism was partly influenced by European movements of the time and, simultaneously, by a rejection of foreign cultural models. This contradiction characterises the entire interwar period and lies behind the intellectual disputes that broke out during that time. Pentelic marble stood at the heart of these debates. As Yannis Tsarouchis lamented, the decline of neoclassical fashion in Europe left Greek architects adrift, prompting them to blend familiar forms with motifs from various periods of Greek history.<sup>171</sup> The eclectic decorative repertoire included Byzantine marble revetments, mosaics, Mycenaean spirals, and vegetal motifs like acanthus leaves, expressing a fervent search for Greek identity rooted in both local and foreign influences.<sup>172</sup> Andreas Symeon highlighted the irony of architectural innovations, such as the atrium, being reintroduced to Greece via Western interpretations of Eastern traditions, a testament to the layered interplay of tradition and modernity.<sup>173</sup> The potency of Pentelic marble endured into the authoritarian Metaxas regime (1936–1941), which sought to consolidate Hellenism into a unified national myth. Marble's whiteness and historical connotations were co-opted for state propaganda, linking ancient and Byzantine civilisations while reinforcing ideals of continuity and purity. Even as the regime selectively embraced modernist aesthetics, Pentelic marble remained a material anchor, embodying the tensions and negotiations of Athens' urban and architectural modernisation during this transformative era.

Despite the significant influx of refugees and the pressures of rapid urbanisation, Greece in the 1930s remained predominantly agrarian, with industrial modernisation advancing slowly. However, large-scale public building initiatives, such as the

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<sup>169</sup> Themistocles Charitakis, “Το Συνέδριο περί του Σχεδίου των Αθηνών [The Conference on the Plan of Athens],” *Αρχιμήδης [Archimedes]* 9 (1925): 80.

<sup>170</sup> Dimitris Pikionis, “Η Λαϊκή Μας Τέχνη κι Εμείς [Our Folk Art and Us],” *Φιλική Εταιρεία [Society of Friends]* 4 (1925): 149.

<sup>171</sup> Yannis Tsarouchis, “Σκέψεις για τον Cézanne και την Ελληνική Ζωγραφική [Thoughts on Cézanne and Greek Painting],” *Ζυγός [Scale]* 11 (1956): 8–9.

<sup>172</sup> Philippides, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830–1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας [Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830–1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture]* 165.

<sup>173</sup> Andreas Symeon, «Σκέψεις Πάνω στη Θέση της Σύγχρονης Ελληνικής Αρχιτεκτονικής,» *Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα [Architectural Issues]* 2 (1968): 40.

construction of 6,000 new schoolrooms and the reconstruction of 2,000 more between 1930 and 1932, were pivotal in embedding modern architecture in the country.<sup>174</sup> Amid these developments, Pentelic marble retained a nuanced role: a classical material enduring alongside emerging construction technologies, often juxtaposed with modernist forms executed in reinforced concrete, producing architectural combinations in which different material logics coexisted within the same projects. These projects not only marked a turning point in Greek architecture but also highlighted the evolving relationship between tradition and modernity. Economic hardship persisted throughout the decade. The global economic crisis of 1929 led to declining agricultural production, reluctance to invest in industry, and Greece's partial bankruptcy in 1932, another consequence of the crisis.<sup>175</sup> These challenges compounded the erosion of political and social stability, influenced by the rise of authoritarian regimes abroad, such as Mussolini's Italy (1922) and Hitler's Germany (1933), as well as by successive domestic crises. By 1936, when Ioannis Metaxas assumed power and established the "New State," the stage had been set for his dictatorship. Metaxas sought to legitimise his regime through the ideology of a "third Greek civilisation," which blended ancient and Byzantine traditions into a unified narrative. Addressing the youth, Metaxas framed this vision as a lofty purpose, "Do you, young Greeks, not have the ambition to form our own civilisation from these two? Do you not like such a lofty ideal and such a great purpose?"<sup>176</sup> Pentelic marble entangled itself in this ideological framework. Its whiteness and classical connotations were manipulated by state propaganda to reinforce ideals of continuity, purity, and national identity. This period saw Greece drawing inspiration from European fascist cultural models,<sup>177</sup> particularly through state propaganda, which distorted earlier cultural slogans to fit its agenda. Yet the 1930s were not defined solely by authoritarian narratives. This was also a period of dynamic engagement with European modernism. Greek architects and artists,

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<sup>174</sup> Nikolaos Oikonomou, *Η Περίοδος από το Σεπτέμβριο του 1926 έως το Φεβρουάριο του 1935: Εσωτερικές Πολιτικές Εξελίξεις* [*The Period from September 1926 to February 1935: Domestic Political Developments*], vol. 15, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* [The History of the Greek Nation], (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1978), 316.

<sup>175</sup> Konstantinos Vergopoulos, *Η Ελληνική Οικονομία από το 1926 ως το 1935* [*The Greek Economy from 1926 to 1935*], vol. 15, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* [The History of the Greek Nation], (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1978), 328-30.

<sup>176</sup> Ioannis Metaxas, *Λόγος του Μεταξά στους Φοιτητές του Πανεπιστημίου Αθηνών στις 20.11.1937* [*Metaxas' Speech to the Students of the University of Athens on 20.11.1937*], vol. 15, *Ιστορία του Ελληνικού Έθνους* [The History of the Greek Nation], (Athens: Ekdotike Athenon, 1978), 386.

<sup>177</sup> Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros, *Η Θεωρία της Ελληνικής Λαογραφίας: Κριτική Ανάλυση* [*The Theory of Greek Folklore: Critical Analysis*] (Athens: Moraitis School Society for the Study of Modern Greek Culture and General Education, 2007), 180.

grappling with the complexities of national identity, often turned to the recurring theme of Hellenism while assimilating modernist influences. This endeavour often led them back to the question of Hellenism, a concept fraught with contradiction, as they assimilated modernist influences. The late arrival of successive waves of modernist movements disrupted established norms in the arts and architecture, further complicating this discourse. In architecture, the interplay between state ideology and intellectual exploration entailed a paradoxical alignment. While both sought to articulate visions of Hellenism, their motivations diverged. This period saw an increasing emphasis on harmonising architecture with Greece's natural and cultural environment. Greek poet Periklis Yannopoulos articulated this sentiment, "Why should we adopt foreign mentalities? Our endeavour must embody the form, the character, and the mentality of Greece, harmonising with the environment and the Greek sky, for this is the only way we can reconnect with Greek tradition."<sup>178</sup> This tension between modernity and tradition was exemplified by the architect Dimitris Pikionis, who recognised modern architecture as a rational art grounded in concrete, yet situated within a cultural landscape still shaped by the marble and traditions of classical Athens. If Hilton and the Embassy stabilise marble within a controlled image of Greekness, Pikionis destabilises it from within, "The line exists. It is the new architecture of simplicity. It is the rational construction of reinforced concrete. Greece is, in essence, the country of this New Art."<sup>179</sup> Initially marginal in Greek architectural practice, modernism began to gain traction among avant-garde architects in the early 1930s. What began as an experimental architectural language gradually migrated beyond elite design circles. Over time, it permeated middle-class residential development,<sup>180</sup> reshaping the urban fabric of Athens as apartment buildings, commercial structures, and new neighbourhoods adopted its forms. As I will further analyse in the next section, this transformation accelerated after World War II with the rapid expansion of the *polykatoikia*, the multistorey apartment building that became the dominant typology of Athenian urbanisation. *Polykatoikia* allowed marble surfaces to enter the everyday architecture of the city. Within this transformation, Pentelic marble moved through the city's expanding circuits, from dispersed stone particles to architectural components, underpinning Athens' physical growth. Yet its significance was not confined to infrastructure alone. As marble appeared in apartment entrances, staircases, facades, and floor finishes, it began to permeate the built environment of middle-class life. No longer reserved

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<sup>178</sup> Anastasios Metaxas, Νέα Αλεξάνδρεια [New Alexandria] (1931).

<sup>179</sup> Metaxas, 51.

<sup>180</sup> Panagiotis Michelis, Η Αναγέννηση της Αρχιτεκτονικής στον 20ο Αιώνα [The Renaissance of Architecture in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century] (Athens: Estia, 1950), 214.

solely for monumental institutions, it became entangled with the textures of everyday urban experience. In this movement across social strata, Pentelic marble participated in the negotiation of modern Greek identity, contributing to a genealogy of urban belonging. It carried the weight of classical heritage while serving the practical demands of a rapidly expanding city. Its whiteness thus operated on multiple registers: as a reminder of antiquity, as a marker of cultural prestige, but also as a material embedded within the socioeconomic transformations of modern Athens. Rather than static, marble functioned within a layered field of meanings shaped by the circulation of capital, labour, and architectural practice. Through this process, it became an active participant in the making of Athens's modern urban landscape, expressing both the aspirations and the contradictions of a city negotiating its place within the shifting horizons of modernity.

This interplay, however, is not unique to Pentelic marble, but becomes clearer when situated within the material logics of modernism more generally. The interwar transformations of Athens suggest that Pentelic marble did not simply persist as a residual classical material within modernisation processes, but participated in a broader reconfiguration in which modernism itself became locally inflected. In this sense, the movement of marble into modern architectural and urban frameworks can be read alongside the capacity of modernist materials and techniques, reinforced concrete, steel, and large-scale glazing, to operate within institutional, economic, and technical assemblages, stabilising marble as a modern architectural object circulating through these regimes. Far from functioning as neutral carriers of universal form, these materials are part of planning regimes, construction practices, regulatory codes, and state-led programmes that mediate the production and circulation of architectural modernity. Within such conditions, modernism does not arrive as a homogeneous or fully deterritorialised system, but is continuously reworked through an interface of local material cultures, labour formations, and political imaginaries. Pentelic marble, with its historically sedimented associations and its continued extraction and circulation, becomes one of the more legible instances through which these dynamics can be traced in the Greek context. Its integration into modern architectural practices does not merely preserve a connection to antiquity; it also contributes to the shaping of a specifically inflected modernism, in which notions of continuity, heritage, and national identity are negotiated through material choices and building techniques. Rather than occupying a singular or exceptional position, marble can be understood within a wider field of materials that, each in its own way, participate in the production and modulation of modern architectural identities, each contributing to a genealogy of modernism as locally reworked rather than uniformly imposed. In this sense, Pentelic marble does not simply persist within modernism but folds it back onto itself, reintroducing locality, memory, and resistance into a discourse that often claims universality.

## 2.2.2 New Housing Regimes

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In Greece, modern architecture developed in close dialogue with the international avant-garde while retaining a distinct character. While Western modernists sought to escape the constraints of entrenched styles and historical revivals, Greek modernism focused on rejecting a specific past tied to particular historical and stylistic associations. This rejection extended to challenging the revivalist practices associated with that past. Modernism in Greece, therefore, became a vehicle for Europeanisation,<sup>181</sup> deliberately aligning with broader cultural and architectural trends abroad. The media of the time often framed Greece's engagement with modern architecture as a mark of progress and sophistication. Reporting on the 4<sup>th</sup> *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne* (CIAM), a Greek newspaper celebrated the nation's advancements, "The admiration of foreigners for our new educational buildings is a sign of advanced civilisation. The capital ... displayed a sign of advanced civilisation."<sup>182</sup> However, Greek modernism was far from a straightforward adoption of international models. Instead, it frequently intersected with traditional forms, creating a distinctive synthesis. Engineer Periklis Paraskevopoulos highlighted these connections, "In our land, within our vernacular architecture, we find noteworthy analogies with the New Art ... The folk art of our islands preceded it ... In the new architecture of the West, we recognise the simplicity and austerity inherent in our island architecture."<sup>183</sup> This synthesis underscored a broader interface within Greek modernism: the merging of the simplicity and rationality championed by modernist ideals with the unembellished forms of Greek vernacular architecture. The stark white surfaces and geometric austerity, characteristic of modernism, resonated with the architecture of Greece's islands. This primitivism, imbued with connotations of purity and virtue,<sup>184</sup> became central to the aesthetic of modern Greek architecture. Le Corbusier himself remarked, "Whitewash [limewash] is found wherever people have preserved the cohesive and balanced institutions of a harmonious culture."<sup>185</sup> This interaction was bidirectional. International modernism drew inspiration from Greek vernacular traditions, particularly the island forms, while Greece adapted modernism to

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<sup>181</sup> Philippides, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830-1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας* [Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830-1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture] 187.

<sup>182</sup> Εμπρός [Ahead] (Athens) 1933.

<sup>183</sup> Periklis Paraskevopoulos, *Νέα Αλεξάνδρεια* [New Alexandria] (1931): 5.

<sup>184</sup> David Watkin, *Morality and Architecture Revisited* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 38.

<sup>185</sup> Le Corbusier, *L'Art Decoratif D'Aujourd'Hui* (Paris: G. Crès, 1925), 192.

embrace its national identity. The geometric simplicity of island architecture, with its adaptability to modern life, began to eclipse the ornate styles of Byzantine and Macedonian influences. Yet, as Le Corbusier “borrowed” forms such as the vaulted structures of Santorini or the geometric plasticity of Skyros,<sup>186</sup> his purpose was not to define a Greek national style but to advocate a rational approach to architecture that addressed shared Mediterranean climatic and economic conditions. Thus, it is debatable whether this cosmopolitan modernism genuinely engaged with local contexts or merely appropriated them to fit a universalist framework. While “modern” classicism could achieve monumentality, the picturesque qualities sought in neoclassicism were more effectively expressed through island vernacular forms. In Greece, however, these modernist principles were reframed to reinforce national narratives, creating a paradox. The rationalist underpinnings of cosmopolitan modernism facilitated a global architectural standardisation but simultaneously raised questions about its genuine engagement with local contexts. This tension between local adaptation and universalist frameworks expressed the complexities of modernism’s role in Greece. As Yannis Tsarouchis aptly observed, “The so-called modern movement in architecture represents a curious amalgamation of simplification of everything and a materialistic form of classicism, if one is allowed to say so.”<sup>187</sup> Amid these dialogues, Pentelic marble contributed to the formation of whiteness and to genealogical connotations that bridged modernist aesthetics and national tradition. Unlike reinforced concrete, whose associations are largely produced through its role in systems of construction, labour organisation, and state planning, Pentelic marble carries a temporality that precedes modernism. Its incorporation into modern architecture does not simply follow functional or economic logics but reactivates a long historical trajectory of cultural and political significance. In this sense, marble does not only participate in modernism’s material palette; it complicates it by introducing a surface thickness of historical reference that resists full absorption into modernism’s universalising claims. In this respect, while materials tend to circulate through relatively standardised practices during modernism, Pentelic marble reintroduces a degree of friction as a resistant material object within these regimes. Its presence anchors architecture to specific genealogical and geopolitical narratives, unsettling the idea that modernism

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<sup>186</sup> Savvas Kontaratos, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική και Παράδοση: Από το Αίτημα της Ελληνικότητας στη Σύγχρονη Προβληματική* [Modern Greek Architecture and Tradition: From the Demand for Greekness to the Contemporary Issue], *Ανθολογία Κειμένων Ελληνικής Αρχιτεκτονικής* [Anthology of Greek Architecture Texts], (Athens: Melissa, 2006, 1982).

<sup>187</sup> Yannis Tsarouchis, “Η Σημασία της Νεοκλασικής Αρχιτεκτονικής και η Στάση των Συγχρόνων Αρχιτεκτόνων Απέναντί της [The Significance of Neoclassical Architecture and the Attitude of Contemporary Architects Towards It],” *Αρχιτεκτονικές Σπουδές* [Architectural Studies] 1 (1965): 51.

unfolds as a neutral or universally applicable language. If modernism is often narrated through its materials, reinforced concrete, glass, and steel as carriers of a new universal vocabulary, then the persistence of Pentelic marble introduces a different trajectory. Within architectural discourse, these materials are often framed as operating within a transnational apparatus of techniques, standards, and economies that flatten local specificity. Yet, they rarely remain neutral. Reinforced concrete, for instance, has been mobilised in different contexts to support distinct national projects, from infrastructural modernisation to monumental state-building. Within this broader field, Pentelic marble does not stand outside modernism. Still, it intervenes within it, reintroducing a historically charged materiality that inflects modern forms with a specifically Greek articulation of continuity and authority, one that participates in a genealogy of localised modernisms. The material's enduring presence, alongside the geometric forms of the islands, participated in the reconfiguration of a new Greek identity, rooted in its classical past but shaped by modernist aspirations. This interplay of history, materiality, and ideology highlights how Greece navigated the currents of international modernism while asserting its place within a rapidly changing architectural landscape.

The year 1933 marked a turning point in Greek architecture with the partial hosting of the Fourth CIAM Congress in Athens. This event celebrated Greece's modern architectural achievements, showcasing the country's alignment with international trends. Yet, it also exposed underlying tensions within the modernist movement. Dimitris Pikionis, a prominent critic of unexamined modernist ideals, voiced concerns about the potential risks of rationalist architecture. He warned that its emphasis on technological and engineering principles risked excluding essential human virtues and emotional engagement.<sup>188</sup> Pikionis urged a more deliberate and thoughtful adoption of Western architectural solutions, cautioning against the rigidity of imported practices. He critiqued broader anxieties about modernism's detachment from architecture's emotional and spiritual dimensions. This tension between technological rationalism and human-centred design underscored the challenges of integrating modernist ideals into a Greek context. Architect Kimon Laskaris echoed these apprehensions, particularly in the context of Athens' Europeanisation.<sup>189</sup> He criticised efforts to remake the city as a "Little Paris," dismissing them as a refusal to engage authentically with Greece's traditions and its unique landscape, colours, and light. Laskaris lamented the loss of local identity, condemning urban planning

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<sup>188</sup> Pikionis, "Αυτοβιογραφικά Σημειώματα [Autobiographical Notes]," 756.

<sup>189</sup> Kimon Laskaris, "Η Κάλυψις του Ιλισσού ως "Κυκλοφοριακή Αρτηρία" και ως Ειδυλλιακή Λεωφόρος της Πόλεως των Αθηνών [The Covering of the Ilissos River as a "Traffic Artery" and as an Idyllic Boulevard of the City of Athens]," Τεχνικά Χρονικά [Technical Chronicles] 171 (1939): 76.

choices like the prevalence of palm trees and gardens, which he saw as a “pervasive Europeanist spirit.” He also decried the adoption of imported architectural styles, such as the *style anglais*, as a betrayal of Greece’s cultural heritage. For Laskaris, authenticity lay in the irregularities and curves of Greece’s traditional architecture, which harmonised with the natural terrain, in stark contrast to the rigid, rectilinear boulevards imported from abroad. Similarly, Konstantinos Biris lamented the destruction of Vrysaki, a neighbourhood in Plaka, to accommodate excavations of the Ancient Agora. He saw this erasure as a misguided pursuit of antiquity that obliterated an authentic segment of “Old Athens.” Vrysaki had embodied a blend of neoclassical, Ottoman, and Byzantine architectural elements, all of which were swept away in the name of modern rediscoveries of the classical past.<sup>190</sup>

Amid these debates, the widespread embrace of modernism in Greece after 1930 introduced profound changes to Athens’ urban fabric. The 1929 law on horizontal ownership paved the way for the rapid proliferation of the *polykatoikia*, the modern Greek apartment building. These structures became a defining feature of the city’s urban expansion, combining functionality with aspirations for luxury. Marble, once associated with temples, palaces, and monumental public buildings, has increasingly appeared within the architecture of everyday life. A playful conversation captures the spirit of this transition:

– *So, by the way, I want to build a polykatoikia, like the one I’m renting.*  
 – *The exact same one?*  
 – *No, not the same! We’ll change something in the laundries and kitchens. And we’ll use marble, and more marble, lots of marble! Like it is in the Acropolis, you know!*  
*Oh, I don’t mean to cut corners on luxury.*<sup>191</sup>

Such gestures reinscribe, in muted form, the earlier genealogies of material authority attributed to Pentelic marble. What is at stake here is not merely aesthetic preference but the persistence of a material logic that folds national memory into the fabric of modern living. While the *polykatoikia* emerges from the technical and economic conditions of modern urbanisation, the incorporation of marble inflects this typology with a distinct cultural charge. What is visible in this anecdote is not only the persistence of classical reference but also the social redistribution of the material itself. As marble entered apartment entrances, staircases, and facades, it migrated

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<sup>190</sup> Kostas Biris, “Αρχαιολόγοι και Αρχαιολογία [Archaeologists and Archaeology],” *Nea Estia* 326 (1940): 887–90.

<sup>191</sup> Dimitris Fotiadis, “Πολεοδομικά [Urban Planning],” *Νεοελληνικά Γράμματα [Modern Greek Letters]* 16 (1937): 1.

from the monumental architecture of the state into the domestic environments of the urban middle class, carrying with it the dispersed stone particles of its extractive origins. In this sense, Pentelic marble bridged classical heritage and modern urban life while simultaneously undergoing a subtle transformation in status. No longer confined to temples or institutions of authority, it became embedded within the expanding fabric of the city. Within the *polykatoikia*, marble thus operated on multiple registers: as an echo of antiquity, as a marker of urban prestige, and as a material circulating through the socioeconomic transformations of modern Athens. Its presence expresses not only the interplay of tradition and innovation but also the changing social life of the material itself within the evolving architecture of the city.

Between 1928 and 1937, the share of multi-storey buildings in new constructions rose from 3% to 14.2%, with their total built volume increasing from 13% to 31%.<sup>192</sup> The *polykatoikia* typology emerged as a significant architectural form, partially replacing traditional two-storey houses while introducing a new housing market. Rather than entirely displacing older typologies, the *polykatoikia* coexisted alongside them. Early designs emphasised technological innovation, the elevated social status of their initial occupants, and efficient construction methods. Architects competed for government contracts to provide housing for urban refugees, public sector employees, and other populations, seeking to address what was described as Athens' "truly miserable and tattered appearance, which undesirably unfolded around the Acropolis and the Parthenon" due to refugee settlements.<sup>193</sup> The rise of the *polykatoikia* also exposed deeper social stratifications. These buildings primarily catered to the desires of higher social groups, contrasting starkly with the marginalised status of Asia Minor refugees. While state-led housing initiatives sought to address refugee needs, they accounted for only a small share of Athens' broader housing developments. This disparity raises important questions: Were refugees systematically excluded from proximity to the marble monuments of the Acropolis? Did they find no place within the emerging modern *polykatoikia*? Viewed critically, the *polykatoikia*, like the marble monuments of Athens, has historically been implicated in national genealogies of belonging and exclusion. Alternatively, one might argue that archaeological monuments temporarily gained new meanings during the refugee crisis, addressing immediate needs before reverting to their role as cultural heritage (Fig. 2.6). Ultimately, refugees were systematically displaced from the historic centre of Athens, and their presence near these national icons diminished.

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<sup>192</sup> Anargyros Dimitrakopoulos, "Η Κρίσις της Οικοδομής εν Αθήναις [The Crisis of Construction in Athens]," Τεχνικά Χρονικά [Technical Chronicles] 141 (1933): 128.

<sup>193</sup> Kyprianos Biris, "Η Αστική Πολυκατοικία [The Urban Polykatoikia]," Τεχνικά Χρονικά [Technical Chronicles] 11 (1932): 568.



FIG. 2.6 Refugee settlement near the Temple of Hephaestus, Athens. Photograph, 1922. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Architect Kyprianos Biris, influenced by the functionalist principles of Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius, advocated the *polykatoikia* as a necessary solution to Athens' challenges of densification. He critiqued the population's "conservative and limited views on housing," positioning the *polykatoikia* as a forward-looking architectural response. Yet, this prompts further contemplation: Was the *polykatoikia* truly the only viable solution, and how effectively did it address Athens' housing needs in practice? Two primary trends emerged within this typology. On the one hand, state-planned apartment buildings were designed for low-income residents, providing basic housing to meet urgent needs. On the other hand, privately developed *polykatoikias* targeted higher-income groups, combining their desires for modernity and luxury with a connection to Athens' marble traditions. Pentelic marble, in particular, linked these new forms of housing to the city's classical heritage and reinforced narratives of privilege and cultural continuity. These dual trends in the *polykatoikia*'s evolution illuminate the socioeconomic inequalities that shaped Athens' urban transformation, operating as an interface between material aspiration and entrenched hierarchy. As a material, Pentelic marble persisted in the fabric of these buildings, bridging the past and the present, yet also expressed the exclusionary dynamics of modernisation, underscoring the complex interplay of tradition, modernity, and social stratification in the city's architectural and urban

development during this pivotal era. In this sense, Pentelic marble does not simply coexist with the canonical materials of modernism; its surface unsettles their claims to universality by exposing that even the most ostensibly neutral material regimes remain open to localisation, appropriation, and ideological inflexion, contributing to a genealogy of unequal urban modernisation.

On August 4, 1936, Ioannis Metaxas, a Greek military officer and politician, established an authoritarian regime that profoundly shaped Greece's political, cultural, and architectural trajectory. Following a period of political instability, Metaxas seized power through a coup d'état, suspending the democratic constitution and declaring martial law. Appointed Prime Minister by King George II, Metaxas justified his actions as necessary to counter communism and political disorder. The August 4<sup>th</sup> Regime, marked by nationalist, anti-communist, and pro-monarchist policies, sought to consolidate Greek identity through traditionalist values and authoritarian control. Architecture became a vital instrument for advancing the regime's ideological agenda. Public buildings frequently incorporated classical Greek forms and objects to evoke the grandeur of antiquity and reinforce nationalist ideals. This raises key questions about Greece's architectural genealogy: Did the country have a prewar tradition of fascist architecture? If so, when and under what conditions did it emerge, and with what characteristics? Was the August 4<sup>th</sup> regime a turning point in Greek architectural evolution? Architect Dimitris Philippides suggests that the transition from modern classicism to fascist architecture in Greece was seamless.<sup>194</sup> Unlike contexts where Classicism had to be revived from historical obscurity, in Greece, it had maintained an unbroken presence since the 1830s, consistently dominating other architectural forms. By the 1920s and even earlier, Classicism had become associated with conservative ideologies, paving the way for its integration into Metaxas' vision. Notably, key architectural works of this period, such as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Hellenic Army Pension Fund office building, were completed years before Metaxas's rise to power. Both projects, prominently executed in white marble, express the aesthetic and ideological force of a disciplined surface aligned with fascist architectural ambitions, blending Classical forms with nationalist overtones and contributing to a genealogy of authoritarian classicism. Despite the regime's amplification of certain architectural trends, it did not disrupt ongoing developments or introduce entirely new directions. Modern architecture, including the *polykatoikia* and modernist school buildings, continued to flourish within the enduring value of functionalist principles. Greece's fascist

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<sup>194</sup> Philippides, Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830-1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας [Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830-1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture] 244.

architecture was less monumental than the grand public works of Mussolini's Italy, such as the EUR district, via della Conciliazione, or Foro Mussolini, but similarly relied on Classicism and Mediterranean vernacular styles. These architectural choices, common across fascist regimes, resonated in Greece not through rupture but continuity, adapting long-standing traditions to serve new ideological purposes.

The legacy of the August 4<sup>th</sup> Regime extended into the multuous wartime and postwar periods. Following the German occupation (1941–1944), the Greek Resistance, led by the National Liberation Front (EAM), fostered a connection between intellectuals and the general populace that was more immediate and tangible than the abstract calls to national roots characteristic of interwar cultural movements. In rural areas, the establishment of a free state facilitated the adoption of modern cultural norms within traditional communities.<sup>195</sup> In urban centres, however, the sociopolitical landscape diverged sharply. By 1943, a facade of democratic governance masked authoritarian realities aligned with monarchist and fascist ideologies. Economic hardships during the occupation created stark divides, as profiteers and black marketeers thrived while many suffered. The postwar years deepened these divides. British intervention culminated in the Dekemvriana clashes and later the Greek Civil War (1946–1949), entrenching a profound political, ideological, and cultural split. The ruling class leveraged anti-communism to suppress dissent, equating progressive tendencies with communism and fostering polarisation. This ossification of ideology mirrored developments in architecture, as the positions of the Metaxas era resurfaced, favouring uncritical revivals of Hellenic traditions and reproducing a genealogy of conservative cultural authority. Conversely, the Left sought to align with both urban and rural populations, embracing folk traditions and integrating them into their cultural narratives. This dynamic evolved from a prewar populist turn into a deliberate cultural appropriation of traditional forms,<sup>196</sup> underscoring the competing visions of national identity and heritage in Greece's postwar architectural and cultural landscape. Pentelic marble was at the centre of these ideological and architectural negotiations, embodying both continuity and contestation amid Greece's complex modern genealogy.

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<sup>195</sup> Konstantinos Tsoukalas, *Η Ελληνική Τραγωδία: Από την Απελευθέρωση ως τους Συνταγματάρχες* [The Greek Tragedy: From Liberation to the Colonels] (Athens: Patakis, 1974), 42.

<sup>196</sup> Alexandros Argiriou, *Η Ελληνική Ποίηση: Νεωτερικοί Ποιητές του Μεσοπολέμου* [Greek Poetry: Modernist Poets of the Interwar Period] (Athens: Sokoli, 1979), 175.

### 2.2.3 Suburban Experiments

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In the aftermath of the Resistance and the Civil War, official ideology sought to anchor a fractured national identity in a distant, idealised past.<sup>197</sup> This return to Antiquity, expressed in materials like Pentelic marble, served as a safe and familiar foundation for cultural validation. The marble's enduring association with classical ideals offered a tangible link to Greece's celebrated history, reactivating the visual and conceptual frameworks of an idealised Antiquity and folklore. Poet and diplomat George Seferis contemplated this complex cultural identity in his wartime diaries, articulating the continuity and adaptability of Greekness:

*Greek culture will not be something isolated, alien, or helpless in the face of the human efforts unfolding around us. Above all, it means holding on—by any means possible—to keep our minds and spirits alive and open ... This distinct element of Hellenism takes shape in different forms over time—sometimes even contradictory or opposing ones—and cannot be strictly defined. Yet, we can sense it.*<sup>198</sup>

Pentelic marble, with its luminous whiteness, became a critical medium through which this cultural and ideological reassertion unfolded, functioning as an architectural object that materially staged continuity. In the 1950s, the arts embraced both traditional and innovative methods, using the marble to evoke classical heritage while situating it within a modernising Greece. This was particularly evident in Athens, where postwar reconstruction efforts and urbanisation utilised marble to reconnect the city's evolving landscape with its classical past. The 1950s marked a decade of political stability under a conservative government, laying the groundwork for economic transformation.<sup>199</sup> As large-scale migration from rural areas to urban centres like Athens intensified, the city's built environment expanded dramatically.<sup>200</sup> Amid this growth, Pentelic marble retained its prominence, appearing in public and private buildings, monuments, and infrastructure projects, aligning the new cityscape with a genealogy of classical continuity. Tourism, emerging as a critical economic sector in 1957, further amplified the weight of Pentelic marble as

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<sup>197</sup> Giorgos Kouroupos, *Η Σημασία της Παράδοσης στη Σύγχρονη Ελληνική Πραγματικότητα* [The Significance of Tradition in Contemporary Greece] (Athens, 1979).

<sup>198</sup> Giorgos Seferis, *Μέρες Δ': 1 Γενάρη 1941 – 31 Δεκέμβρη 1944* [Days IV: 1 January 1941 – 31 December 1944] (Athens: Ikaros, 1977), 133–34.

<sup>199</sup> Tsoukalas, *Η Ελληνική Τραγωδία: Από την Απελευθέρωση ως τους Συνταγματάρχες* [*The Greek Tragedy: From Liberation to the Colonels*], 99.

<sup>200</sup> Lila Leontidou, «Ρυθμιστικά Σχέδια για την Αθήνα, 1950–1980: Ένα Σχόλιο

[Regulatory Plans for Athens, 1950–1980: A Comment],» *Αρχιτεκτονικά Θέματα* [*Architectural Issues*] (1981): 72–73.

an interface between global imaginaries and local identity. For international visitors, the marble stood as a testament to Greece's ancient heritage, while for the local populace, it reaffirmed a resilient cultural identity. Yet, this material was not static; its surface applications shifted alongside Greece's evolving socioeconomic landscape. Marble's use in urban developments, alongside modern materials, manifested the interplay between tradition and modernity, a dynamic shaped by American economic aid and postwar reconstruction policies. Despite its role in the continuity of monumental and architectural structures, Pentelic marble also bore witness to the disruptions of war. The destruction of the built environment during World War II and the Civil War was severe, with Athens losing significant portions of its historic fabric. Estimates suggest that 25% of all buildings standing in 1940 were destroyed, reducing much of the city to rubble and dispersed stone particles that marked the violence of occupation and civil war. Some sources indicate even higher figures, with 530,000 buildings lost during the war and an additional 90,000 destroyed in the Civil War (1946–1949).<sup>201</sup> In Athens alone, 800 houses were demolished during the December 1944 clashes. By 1945, substantial activity in the country had come to a standstill. Reconstruction efforts by the Ministry of Reconstruction prioritised functionality and rapid urbanisation, often sidelining the meticulous craft associated with marble. By 1951, it had planned 150 rural settlements and 200,000 housing units.<sup>202</sup> Construction activity surged in the late 1950s, coinciding with Greece's economic boom. Between 1945 and 1956, an estimated 280,000 illegal houses were built, with the actual figure likely closer to 400,000.<sup>203</sup> Rural migrants, unable to access the formal land market, constructed homes on unregulated land, often under the threat of demolition. Meanwhile, urbanisation intensified, with new height and density allowances accelerating apartment building construction in Athens. In 1960 alone, 520 new structures were recorded. Despite these developments, a 1959 census revealed that 13,356 families in Athens, Piraeus, and Thessaloniki lived in shacks.<sup>204</sup> Thus, marble's presence in high-profile projects ensured its survival as a material of cultural significance, linking the new urban skyline to the weight of classical ideals by preserving its role as a national object of reference. This uneven distribution is not incidental: marble's privileged surface visibility contrasts

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<sup>201</sup> Association of Graduate Architects from Higher Education Institutions (SADAS), Στοιχεία του Προβλήματος της Λαϊκής Κατοικίας στην Ελλάδα [*Elements of the Problem of Popular Housing in Greece*] (Athens: Christou, Chrysanthos, 1962), 5.

<sup>202</sup> Ioannis Papaioannou et al., Κρατική Δραστηριότητα: Η Κατοικία στην Ελλάδα [State Activity: Housing in Greece] (Athens: Technical Chamber of Greece, 1975).

<sup>203</sup> Biris, Αι Αθήναι: Από του 19ου εις τον 20ον Αιώνα [Athens: From the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century], 10.

<sup>204</sup> (SADAS), Στοιχεία του Προβλήματος της Λαϊκής Κατοικίας στην Ελλάδα [*Elements of the Problem of Popular Housing in Greece*], 22.

sharply with the hidden infrastructures of informal construction. While marble anchors monumental and institutional architecture, it is largely absent from the rapidly expanding informal city. In this divergence, marble becomes a material of visibility, while concrete and improvised construction materials structure everyday life. The modern Greek city thus unfolds through a material bifurcation: one that stages continuity and national identity, and another that accommodates necessity and survival, forming an interface where visibility and invisibility are materially organised. Marble does not disappear in this condition; rather, it operates selectively, marking those sites where the nation seeks to recognise itself. Through its enduring presence, Pentelic marble participated in the ongoing redefinition of Hellenicity. It materialised the tensions between resilience and adaptation, tradition and modernity, serving as a testament to the complex interplay of identity, memory, and materiality in postwar Greece.

By the late 1950s, Greek civic and public architecture underwent a significant transformation, marked by the emergence of monumental modernist buildings that sought to reconcile international architectural language with references to national heritage. Within this context, the recurrent use of Pentelic marble acquired particular significance. Modernism is frequently narrated through reinforced concrete, glass, and steel, each associated with a regime of construction, perception, and governance. Concrete enables plasticity and repetition at scale, glass articulates transparency and universality, and steel structures the logic of industrial repetition. These materials participate in a broader apparatus of techniques, standards, and economic flows through which modernism operates and circulates globally. Within this field, Pentelic marble occupies a markedly different position. It does not align with the forward-driven temporality of industrial production, nor does it fully submit to the abstraction of universal form. Instead, it carries with it a dense historical and territorial charge that resists complete assimilation. Its presence within postwar modernist architecture in Athens does not simply accompany the language of international modernism. Still, it subtly displaces it, introducing a material continuity that folds national identity into structures otherwise governed by transnational logics. In this sense, marble does not replace reinforced concrete, glass, or steel. Still, it coexists with them in tension, complicating their claims to neutrality and exposing modernism as always already entangled with local histories and cultural inscriptions. This tension is formal and operative at once: marble reintroduces historical density into systems otherwise oriented toward standardisation and abstraction. Sourced from the same quarries that supplied stone for the Parthenon, the material carried powerful historical associations within Greek architectural culture. Its use in postwar public buildings, therefore, exceeded considerations of availability or durability. Rather, the visible use of Pentelic marble enabled modern structures to establish a deliberate dialogue with classical antiquity, situating

contemporary architecture within a broader narrative of cultural persistence and national inscription, shaped in part by American architectural ideals.<sup>205</sup> This strategy is particularly evident in two landmark postwar buildings: the Hilton Hotel and the United States Embassy. Both projects demonstrate the complex interplay of modernism, national identity, and international influence in shaping architectural developments in postwar Greece. At the Hilton Athens, this engagement with classical heritage was further reinforced through the building's artistic programme. The monumental facade reliefs, carved directly into Pentelic marble panels by the Greek artist Yannis Moralis, draw on motifs from the Panathenaic procession depicted on the Parthenon frieze.<sup>206</sup> By translating this classical imagery into the surface of a modernist structure, the facade establishes both a visual and material connection to ancient Athens. In this way, material choice, artistic intervention, and architectural form operate together to construct a sense of continuity between modern development and the enduring authority of the classical past.



FIG. 2.7 The Hilton Athens. Photograph.  
From *Doma*.

<sup>205</sup> Philippides, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830-1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας* [*Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830-1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture*] 276.

<sup>206</sup> Petros Phokaides et al., "Field Notes: Athens in Flux," *Architectural Histories* 12, no. 1 (2024): 43.

Completed between 1958 and 1963 and designed by Emmanuel Vourekas, Prokopis Vassiliadis, and Spyros Staikos, the Hilton Athens became a prototype for large-scale postwar architecture in the city, expressing both institutional ambition and Greece's aspirations toward modernisation (Fig. 2.7). Pentelic marble participated in mediating this relationship between modernity and tradition. The facades incorporated perforated marble screens (*klostrá*) that provided sun protection while evoking classical architectural motifs. Despite these references to local tradition, their application remained primarily surface-bound, operating less as a continuation of constructional logic and more as a calibrated visual mediation, aligning the building more closely with international architectural prototypes such as the United Nations headquarters in New York (Fig. 2.8),<sup>207</sup> defined by expansive communal spaces at ground level and a multi-storey volume of rooms above, than with the regional modernist ideals exemplified by the Xenia programme under Aris Konstantinidis. Pentelic marble also appeared in vertical facade elements and interior partitions, reinforcing the building's visual association with Greece's classical heritage. The atrium spaces, punctuated by olive trees, further embed marble within a carefully curated narrative of Greekness, juxtaposing natural and architectural elements to evoke a sense of continuity with the past. Yet marble operates alongside concrete and steel, not as a structure but as a material that re-inscribes genealogical weight onto otherwise standardised modernist systems. In its imposing scale, the 400-room Hilton rivalled the Parthenon's monumental presence, asserting a similarly dominant position within the urban landscape. Unlike the Parthenon, however, the hotel's relationship to the city was defined less by integration than by visual dominance, expressing a broader shift from the regional sensibilities of early Greek modernism toward a more globalised monumental aesthetic. The building's use of Pentelic marble thus reveals both the enduring cultural resonance of the material and the tensions between authenticity and modernisation that shaped postwar Greek architecture.

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<sup>207</sup> Philippides, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830-1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας [Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830-1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture]* 277.



**FIG. 2.8** United Nations headquarters, New York. Photograph. From ArchDaily.

The United States Embassy in Athens, designed by Walter Gropius (Fig. 2.9), exemplifies the integration of modernist principles with classical heritage through Pentelic marble. Constructed alongside the Hilton Hotel, the Embassy (1956–61) occupies a full city block on Vassilissis Sofias Avenue, featuring a symmetrical square plan with a perimetric colonnade and a central atrium. This arrangement recalls the peripteral temple, with colonnades clad in Pentelic marble that directly reference the Parthenon and ground the building in Athens' ancient architectural genealogy. These design elements, including horizontal bands framing the roof, were conceived to align modernist architecture with local historical precedents, creating a dialogue between contemporary design and classical ideals. This architectural synthesis is part of the geopolitical context of U.S. foreign policy in the 1950s, which sought to project "Americanness" through advanced construction techniques blended with the architectural languages of host nations.<sup>208</sup> The specifications outlined by the client emphasised this fusion, presenting the Embassy as part of what the international press termed "the Greek Revival," a nuanced interpretation that transcended Le Corbusier's influence and connected modernism with Greece's storied past. Walter Gropius's work in Athens was celebrated as a prestigious addition that elevated Greek architecture. However, the embassy's grandeur, wrapped in Pentelic marble,

<sup>208</sup> Jane C Loeffler, "The Architecture of Diplomacy: Heyday of the United States Embassy-Building Program, 1954-1960," *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 49, no. 3 (1990).

concealed a sterility and academicism that few questioned at the time. Pentelic marble, deeply tied to Greek architectural identity, here served not to evoke the nation's classical heritage but to express global architectural trends, a worldwide shift toward monumental modernism. In this inversion, marble no longer anchors the building to the ground but circulates as a mobile object within a globalised architectural field, revealing its capacity to operate not only as a marker of locality but also as a transferable sign within international modernism, participating in a genealogy of globalised monumental form. The influence of figures like Le Corbusier, seen as an idol by young Greek architects prewar and into the 1960s, remained complex. Although revered, Le Corbusier was perceived as dangerously nonconformist, standing apart from the more conservative, state-approved designs. In this context, Greek postwar architecture, with its cautious embrace of neoclassical ornament and alignment with American influences, especially in the use of materials like Pentelic marble to evoke authority and continuity rather than innovation. Official architecture, largely under the sway of elite decision-makers, persisted in interpreting monumental structures like the embassy while dabbling in anachronistic forms. Yet, as modernisation took hold, a cautious alignment with international architectural movements began to emerge. Shifts emerging in the early 1950s suggested that Greek architecture would soon adopt the broader currents of Western architectural thought, even as it continued to rely on materials like Pentelic marble to mediate between heritage and the demands of modernity.

While the Greek press celebrated the Embassy as a modern homage to the Parthenon,<sup>209</sup> the design's inspiration is closely aligned with contemporary American civic architecture, such as Edward Stone's U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, India (1957–59) (Fig. 2.10). The use of Pentelic marble, however, was pivotal in framing the structure as inherently Greek, embedding the modernist design within a narrative of cultural continuity. The white marble, quarried from the same mountains that supplied Athens' ancient monuments, reinforced the Embassy's connection to the city's classical genealogy, its luminous surfaces expressing both purity and permanence, consolidating the building as an architectural object of Hellenic authority. The choice of materials extended beyond marble to include light blue ceramics and landscaping with olive and cypress trees, and wild shrubs. This combination constructed a cohesive image of Greek identity, one tied explicitly to antiquity and subtly recontextualised within a modernist framework, as seen in the accompanying Greek publication:

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<sup>209</sup> Philippides, *Νεοελληνική Αρχιτεκτονική: Αρχιτεκτονική Θεωρία και Πράξη (1830-1980) σαν Αντανάκλαση των Ιδεολογικών Επιλογών της Νεοελληνικής Κουλτούρας [Modern Greek Architecture: Architectural Theory and Practice (1830-1980) as a Reflection of the Ideological Choices of Modern Greek Culture]* 277.



FIG. 2.9 United States embassy in Athens. Photograph by Giorgis Gerolympas, 2016  
From *Doma*.



FIG. 2.10 United States embassy in New Delhi. Photograph.  
From *Docomomo US*.

*The tradition of the classical spirit, expressed here through the concept of modern architecture, was continued through the use of the archaic atrium form, surrounded by the structure's columns, and through porticoes that encircle the building. An effort was made, however, to avoid the sterile imitation of archaic stylistic elements.<sup>210</sup>*

This statement encapsulates the ideological role of Pentelic marble as an interface between the past and the present, anchoring modern design within the enduring genealogy of Greek civilisation. Yet, this narrative also underscores the complexities of cultural negotiation in postwar Greece, where marble's disciplined surface was mobilised to stabilise competing claims of identity. The use of Pentelic marble and classical motifs sought to assert an authentic Hellenic identity. Still, these choices were often shaped by external influences associated with the broader imposition of American architectural ideals under the guise of Hellenism. The Embassy's use of Pentelic marble highlights the tension between global modernism and local tradition. While the marble visually aligned the building with Athens' ancient monuments, its application was associated with a revivalist tendency that favoured monumental classicism over the vernacular or Byzantine influences more closely associated with local architectural traditions. Pentelic marble, both as a material with deep historical resonance and as a modern architectural tool, exemplifies its centrality as an interface in the postwar redefinition of Greek identity. In the Embassy, as in the Hilton, marble became both a literal and figurative cornerstone for situating Greece within a narrative of continuity and modernity, navigating its place in a rapidly globalising world. The debate over the role of Pentelic marble and its relationship to polychromy in Greek architecture reached a critical juncture in 1957, when Aris Konstantinidis resigned from the Workers' Housing Organisation (OEK). Central to the controversy was the question of whether modern Greek architecture should embrace polychromatic traditions or adhere to the aesthetic of monochromatic whiteness. Konstantinidis argued that traditional Greek architecture was inherently polychromatic, a vibrant interplay of materials and colours that the imposed whiteness of the Metaxas regime had overwritten. In doing so, he effectively challenged the modern construction of architectural whiteness discussed in Chapter 1.1, *Material Athens* and Chapter 2.1, *Recasting Antiquity*.<sup>211</sup> This enforced whitening was a nationalist gesture that linked architectural aesthetics to the purity of classicism, constructing a genealogy of whiteness. Pentelic marble, with its luminous whiteness, became synonymous with modernist and neoclassical

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<sup>210</sup> Konstantinos Kitsikis, *Αρχιτεκτονική Architecture Art and Decoration in Greece* 6 (1957): 30.

<sup>211</sup> Aris Konstantinidis, *Τα Παλιά Αθηναϊκά Σπίτια* [The old Athenian houses] (Athens: Politypo, 1983), 61.

ideals, deemed uniquely suited to Greek light. Its use reinforced the sanitised aesthetic of whiteness, which was reinterpreted as a defining characteristic of Greek architecture. Yet Konstantinidis saw this monochromatic vision as reductive, erasing the textured, polychromatic character of traditional Greek architecture. This tension between tradition and modernity found a nuanced expression in the works of Dimitris Pikionis, particularly his interventions around the Acropolis (1951–57). The approach to these structures is meticulously designed, with movement unfolding through a sequence of open-air and semi-enclosed levels. Threshold spaces, such as a veranda (*hayati*) for the church and a reception area for the pavilion, mediate the transitions between enclosed and open spaces, guiding the visitor's movement and perspective. The role of vanishing perspectives is critical in Pikionis' work, as evident in the few surviving drawings, which focus on details rather than overarching plans.<sup>212</sup> In these projects, Pentelic marble is integrated into compositions that celebrate the material's historical resonance while challenging its singular association with whiteness. Pikionis's Acropolis works, including pathways, structures, and the St. Dimitrios Loumbardiaris church, demonstrate a meticulous interplay of materials, including textured stone, concrete, timber, and Pentelic marble fragments (Fig. 2.11). Rather than using Pentelic marble solely for its whiteness, Pikionis employed it as one element in a rich palette of textures and forms.<sup>213</sup> He incorporated marble finishes, solid steps, and embedded reliefs, often juxtaposed with unconventional materials like clay vessels, perforated bricks, and waste marble fragments.<sup>214</sup> These fragmented patterns oscillate between revealing and concealing references to "Greekness,"<sup>215</sup> suggesting a more layered and dynamic relationship with cultural identity. Pikionis's use of Pentelic marble shows a respect for its historical significance while resisting its reduction to a monochromatic symbol of classicism, opening a genealogy of alternative material Greekness. By combining it with other materials and forms, he recontextualised marble within a broader architectural language that engaged with the landscape and cultural memory. This approach aligns with his philosophy of architecture as a commentary on the environment rather than an assertion of dominance. The resulting structures,

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<sup>212</sup> Christos Tsilalis, *Η Ζωή και το Έργο του Πικιώνη* [The Life and Work of Pikionis] (Thessaloniki: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, 1970), 358.

<sup>213</sup> Noriaki Kurokawa, "Architecture of the Road," in *Human Identity in the Urban Environment*, ed. Gwen Bell and Jaqueline Tyrwhitt (London: Butler & Tanner, 1972), 394–400.

<sup>214</sup> Dimitris Vasileiadis, "Μια Δημιουργία Υψηλού Αισθητικού Ήθους: Η Διαμόρφωση των Λόφων Γύρω από την Ακρόπολη [A Creation of High Aesthetic Ethos: The Shaping of the Hills Around the Acropolis]," *Τεχνικά Χρονικά* [Technical Chronicles] (1962): 31–46.

<sup>215</sup> Francois Loyer, "Architecture de la Grèce Contemporaine" (Universite de Paris, 1966), 674–75, <https://books.google.se/books?id=oz62SQAACAAJ>.

including the Loumbardiaris complex, appear to have emerged organically from the landscape, blending human craftsmanship with the primordial qualities of the natural environment. Pikionis's approach resonates with East Asian architecture traditions, where respect for nature leads to a seamless blend of human-made and primordial environments.<sup>216</sup> Through his innovative use of Pentelic marble, Pikionis exemplified an alternative to the prevailing narratives of modernist whiteness and nationalist classicism. This approach extends the earlier material sensibilities introduced in his Acropolis interventions, now resonating with particulate agency. His work embraced the complexity and vibrancy of Greek material traditions, positioning Pentelic marble as a dynamic participant in the interplay of materials, forms, and cultural narratives. This reimagining of marble's role within architecture challenges reductive interpretations of Greek identity, offering a more nuanced exploration of how materials can mediate between history, nature, and modernity.



FIG. 2.11 Philopappou Hill pathways under construction, Athens. Photograph, ca. 1956. From *Doma*.

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<sup>216</sup> Tsilalis, *Η Ζωή και το Έργο του Πικιώνη* [The Life and Work of Pikionis], 358.

## 2.3 Colonial Modernity

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### 2.3.1 Surfaces of Authority

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The historiography of architectural modernism has expanded significantly over recent decades, particularly through the lens of postcolonial critique. Rather than treating modernity and colonialism as distinct intellectual formations, this body of work has demonstrated their constitutive entanglement, revealing how the emergence of modern thought, aesthetics, and spatial practices unfolded alongside imperial expansion.<sup>217</sup> Within this framework, materials such as Pentelic marble cannot be understood as neutral carriers of meaning, but as elements implicated in the production and stabilisation of broader cultural and geopolitical configurations. In this context, the question is not only how Pentelic marble becomes embedded within colonial and European narratives, but how it participates in making these narratives perceptible and operative within architectural form. Coloniality does not lie dormant within the material, awaiting interpretation; it persists as an active condition, rearticulated through how architecture organises perception, continuity, and legibility. What is at stake, therefore, is not simply the association of marble with antiquity or refinement, but the processes through which its presence contributes to the production of a seemingly neutral and continuous historical field. Scholars in postcolonial theory have explored how the Enlightenment's project of modernity intertwined with imperial practices, producing a worldview structured through differentiation and hierarchy. Drawing on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism, these studies have shown how Europe constituted itself as "modern," "civilised," and "superior," through the construction of an "other" positioned as opposite. As Edward Said, writes, "Therefore, as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea with a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence in, and for, the West. The two geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other."<sup>218</sup> Within this reciprocal construction, Pentelic marble does not simply enter architectural discourse as a bearer of inherited meaning. Its mobilisation within architectural discourse contributes to rendering these relations

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<sup>217</sup> Hilde Heynen, "The Intertwinement of Modernism and Colonialism: A Theoretical Perspective," *Docomomo Journal*, no. 48 (2013): 11.

<sup>218</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 5.

perceptually immediate, grounding cultural hierarchies that are otherwise abstracted within the material field of the built environment. This perceptual immediacy echoes the stabilisations of whiteness introduced earlier but now recoded through the modern surface. In this sense, the marble does not simply express an already constituted division between Europe and its “others”; it participates in the ongoing production of that division. This production operates through a genealogy of surface effects, where material visibility stabilises relations of power.

Pentelic marble, far from being just a raw material, was reimagined in Western architecture and thought. Its adoption in neoclassicism and modernism imbues it with layers of meaning, linking it to European ideals of civilisation and aesthetic superiority. The marble’s whiteness and durability were harnessed to signify a return to the classical ideals of antiquity. Though it is part of Greece’s natural landscape, Pentelic marble has thus become integral to Western narratives of heritage and identity, standing for a universalised notion of “Greekness” that serves European ideals rather than Greek realities. This process of “Orientalisation” can be observed in how the West interprets and recontextualises Pentelic marble within neoclassical and modernist architecture. The marble supports Western narratives of heritage and identity, functioning as a material condition through which an idealised antiquity is rendered perceptually immediate. In this way, both the Orient and Pentelic marble emerge as constructs that reinforce Western ideological frameworks, illustrating a dual process of objectification and idealisation. The materiality of Pentelic marble is implicated in the construction of Western ideals of purity, order, and civilisation. Just as the Orient was historically portrayed as the “other”, mysterious and morally dubious, Pentelic marble was positioned as an indication of Hellenic purity and European high culture; its association with classical architecture promoted an idealised vision of Greece, one that served Western narratives while overshadowing the complexities of the marble’s historical context. This dynamic suggests that the adoption of Pentelic marble in neoclassical and modernist structures expressed a figurative “civilising” act, a way for Greece to assert its cultural legitimacy while distancing itself from Ottoman influences. As Greece emerged from Ottoman rule and sought to define its place within Western Europe, the use of Pentelic marble in architecture indicated a broader civilising mission.

The marble’s aesthetic qualities aligned with Western desires for a stable source of cultural legitimacy, often obscuring the material’s multifaceted historical realities. The whiteness of the marble reduces it to an idealised Greece, even as its geological particles testify to entanglements that exceed this reduction. It organises perception so that this ideal appears immediate and self-evident, while its historical entanglements recede. Thus, Pentelic marble is not merely a marker of architectural heritage but also a carefully constructed cultural narrative that validates Western

ideals while masking the complexity of its own genealogy. Applying Edward Said's concept of Orientalism to Pentelic marble reveals how Western perspectives engage with Greece, instantiating both admiration and a desire for control over cultural meanings. As Said mentions:

*Orientalism is not a mere political subject matter or field that is reflected passively by culture, scholarship, or institutions; nor is it representative and expressive of some nefarious "Western" imperialist plot to hold down the "Oriental" world. It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical and philological texts.*<sup>219</sup>

While Orientalism traditionally examines Western constructions of the East, including regions such as the Eastern Mediterranean, Asia, and North Africa, a comparable dynamic is evident in the West's engagement with Greece, especially in relation to its classical past. When European scholars and architects encountered Greek antiquities, they framed Greece as the cradle of Western civilisation. This framing was both celebratory and instrumental in reinterpreting Greek identity within a Western narrative. Pentelic marble manifested an idealised, pure Greek antiquity, distinct from the Ottoman influence that Western elites perceived as a contamination. Its association with iconic structures like the Parthenon allowed it to be integrated into an imperialistic vision of Greece as a cultural ancestor that the West could restore or complete. Yet in modernist architecture, this transformation cannot be understood solely in terms of meaning. It unfolds more decisively at the surface. The marble surface operates as an interface, both mediating between genealogical reference and architectural abstraction, and reorganising how such reference becomes perceptible in the first place. Its smoothness does not merely present an aesthetic quality; it performs a work of organisation. Discontinuities are flattened, temporal ruptures are subdued, and heterogeneous histories are brought into alignment within a coherent perceptual field. The marble surface does not simply conceal historical discontinuities; it produces their imperceptibility. What appears as neutrality is not the absence of determination, but the effect of a continuous process through which certain relations are stabilised while others recede. The materiality of Pentelic marble is therefore implicated in the construction of Western ideals of purity, order, and civilisation in a manner that exceeds symbolic association.

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<sup>219</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

Its whiteness functions as a condition of visibility. Rather than simply signifying an idealised antiquity, it organises perception by foregrounding particular historical associations, continuity, origin, and permanence, while displacing others, including the material's entanglement with colonial and geopolitical processes. Through this operation, the marble surface produces an effect of immediacy in which these associations appear self-evident, requiring neither justification nor critical interrogation. This dynamic resonates with the broader logic identified by Edward Said, in which cultural forms do not merely express power but participate in its distribution. As Said notes:

*[Orientalism] is, rather than expresses, a certain will or intention to understand, in some cases to control, manipulate, even to incorporate, what is manifestly a different (or alternative and novel) world ... it is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power.*<sup>220</sup>

The relationship between Pentelic marble and European identity is complex, as this material has been instrumental in shaping architectural and cultural narratives that reinforce asymmetrical power relations. The appropriation of Pentelic marble by Western architects, artists, and scholars serves to materialise concepts of “civilised” European heritage, reinforcing a power imbalance between the West and Greece. During the neoclassical period, Europe’s selective rediscovery of Greek antiquity, through materials such as Pentelic marble, articulated a broader colonial mindset, suggesting that European ideals would guide Greece’s future. The significance of Pentelic marble extends well beyond its aesthetic appeal; it is tied to cultural hegemony, where Western ideals overshadow local narratives and genealogies. This dynamic is particularly evident in the neoclassical architecture of post-independence Athens, influenced by Bavaria, as we saw in Chapter 1.2, *Neoclassical Alignments*. Here, the revival of classical Greek forms simultaneously celebrates Greek identity and re-inscribes European frameworks as authoritative. Pentelic marble not only exemplified the grandeur of ancient Greece but was also mobilised to assert Western cultural authority, aligning with Edward Said’s concept of hegemony. The aesthetic and intellectual elevation of Pentelic marble cast it as inherently “European,” reimported into Greek contexts to reaffirm Western cultural frameworks. Viewed through the lens of Orientalism, Pentelic marble exposes how its narrative sustains an assertion of control over its cultural legacy, positioning the material as an epistemic object through which authority is materialised. This dynamic aligns with Denys Hay’s notion of Europe as a collective identity distinguishing “us” Europeans from “those” non-Europeans:

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<sup>220</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 12.

*Orientalism is never far from what Denys Hay had called the idea of Europe, a collective notion identifying “us” Europeans as against all “those” non-Europeans. Indeed, it can be argued that the major component of European culture is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both within and outside Europe: the idea of European identity as superior to all non-European peoples and cultures.*<sup>221</sup>

The European valorisation of Pentelic marble relegated non-European materials and architectural traditions to the margins. The sourcing and extraction of Pentelic marble were frequently prioritised by European interests, linking it to broader colonial dynamics of resource and labour exploitation. This suggests that European identity was partly constructed through material appropriation, with Pentelic marble serving as a marker of refinement aligned with idealised antiquity. The relationship between Pentelic marble and European identity is layered, revealing how architectural material choices contribute to broader narratives of power, dominance, and identity. This approach underscores how architectural materials, such as Pentelic marble, helped shape cultural narratives that reinforce sociopolitical hierarchies within architectural history and modernity. The appropriation and circulation of marble then positions Greece simultaneously as origin and object, both foundational to and subject to Western reinterpretation. Marble becomes a site where admiration and control converge, where the classical past is both preserved and reformulated within a broader European framework. This process can be understood through Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of territorialisation and deterritorialisation.<sup>222</sup> Marble is detached from its immediate historical and geographical specificity and enters the circulating language of international modernism. Yet this very movement enables a re-stabilisation: its surface reterritorialises a perceptual field in which whiteness and classical continuity are reasserted as neutral and universal conditions.

The apparent abstraction of modernism does not dissolve these associations but redistributes them in a more diffuse, less immediately visible form. The relationship between Pentelic marble and European identity is thus not exhausted by questions of representation or cultural appropriation. Rather, it involves a set of material operations through which architectural form participates in the organisation of perception and the stabilisation of historical narratives. The marble does not simply signify a connection to antiquity; it helps produce the conditions under which that connection appears natural, continuous, and unquestioned. At the same time, this analysis raises a critical question: whether all deployments of Pentelic marble within Athenian modernism necessarily operate through this regime of neutralised visibility.

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<sup>221</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 7.

<sup>222</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 508–10.

While the material frequently participates in the smoothing of historical and political discontinuities, it remains possible that certain architectural practices disrupt rather than stabilise these conditions, exposing the very entanglements that are elsewhere rendered imperceptible. Such cases would not stand outside the dynamics described here, but would reveal their contingency and limits. In this sense, Pentelic marble does not merely persist within architectural modernism as a bearer of historical meaning. It operates as an active surface through which regimes of visibility are instituted, maintained, and, at times, unsettled.

### 2.3.2 Cold War Aesthetics

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In “Ornament and Crime,” Adolf Loos’ argument against ornamentation draws heavily from colonial ideas about “primitive” cultures. His view rests on an evolutionary hierarchy in which non-European cultures are portrayed as childlike and inferior stages in a supposed progression toward European ideals.

*In the womb, the human embryo undergoes all stages of animal development. At birth, human sensations are akin to those of a newborn dog. Childhood mirrors all transformations paralleling human history. At two, a child sees like a Papuan; at four, like a Teuton; at six, like Socrates; at eight, like Voltaire ... The child is amoral. To us, the Papuan is amoral. The Papuan kills, devours, tattoos his skin, his boat, his oar—everything in reach. He is not a criminal. A modern man who tattoos himself is a criminal or degenerate ... The urge to ornament oneself and everything close by is the origin of fine art. It is the babble of painting. All art is erotic.*<sup>223</sup>

Loos’s infamous comparison of a tattooed Papuan to an amoral child positions ornamentation as primitivism and regression, and its absence as a marker of civilised modernity. What appears as a movement toward neutrality does not eliminate the surface but reorganises it. The unadorned surface does not withdraw; it structures how objects are perceived, compared, and classified. Neutrality here does not conceal power so much as organise its conditions, configuring what can appear as comparable, classifiable, and culturally intelligible. The surface operates as an interface through which visibility is regulated and aligned with broader epistemic hierarchies. This radical purification of the surface, stripped of ornament and reduced to smooth material expression, would later provoke a strong reaction

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<sup>223</sup> Loos, *Ornament and Crime*.

within architectural discourse, eventually contributing to postmodern critiques that interpreted surface itself as a site of ornament and representative communication. This perspective, steeped in colonial discourse and particularly evolutionist anthropology, views cultural differences as hierarchical stages, positioning some societies as more “advanced” than others. By this logic, non-European cultures are seen as needing to “evolve” toward a European ideal, reinforcing notions of Western superiority. What appears in Loos’ argument as neutrality is not the disappearance of surface effects, but their reconfiguration within a regime of visibility and differentiation. In this sense, neutrality functions less as an absence than as a condition that enables comparison, standardisation, and legibility to operate without explicit ornamentation, forming a regulatory object within architectural culture. The surface becomes less about expressive excess and more about the regulation of what can be perceived, aligned, and differentiated within a broader architectural and cultural field. Applying Loos’ concepts of “primitive” ornament to Pentelic marble in Greek neoclassicism can be read as participating in similar colonial dynamics in material choice and architectural expression, extending through marble’s disciplined surface. Coloniality here does not sit behind representation; it operates through surface and material practice, functioning as an interface between material selection and cultural classification. The focus shifts from discourse to operation: to the organisation of visibility, the selection of materials, and the stabilisation of aesthetic norms, with the surface as their mediating interface. Pentelic marble is not merely associated with colonial or Eurocentric narratives; it is implicated in the production of neutrality, purity, and cultural continuity as regimes of visibility. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, Greece deliberately chose Pentelic marble to invoke an idealised classical purity, aligning itself with European fantasies of ancient Greece as the “cradle of Western civilisation.” This emphasis on classical, “ornament-less” Pentelic marble contrasts sharply with its actual, varied historical applications, imposing a hierarchy that celebrates only certain elements of Greek architecture. Ottoman and Byzantine influences, by contrast, were dismissed as “lesser”. The Greek neoclassical use of Pentelic marble thus became a carefully curated identity aligned with Western ideals of “pure” classical beauty, effectively erasing complex histories and cultural diversity incompatible with this colonial image of Hellenic primitivism. Just as Loos rejects ornament as primitive, Greek modernism excluded non-classical elements as culturally irrelevant, constructing a national identity rooted in Western ideals. This dismissal of ornament in Loos’ theory parallels how the 19<sup>th</sup> century Greek nation-state aligned itself with a European “ornament-less” standard, casting Ottoman and Byzantine aesthetics as subordinate or irrelevant. This colonial framework, which

purged “undesirable” architectural elements, can also be understood as a process of territorialisation:<sup>224</sup> stabilising certain material configurations while excluding others, thereby reinforcing a regulated field of cultural legibility.

Both Loos and Le Corbusier engaged deeply with the notion of the primitive, albeit in contrasting ways. While Loos viewed the primitive as a pre-rational, childlike stage that advanced cultures had transcended, Le Corbusier saw it as a fundamental, authentic essence worth reclaiming. Adolf Max Vogt interprets Le Corbusier’s work as balanced between rationality and geometric order on one side and foundational elements in archaeology and architecture on the other.<sup>225</sup> Vogt argues that Le Corbusier’s affinity for pure geometric forms was fuelled by his fascination with archaeological discoveries and the architectural forms he encountered during his “Journey to the East.” Applying this framework to Pentelic marble offers an intriguing lens for understanding how materials and their cultural significance can convey a similar duality of primitivism. Le Corbusier’s fascination with primitive forms and his search for authenticity through simplicity and geometric purity were inspired by what he perceived as architecture’s foundational essence.<sup>226</sup> Likewise, neoclassical and modernist architects used Pentelic marble not only as a connection to Greek antiquity but as a legitimisation of purity, truth, and cultural origin. This parallel suggests that both neoclassicism and modernism, like Le Corbusier’s primitivism, aimed to reclaim an authentic cultural foundation, grounding a new architectural language in a “primitive,” original material. In this light, Pentelic marble operates as a primitive element, not in the sense of being archaic or outdated, but as a substance that suggests an authentic genealogy of origin, much like Le Corbusier’s geometric forms, which aimed to channel an essential, original order. This primitivism is not limited to aesthetic simplicity; it also carries the authority of a material believed to bear the weight of historical continuity. For Le Corbusier, geometric forms served as a means to convey an essential, primary truth, while Pentelic marble became a physical link to the idealised Greek past, effectively bridging the rationality of modern architecture with a primal, cultural authenticity. In comparing Loos and Le Corbusier, it becomes evident that, for Loos, the primitive was something to be transcended, associated with a cultural-evolutionary view in which the primitive was synonymous with the undeveloped. For Le Corbusier, however, the primitive signified the primary, the original, and the authentic qualities to be reclaimed. This distinction is at the

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<sup>224</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

<sup>225</sup> Adolf Max Vogt and Le Corbusier, *Le Corbusier, the Noble Savage: Toward an Archaeology of Modernism* (MIT Press, 1998).

<sup>226</sup> Corbusier and Žaknić, *Journey to the East*.

heart of modernist architecture, where the primitive, seen as the authentic, emerges repeatedly as something to be restored, becoming central to what we might call the primitivist impulse in architecture.

From a postcolonial perspective, primitivism presents a problematic stance. While it has not been as extensively questioned in architecture, it is insightful to turn to other disciplines, such as art history, where this issue has been thoroughly debated. The conversation was sparked by the 1984 exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, “Primitivism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern.” The exhibition sought to highlight supposed similarities between Western Modern art and so-called “primitive” objects from non-Western cultures. It aimed to demonstrate potential affinities between these two, but it provoked significant criticism. Thomas McEvilley encapsulated some of the key arguments in the debate:

*I do not doubt that those responsible for this exhibition and book feel that it is a radical act to show how equal the primitives are to us, how civilised, how sensitive, how “inventive” indeed, both Rubin and Varnedoe passionately declare this. But by their absolute repression of primitive context, meaning, content, and intention (the dates of the works, their functions, their religious or mythological connections, their environments), they have treated the primitives as less than human, less than cultural—as shadows of a culture, their selfhood, their Otherness, wrung out of them.<sup>227</sup>*

This argument is a recurring theme in critiques of how European colonisers engaged with the art and cultures of the people they subjugated, revealing a genealogy of aesthetic extraction. Objects in colonial museums are often those taken because colonial explorers admired them. Many of these “primitive” objects in museums across Europe, America, and Australia lack clear historical or cultural context; their origins, functions, and meanings are often unknown. Stripped of these vital details, they become mere aesthetic objects. Things to be looked at and admired, devoid of the rich cultural context from which they emerged. When examining Pentelic marble through a postcolonial lens, we can uncover how the marble, often divorced from its historical, cultural, and contextual significance, has been reimagined or repurposed in ways that obscure its origins and meaning. Just as the primitivism debate in art history critiques the reduction of non-Western objects to mere aesthetic forms, the use of Pentelic marble in Western architecture, particularly during the neoclassical and modernist periods, can be seen as an analogous act of cultural abstraction. The marble, extracted from Mount Pentelicus and deeply

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<sup>227</sup> Deutch Miriam and D Flam Jack, “Primitivism and Twentieth Century Art: A Documentary History,” (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

tied to ancient Greek culture, was used in structures designed to evoke classical ideals of beauty, order, and reason. Yet, much like the “primitive” objects in colonial museums, its original context and the labour of its crafters were often disregarded in favour of its associations with power, culture, and civilisation. The neoclassical and modernist use of Pentelic marble, therefore, can be understood as a form of cultural appropriation, where the material is abstracted from its local, genealogical, and mythological contexts and instead serves a Western narrative of supremacy, civilisation, and permanence. The exhibition “Primitivism in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art” provides a useful analogy for how the use of Pentelic marble in neoclassical and modernist architecture perpetuates a similar colonial attitude. In this view, the marble is reduced to a commodity, its true cultural significance erased, and its meaning confined to Western values and aesthetics, stabilising it as an aesthetic object abstracted from its genealogical field. By questioning this reduction, just as McEvelley critiques the exhibition’s failure to recognise the full humanity and cultural complexity of the so-called “primitive” objects, there is a need to reconsider Pentelic marble not merely as an aesthetic object but as a material with its own complex, layered genealogy. This includes the artisans’ experiences, the local Greek context, and the role of the latter in the modern project of nation-building in Greece. Through this lens, Pentelic marble, much like the “primitive” objects discussed by McEvelley, has been recontextualised and objectified in ways that erase or simplify its cultural and historical significance, expressing broader colonial dynamics in architecture.

Applying Hal Foster’s critique of the Western fascination with the “primitive” to the use of Pentelic marble in architecture and modernism reveals a layered tension between materiality, ideology, and historical consciousness. Foster observes that architectural forms and materials drawn from ancient or “primitive” sources often participate in colonial and imperial narratives, whether these connections are made explicit or remain implicit.<sup>228</sup> Pentelic marble, celebrated for its historical role in ancient Greek architecture, exemplifies this complexity, mediating between ideals of antiquity and modernist appropriations of ancient materials. The modernist mythologisation of Pentelic marble as a pure, elevated, or “authentic” material illustrates how such valorisation can obscure the sociohistorical conditions that produced it, transforming the material into a cultural object detached from its labour and geopolitical histories. As Foster emphasises, this fascination with the “primitive” or classical often entails recontextualisation, erasure, or simplification of the material’s entangled genealogies. In the case of Pentelic marble, its extraction, transport, and use were shaped by social, economic, and imperial forces, realities

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<sup>228</sup> Hal Foster, “The” Primitive” Unconscious of Modern Art,” *October* 34 (1985).

that are often elided in narratives that celebrate the marble's value. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, prominent modernist architects like Le Corbusier drew inspiration from classical antiquity, yet frequently bypassed the specific historical and material contexts that produced these forms. This resonates with Foster's critique of the Western "discovery" of the primitive, in which explorers and architects admired exotic artefacts, here Pentelic marble, while disregarding the violent histories of labour, extraction, and domination in their production. The romanticised canonisation of Pentelic marble, like Rudofsky's portrayal of non-Western architecture,<sup>229</sup> presents an ostensibly neutral or purified aesthetic that masks the material's entanglement in exploitation. Viewed through a postcolonial lens, however, this fascination is far from neutral. It performs an overt claim of superiority. By displaying and consuming materials produced through intensive labour and imperial circuits, modernity enacts domination as a deliberate demonstration of authority, an unashamed assertion of control that aligns with its broader project of global civilising and modernising.

The modernist embrace of Pentelic marble thus exemplifies how admiration for the "authentic" or "timeless" is inseparable from histories of exploitation, revealing a hidden genealogy of violence beneath aesthetic ideals and a visible, intentional projection of power. Variations in intention and context may modulate these operations, yet the general tendency remains: the deployment of Pentelic marble aligns with regimes that privilege neutrality as a condition of visibility and classification; an architecture of supremacy in which material and ideology converge. A potential counterexample would be a deployment of Pentelic marble in which the surface no longer operates as a stabilised field of legibility aligned with classical purity, national identity, or standardised visual regimes. Such a case would require the marble to resist its role as a smooth, homogenising interface, foregrounding heterogeneity and discontinuity, disrupting comparability and classification by exposing the dispersed stone particles that undermine its smoothness. Yet even here, such as in the fragmented and heterogeneous work of Dimitris Pikionis around the Acropolis, discussed earlier in Chapter 2.2, *Urban Modernities*, the material rarely escapes reterritorialisation.<sup>230</sup> Its cultural and historical associations continue to shape how it is perceived and interpreted. What appears as an exception emerges instead as partial deterritorialisation, still entangled within a shifting interface of broader regimes of visibility. Neutrality, as operationalised through surface, proves difficult to disentangle from the conditions that render architectural materials

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<sup>229</sup> Bernard Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture* (UNM Press, 1987).

<sup>230</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

legible in the first place. This critique not only challenges the romanticised accounts of architectural history but also urges a deeper, more nuanced engagement with the materials and traditions underpinning Western architectural culture. Foster's critical view on the contradictions inherent in the Western or Modernist fascination with the "primitive" can be summarised as follows, "The Modern discovery of the primitive really means its death ... no anthropological remorse, aesthetic elevation, or redemptive exhibition can correct or compensate this loss because they are all implicated in it."<sup>231</sup> He argues that the modernist "discovery" of the primitive signifies its erasure, such that no act of anthropological regret, aesthetic veneration, or museum display can truly address this loss. Rather, each is complicit in the process. As explorers and well-meaning individuals ventured into "undiscovered" areas, their efforts to gather exotic objects inadvertently contributed to the loss of the cultures they sought to preserve, a contradiction rarely acknowledged. This same fascination pervades architectural culture, evident from the late 1950s in works such as Paul Oliver's "Shelter and Society,"<sup>232</sup> Bernard Rudofsky's "Architecture Without Architects,"<sup>233</sup> Amos Rapoport's "House Form and Culture," and Joseph Rykwert's "Adam's House in Paradise."<sup>234</sup> Written by architects and historians within the Modernist tradition, these texts champion the "authenticity" of non-Western architectural traditions. For example, Rudofsky's exhibition critiques Western architectural norms, contrasting the "serenity" of architecture in so-called underdeveloped regions with the "blight" of industrialised countries:

*The exhibition is not an exercise in quaintness, not a travel guide, except in the sense that it marks a point of departure for the exploration of our architectural prejudices. It is frankly polemic, comparing, as it does, if only by implication, the serenity of the architecture in so-called underdeveloped countries with the architectural blight in industrial countries.*<sup>235</sup>

Rudofsky suggests that modern architects might recover certain communal and harmonious qualities through studying these "primitive" forms, including integration with natural surroundings, well-defined communal spaces, practical problem-solving, and prioritising collective wellbeing over profit, yet portraying "primitive"

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<sup>231</sup> Foster, "The" Primitive" Unconscious of Modern Art."

<sup>232</sup> Paul Oliver, *Shelter and Society* (F. A. Praeger, 1969). <https://books.google.se/books?id=0azfAAAAAAAJ>.

<sup>233</sup> Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture*.

<sup>234</sup> J. Rykwert, *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (Museum of Modern Art, 1972). [https://books.google.se/books?id=m\\_VPAAAAAAAJ](https://books.google.se/books?id=m_VPAAAAAAAJ).

<sup>235</sup> Rudofsky, *Architecture Without Architects: A Short Introduction to Non-pedigreed Architecture*.

architecture as timeless and universal, with little mention of dates, creators, or socio-economic backgrounds. This narrative situates the primitive as Modernism's "Other," as in Edward Said's "Orientalism," in which the "Other" is constructed to serve Western self-definition. Critics, including McEvilley, challenge this genealogy of sanitised primitivism. He argues that such "sterilised" portrayals, which "wipe the blood off" these artefacts, overlook their complex and often violent histories. Rudofsky's work similarly omits economic and social inequalities, painting the "primitive" as idyllic and pure. These texts are predominantly authored by Western intellectuals, with little direct engagement or collaboration with the cultures they portray, and they ignore the role of Western fascination in the very erasure they critique. This entanglement constitutes a genealogy of modernism built upon appropriated difference.

### 2.3.3 Marble in Global Diplomacy

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The call to reassess modernity's ideals, particularly its social ambitions, finds a striking parallel in the story of Pentelic marble. Revered for its classical heritage, this material re-emerged in Greece's modern architectural landscape as an agent of national identity. Just as architects in Brasília and Chandigarh adapted modernist ideals to express local aspirations, Greek architects and politicians utilised Pentelic marble to bridge their cultural past with ideals of social progress and statehood. Despite modernity's frequent association with Western superiority, its vision also holds an emancipatory potential that transcends boundaries. In Greece, the repurposing of Pentelic marble illustrates how a material, deeply linked to antiquity, was recontextualised within a modern narrative, becoming more than a mere homage to Hellenic grandeur. Instead, it functioned as a vehicle for social renewal. When incorporated into Greece's national institutions, such as the Athenian Trilogy, the Hilton Athens, and the United States Embassy in Athens, as we saw earlier in Chapter 2.2, *Urban Modernities*, Pentelic marble became a social instrument, fostering an elevated public sphere and a renewed national identity. This apparent transparency of the material surface, however, should not be taken as a neutral condition. The marble cladding does not simply represent social ideals; it participates in organising their visibility. Its whiteness, legibility, and smoothness contribute to a surface regime in which certain forms of presence become stabilised as authoritative, while others remain peripheral or unmarked. These buildings sought to fuse Greece's storied past with the state's vision for the future, aligning with modernity's commitment to societal advancement. Far from simply echoing classical heritage, Pentelic marble in neoclassical and modernist architecture allowed Greece to engage with a global narrative, asserting an identity that was both self-affirming and internationally

resonant. The material became a localised expression of modernity, anchoring the young state in the democratic ideals of antiquity and laying the foundation for an open, enlightened society. Like Brasília's Central Bus Station or Chandigarh's public spaces, these marble-clad buildings were envisioned as inclusive and uplifting, places where citizens could engage in a shared national story. Yet, such parallels do not imply uniformity in how marble or modernist surfaces operate across contexts. In certain configurations, the material surface may fail to stabilise a coherent narrative of neutrality, instead exposing tensions between representation, use, and perception. These variations suggest that the effects of Pentelic marble are not predetermined but contingent upon specific spatial, institutional, and socio-political arrangements. Pentelic marble thus stands not as a relic but as an evolving expression of modernity's social ideals, continuously reinterpreted through the spatial and institutional conditions that shape its visibility and use. In this sense, the neutrality often attributed to modern material surfaces can be reconsidered as an active condition of visibility, stabilising modernity as an architectural object that appears coherent and selfevident. Rather than merely withdrawing into the background, the marble surface helps establish a field in which architectural form is rendered intelligible through clarity, purity, and continuity. What appears as neutrality may thus operate as a mechanism through which particular aesthetic and cultural norms are naturalised. This process can also be understood as a genealogical reterritorialisation,<sup>236</sup> in which a material historically anchored in classical antiquity is reinscribed within modern institutional frameworks, while simultaneously being deterritorialised through its circulation within international modernist idioms. Its use in modern Greek architecture affirms that the movement's ideals, social cohesion, progress, and liberation can be realised through a localised, yet globally resonant, architectural language. By reconsidering the significance of Pentelic marble, we go beyond viewing it as a static artefact; we see it as a living material, actively engaged in a genealogy of identity formation. In this way, Pentelic marble resonates with a vision of modernity that, rather than being exclusively Western, becomes a shared pursuit of social progress and cultural dignity, a vision that, while resonant across contexts such as Athens, Brasília, and Chandigarh, is nevertheless refracted differently through the material, institutional, and social arrangements in which it is realised.

Modernist ideals merit re-examination because of their social goals. While modernity and modernism often carried assumptions of European superiority, this does not negate their full potential. Instead, it suggests expanding modernist concepts beyond their Western origins. Perhaps the real task is to critique the conflation of

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<sup>236</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 508–10.

the modern with the West. By re-examining modernist architecture or broadening modernist discourse to include diverse perspectives, we might retain some of its initial promises. Modern architecture is a social project at its core, a vision for improving society that reaches beyond stylistic innovation, though its form is certainly notable. However, this social ambition is never detached from the material and visual regimes through which it is articulated. The aspiration toward universality, clarity, and improvement is mediated by surfaces that render these values perceptible, and in doing so, participate in defining what counts as livable, modern, or progressive. The essence of modernist architecture lies in its commitment to social betterment: architects sought not only to reimagine buildings but to enhance lives. Sigfried Giedion advocates for architecture that could emancipate society.<sup>237</sup> Modern architecture was intended to free people from restrictive spaces, offering environments filled with light, air, and a better quality of life. This vision took shape through welfare-state initiatives, particularly in social housing, schools, hospitals, and infrastructure, which transformed communities on a grand scale. Catharine Bauer's "Modern Housing"<sup>238</sup> echoes this mission, emphasising that modern architecture sought to improve housing, health, and essential infrastructure, aligning modernism with progress and emancipation. This approach to modernism has been widely adopted beyond Western contexts, though its translation is always mediated by local conditions that reshape its assumptions and effects. Although often associated with Western superiority, its ideals of social uplift and emancipation can resonate far beyond the West. Critics sometimes argue that projects like Brasília or Chandigarh are disconnected from the lifestyles of their intended communities. Yet, in these instances, local leaders selected modernist aesthetics to express their ambitions for their countries' futures. Such appropriations of modernism are part of the larger dialogue driving modernisation. For instance, Brasília's Central Bus Station, designed by Lúcio Costa, is one of the city's most dynamic spaces. While Costa's original "pilot project" is now protected as heritage, the city has expanded primarily through satellite towns. The bus station serves as a vital hub where diverse social groups converge, underscoring Brasília's modernity as a place of connection and social exchange. Similarly, in Chandigarh, residents, not just architects, take pride in the city's design, often referencing its celebrated architect. This pride suggests that cities like Chandigarh have, within a generation, become an intrinsic part of daily life rather than remain external impositions.

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<sup>237</sup> Sigfried Giedion and Reto Geiser, *Liberated Dwelling* (Lars Müller Verlag, 2018).

<sup>238</sup> Catherine B. Wurster, *Modern Housing* (Houghton Mifflin, 1934). <https://books.google.se/books?id=EKFPAAMAAMAJ>.

Modernity can be seen as adaptable, yet its translations into different contexts are never neutral; they involve negotiations that reshape both its material expressions and its social meanings. Reinterpreting Pentelic marble through a postcolonial lens does not merely revisit questions of influence or dependency; it allows us to trace how processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation have shaped the material's meanings across time. In early 19<sup>th</sup> century Greece, marble was territorialised as a sign of national continuity and cultural legitimacy. At the same time, its alignment with neoclassical aesthetics linked it to broader European epistemologies that defined the terms of visibility and value. Yet, this choice could imply a tacit endorsement of Western ideals in defining Greek identity. Was Greece, through its architectural materials and styles, unconsciously affirming a Western perspective that cast it as a cultural “other”, a modern state aspiring to meet European expectations? One way to rethink this narrative is by exploring the concept of “indigenous modernities.”<sup>239</sup> While 19<sup>th</sup> century Greek architects and politicians may have drawn inspiration from Western neoclassicism and modernism, could Pentelic marble, utilised in a variety of architectural forms, mediate a more complex Greek modernity? Perhaps it materialises not just Western paradigms but also local social and environmental realities. This approach reveals Pentelic marble's significance beyond mere affirmation of Western values, offering a nuanced interpretation that highlights a genealogy of Greek agency, creativity, and cultural resilience.

Edward Said's work on the power dynamics of knowledge invites us to reconsider the cultural hierarchies that shaped Greek neoclassicism/modernism. This dynamic is not only discursive but also material, insofar as architectural surfaces participate in determining whose knowledge becomes visible, authoritative, and preservable. European architects and intellectuals largely influenced the meanings assigned to Pentelic marble, often disregarding the insights of local artisans, labourers, and communities who knew the material intimately. Were these historical figures viewed as equals in constructing a modern Greek identity, or were they sidelined in the “authorised” version of Greek heritage promoted by European classicists? Exploring these overlooked perspectives foregrounds the experiences of Greek craftspeople and questions narratives largely shaped by Western frameworks. The conservation practices applied to Pentelic marble structures today further raise postcolonial ethical questions. Greek heritage preservation often follows European frameworks that may overlook local environmental and cultural contexts. To “respect the other” here would mean acknowledging Greek perspectives and adapting conservation methods to honour these specificities. A more attentive approach to context could

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<sup>239</sup> Jyoti Hosagrahar, *Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism* (Routledge, 2012).

allow Greece's neoclassical and modernist heritage to be appreciated on its own terms, moving beyond the postcolonial tendency to impose Western solutions. Considering marble through these multiple perspectives reveals deeper questions about power, identity, and heritage. Could we see this material not merely as a link to ancient Greece but as a site of cultural negotiation and hybridity, enacting diverse modernities and identities? These overlapping processes suggest that Pentelic marble does not simply carry meaning across contexts but participates in their production, modulation, and occasional disruption through shifting processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation. This inquiry reimagines Pentelic marble as a complex, living testament to the intersecting forces that have shaped Greece's past and continue to influence its present.

Does adopting modernist principles inherently mean accepting Western dominance? This is a complex issue, and postcolonial theory, particularly Edward Said's insights, underscores how ideas of superiority are deeply embedded in our thinking. A potential path forward lies in what Jyoti Hosagrahar calls indigenous modernities. In her book "Indigenous Modernities: Negotiating Architecture and Urbanism," she examines forms of modernity in 19<sup>th</sup> century Delhi, arguing that the distinction between tradition and modernity, which often casts the modern as Western and the traditional as non-Western, is far less stable than it appears. Examining cities like Delhi reveals a blending of these elements into hybrid forms, which express unique modernities shaped by local contexts rather than strictly Western ideals. Said's question, "How can one truly know and respect the Other?" remains central. He contends that efforts to understand the Other often risk aligning with intentions to control or shape, rather than genuinely engage. Why study architecture and neighbourhoods abroad? Should Western preservation standards, technologies, or epistemologies be applied universally, without regard for local context? With colonial-era architecture, the risk lies in assuming that Western expertise automatically produces correct or legitimate outcomes. Yet, rejecting Western methods entirely may not address the complexities of modern heritage elsewhere. The deeper challenge for architects, historians, and theorists is not simply to balance engagement with "respect," but to confront the limitations of Western frameworks in apprehending the technical, aesthetic, and cosmological diversity of other cultures. Engagement must move beyond management or tolerance toward an attunement that recognises alternative ways of knowing and doing, without subsuming them under universalised standards.

The preceding chapters have examined the transformation of Pentelic marble from a stabilised classical object into a modern surface. Whereas the *Classical Object* traced the historical production of marble's coherence through discourses of antiquity, nationhood, and cultural authority, the focus here has shifted to the

mechanisms through which that authority circulates. Marble no longer appears primarily as a monumental object anchored to a particular historical origin. Instead, it operates through surfaces, interfaces, and regimes of visibility that mediate relationships between institutions, subjects, and broader political imaginaries. This transformation involved neither a rejection of antiquity nor a simple continuation of it. Rather, antiquity was repeatedly reformulated through modern architectural languages, urban developments, and international networks. In Chapter 2.1, *Recasting Antiquity*, classical reference persisted as abstraction, translation, and circulation. Marble continued to carry the authority of the classical past even as modern architecture sought to distance itself from historicist representation. The material's significance increasingly depended upon its capacity to operate across different contexts while maintaining the appearance of continuity. In Chapter 2.2, *Urban Modernities*, this process unfolded at the scale of the expanding city. Marble moved beyond monuments and state institutions into apartment buildings, public infrastructure, commercial developments, and everyday spaces. Through these transformations, Pentelic marble contributed to the formation of new urban identities while preserving connections to older narratives of Hellenism and national belonging. What emerged was not a singular modernity but a series of negotiated modernities in which local histories and global architectural forms became entangled in different ways. In Chapter 2.3, *Colonial Modernity*, attention turned to the geopolitical dimensions of these processes. The marble surface became increasingly implicated in institutional architectures extending beyond the national frame. Embassies, government buildings, museums, hotels, and diplomatic infrastructures mobilised Pentelic marble as a material of legitimacy, authority, and cultural distinction. Its whiteness, apparent neutrality, and historical associations helped project visions of universality that often concealed the political, colonial, and labour conditions underpinning them. The surface, therefore, emerged as an active site through which power organised visibility and organised the terms under which architecture could appear coherent and self-evident.

Across these chapters, recurring concepts acquired new functions. Territorialisation and deterritorialisation no longer referred primarily to the formation of a classical object but to the circulation and reorganisation of meanings across different institutional and spatial contexts. Whiteness appeared not simply as an aesthetic ideal but as a surface condition through which authority became naturalised. Coloniality operated less through direct domination than through regimes of visibility and representation that rendered particular forms of knowledge, architecture, and historical continuity legitimate while marginalising others. The surface thus became a crucial analytical site where material, political, and epistemic processes converged. What emerges from this genealogy is that modern surfaces organise perception, structure experience, and stabilise particular arrangements of power. Their apparent

neutrality depends upon the concealment of the material processes, labour relations, extraction histories, and geopolitical conditions that make them possible. The smoother and more transparent the surface appears, the more effectively these conditions recede from view. Surface, in this sense, is not the absence of depth but one of the principal mechanisms through which depth is managed, reordered, and obscured. Yet this concealment can never be complete. The authority projected by surfaces remains dependent on material conditions that extend beyond their representational functions. Beneath the polished veneer of institutions, monuments, and diplomatic architecture, the geological formations, extractive practices, labour histories, environmental transformations, and material processes from which marble emerges persist. These dimensions do not disappear when marble becomes a surface. They remain within it, exerting pressures that periodically disrupt its claims to permanence, neutrality, and coherence. For this reason, the genealogy of Pentelic marble cannot end at the level of visibility alone. If the classical object revealed how marble became coherent and the modern surface exposed how that coherence circulates, a further question remains unresolved: what becomes visible when attention shifts away from representation altogether and toward the material processes that sustain it? While these discussions have largely remained at the level of architectural surfaces and the regimes of visibility they establish, the materiality of Pentelic marble extends beyond this register. Beneath the surface, the material does not simply support or carry form but participates in processes that unfold at different temporal and spatial scales. In moving from surface to substance, from architectural articulation to material composition, attention shifts toward the granular and molecular dynamics, the stone's minute particles, through which marble itself becomes active. It is within this interstice between form and matter that Pentelic marble can be reconsidered, down to the geological particles through which its genealogical forces operate.

# 3 Material Particle

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The movement towards the material particle emerged through theoretical questioning, archival research, and repeated visits to Mount Pentelicus. Throughout the previous parts, Pentelic marble appeared as a classical object and as a modern surface. It emerged within systems of representation, institutions of cultural authority, architectural programmes, and political projects that rendered it visible as a coherent material. Yet encounters with the mountain complicated these formulations. The quarry presented a different marble. What appeared there was not the stable material of architectural history. Instead, marble emerged through fractured terrain, extraction debris, dust, abandoned cuts, machine traces, unfinished blocks, tailings, and dispersed residues. The mountain revealed a material condition that exceeded both the monumental object and the architectural surface. Stability itself appeared less as a given property than as a temporary achievement continuously produced through extraction, transport, cutting, polishing, maintenance, and representation. What had previously appeared coherent began to fragment. The photographs included in this part emerged from these encounters. They are not presented as documentary evidence that confirms a pre-existing argument, nor as illustrations of concepts developed elsewhere. Rather, they record situations that redirected attention. Walking through active and abandoned quarries repeatedly displaced the scale at which marble had previously been understood. Monumental narratives became difficult to sustain when confronted with extraction scars, accumulations of debris, exhausted quarry faces, abandoned machinery, and the fine dust that settles on vegetation, equipment, bodies, and stone alike. The question gradually shifted from what marble represents to what marble does. Field encounters also complicated distinctions between observer and observed. Marble was no longer encountered as a finished architectural material but as an ongoing process. Quarry walls disclosed geological formations spanning temporalities far beyond architectural history. Fragments underfoot revealed the material losses required to produce monumental coherence. Dust, perhaps the most ubiquitous presence on the mountain, resisted classification altogether. It settled across human and nonhuman bodies alike, crossed property boundaries, circulated through atmospheric conditions, and remained indifferent to the categories through which architecture typically organises matter. As such, the particle became less a scale of analysis than a challenge to established ways of seeing.

This shift does not abandon the concerns of the previous parts. Questions of territorialisation, coloniality, labour, authority, and material meaning remain central. What changes is the level at which they become visible. If the classical object revealed how architectural authority is stabilised and the modern surface revealed how that authority circulates, the particle reveals what both formations depend upon but tend to obscure. Extraction, fragmentation, exhaustion, residue, environmental transformation, and dispersed material agencies move into the foreground. Processes that appeared secondary from the perspective of the monument become central from the perspective of the quarry. The particle should therefore not be understood as the smallest possible component of marble. Nor does it function as the final level of analysis. Rather, it names a different orientation toward materiality. It directs attention toward processes rather than forms, dispersals rather than boundaries, and relations rather than identities. At this scale, Pentelic marble no longer appears as a stable object carrying meanings across time, nor as a surface organising visibility and representation. It appears instead as a dynamic material field in which geological, ecological, social, technical, and political processes continuously intersect. The chapters that follow explore this field through three interconnected movements. Chapter 3.1, *Matter in Motion*, examines fragmentation, residue, dust, and dispersed agencies that unsettle the coherence established in earlier formations. Chapter 3.2, *Entangled Grounds*, turns to the entanglements between human practices and geological processes visible across the landscape of Mount Pentelicus. Chapter 3.3, *Mediterranean Materialism*, develops the framework of Mediterranean materialism proposed by this dissertation, situating Pentelic marble within broader questions of extraction, environmental transformation, historical multiplicity, and material becoming. What emerges from these investigations is not a deeper layer hidden beneath the object and the surface. Rather, the particle discloses the instability that had always been present within them. The mountain does not reveal a more authentic marble than the monument or the facade. It reveals the material processes through which monuments and facades become possible in the first place. Seen from the perspective of the particle, coherence appears not as the natural condition of marble but as a temporary and contingent accomplishment, continuously produced and continuously undone.

## 3.1 Matter in Motion

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### 3.1.1 Dust and Residue

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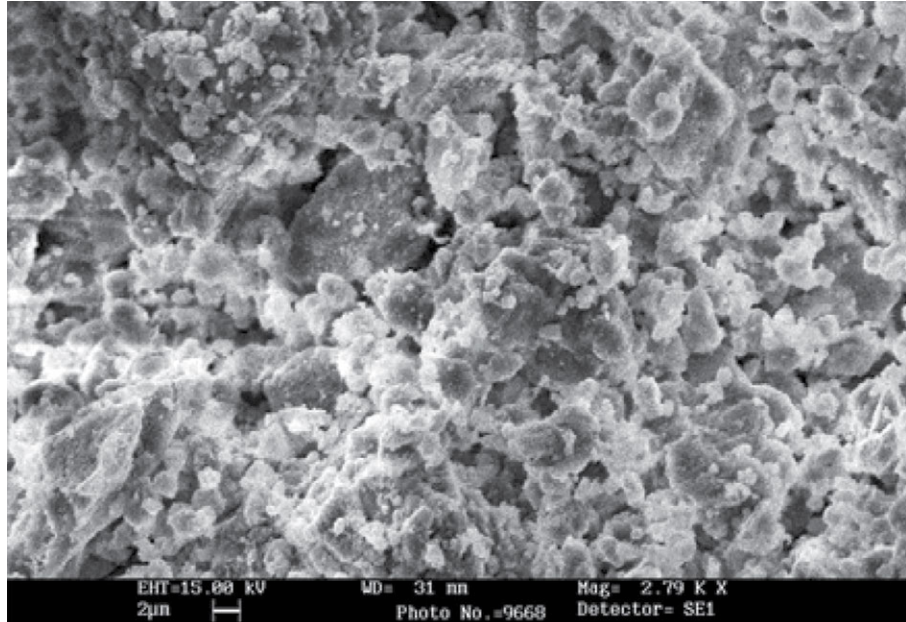


FIG. 3.1 SEM image of marble powder. Scanning electron microscopy by Mehmet Kirgiz, 2012.

Moving from the regimes of architectural surface discussed in the previous chapter, attention now shifts toward the material interior of Pentelic marble, where the conditions that sustain those surfaces begin to register at a different scale (Fig. 3.1). What appeared as continuity, clarity, and neutrality at the level of bounded form can be reconsidered as the effect of processes unfolding within the material itself, unsettling the stability of the architectural object that the surface seemed to guarantee. In this transition, the marble is no longer approached primarily as a surface that mediates visibility, but as a field of particulate relations in which geological formation, extraction, and transformation leave traces that are both physical and genealogical. The interstice between surface and substance thus opens onto a domain where meaning is not only represented but materially produced, and

where the organisation of whiteness, legibility, and coherence can be re-examined as the outcome of processes that operate beneath and through the architectural envelope. This shift in scale does not occur solely as an analytical decision. It is precipitated by moments when the surface fails to maintain its coherence: when cutting reveals veins that deflect the intended line, when polishing produces uneven reflectance due to crystalline variation, and when extraction fractures propagate along planes that exceed the block's geometry. In these instances, marble does not simply receive form but conditions its possibility, redirecting the operations imposed upon it. This conditioning constitutes a genealogy of material resistance. The move toward the particle thus emerges not from a desire to look closer, but from the necessity of accounting for material behaviours that cannot be contained within the regime of surface.

Marble was reformulated as the material carrier of an Aryanised antiquity, abstracted from its geological formation, ecological entanglements, and historical crossings. This reformulation produced a specific form of erasure that becomes visible at the particulate and molecular scales. The erasure does not concern Greece as territory or nation, but the systematic exclusion of modern Greece as a material and genealogical present from dominant regimes of classical expression. When Pentelic marble is apprehended at the scale of the particle, its whiteness is materially conditioned by processes of selection, extraction, and refinement that systematically exclude heterogeneity at both mineral and cultural levels. The conditions that produce it are rooted in a long history of political and epistemic marginalisation, through which modern Greece has been positioned as formally autonomous yet materially and economically dependent. Within this configuration, Greece is repeatedly collapsed into antiquity, while the contemporary quarry landscape, its dust, debris, fractured ecologies, and labouring bodies, is rendered invisible. Even as Pentelic marble circulates globally, it does so as an ancient substance, its surface detached from the present ground, practices, and relations from which it is extracted. At the particle level, the mechanics of this erasure become more legible, revealing an interface where geopolitical abstraction meets material behaviour. Its crystalline fragments are produced through extraction and processing conditions that bind together monumental ambitions and the dispersed, often invisible labour required to realise them. The whiteness of Pentelic marble appears not to be an intrinsic or neutral property, but rather a condensed ideological residue, shaped by 18<sup>th</sup> century constructions of classical purity and racialised aesthetics. Heterogeneity was suppressed both materially and conceptually, as mineral variation, sedimentary complexity, and cultural multiplicity were effaced. This process parallels the genealogical erasure of Semitic and Egyptian contributions to

European culture,<sup>240</sup> enabling the fabrication of a supposedly homogeneous classical lineage. Examined microscopically, however, the marble particle unsettles this logic of purification, exposing the dispersed particles through which variation and accumulation persist. Its crystalline structure records a genealogy of accumulation rather than origin, variation rather than essence. At this scale, whiteness emerges not as a given, but as the unstable effect of cutting, grinding, and polishing processes that are themselves conditioned by crystalline orientation, fracture patterns, and differential mineral composition. In the terms proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, this process can be understood as a molecular deterritorialisation, in which marble is loosened from its classical coding through the material behaviour of its particles rather than solely through abstraction. Modern Greece does not disappear within the particle, but persists in a dispersed and sedimented form, no longer a monumental object but a distributed material presence as dust, residue, and particulate matter. The white particle, therefore, interrupts the reterritorialisation of antiquity, allowing Pentelic marble to re-enter history not as an idealised classical substance, but as active matter entangled with power, exclusion, and ongoing processes of deterritorialisation.

Although the German philologists and art historians who constructed the neoclassical model of Greek culture were not themselves military colonisers, their work nevertheless functioned as an ideological extension of European global hegemony. Through systems of classification, aesthetic hierarchies, and genealogical narratives, they produced frameworks that shaped how Greece and its associated materials could be perceived and valued. Their scholarship operated within what Deleuze and Guattari describe as an abstract machine:<sup>241</sup> a diffuse apparatus that organises knowledge, representation, and material flows without requiring direct territorial domination. Pentelic marble, once abstracted into the classical ideal, became part of a genealogy of classical abstraction. Its celebrated whiteness and solidity encoded notions of cultural purity and civilisational origin, while the labour, geology, and economic conditions of its extraction receded from view. At the particle scale, however, the political economy underlying this system is exposed through the distribution of fragments, dust, and waste that exceed formal systems of valuation and recognition. The circulation of Pentelic marble expresses what Michael Herzfeld has described as crypto-colonialism,<sup>242</sup> a condition in which states

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<sup>240</sup> Michael Herzfeld, "The Absent Presence: Discourses of Crypto-colonialism," in *Enchantments of Modernity* (Routledge India, 2020), 900.

<sup>241</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 141–42, 511–13.

<sup>242</sup> Herzfeld, "The Absent Presence: Discourses of Crypto-colonialism," 900.

formally recognised as independent nevertheless remain structurally subordinated within global hierarchies of knowledge, taste, and economic power. At the particle scale, the crypto-colonial logic underlying this system becomes visible as a genealogy of dependency and displacement, whereby territories such as modern Greece occupied a liminal position: neither fully colonised nor fully sovereign, but functioning as cultural and economic buffer zones between imperial centres and regions still imagined as peripheral or “untamed.” They are compelled to assert political autonomy while remaining materially dependent, their cultural and natural resources interpreted primarily through foreign scholarly frameworks and aesthetic standards. Crypto-colonialism can thus be understood as the systematic exclusion of certain countries from the circulatory advantages of global modernity. This condition leaves traces not only in economic and political structures but also in knowledge production.

Within this regime, Pentelic marble appears as a paradoxical agent. Although quarried from Greek ground, it circulates within a system in which its value, meaning, and legitimacy are largely defined elsewhere, an alien ideological reconfiguration that registers as a historical and epistemic injury. Its material autonomy is therefore constrained by ideological structuring. Pentelic marble, when considered at the particle scale, expresses this exclusion: dust, fragments, and residues circulate invisibly, while the polished, monumental forms claim universal recognition. A similar pattern emerges in architectural historiography. Former colonies were often elevated as central objects of theoretical documentation, their social and cultural forms meticulously catalogued and interpreted. By contrast, crypto-colonies like Greece occupied a more ambiguous position; their material and cultural contributions were overlooked or marginalised within dominant scholarly frameworks if produced by local architects lacking Western education. While this distinction should not be overstated, and while the dynamics of global knowledge production have shifted over the last two decades, much of the theoretical labour conducted within crypto-colonies remains dispersed and peripheral, like the marble particle itself: present but not fully legible in the canon. Unlike colonial histories that became legible through established postcolonial frameworks, the histories of crypto-colonies often remain only partially visible. They persist as dispersed material, archival, and conceptual residues whose significance emerges indirectly, much like the marble particle itself. In this sense, the particulate scale of Pentelic marble records this ambivalence. They testify to a reality that official representations obscure: a landscape of extraction, labour, and dependency folded into the polished surface of classical whiteness through processes of systematic depigmentation and erasure. Modern Greece, like the marble particle, exists simultaneously as visible and invisible, present in matter yet absent from dominant narratives, its historical complexity reduced to a curated classical ideal serving a broader project of cultural domination. The particulate

scale of Pentelic marble, therefore, operates as a site of material verification, where processes of extraction, fragmentation, and residue make perceptible what architectural representation suppresses.

But can we speak of a neocolonial Europe, and if so, how does this manifest materially? If we shift our attention from states to the circulation of Pentelic marble, the question takes on a different resonance. In the late 1950s, when half of the founding states of the European Economic Community were still colonial powers, the idea of a “colonial Europe” was not purely abstract: it was inscribed in institutions, trade networks, and material flows that participated in a genealogy of European expansion.<sup>243</sup> Marble extracted from Greek quarries, ancient and modern, participated indirectly in these circuits, its value and meaning shaped by international agreements, architectural fashions, and markets controlled from Western Europe. The institutionalisation of these relationships was not limited to economic contracts; it extended into the architectural and material realms as well. Pentelic marble’s monumental surfaces, exported and reproduced in European capitals, carried both aesthetic prestige and embedded hierarchies of control. At the particle scale, however, these flows reveal the contradictions of neocolonial ordering: fragments, dust, and discarded blocks circulate outside formal recognition, documenting a continuous, dispersed labour and architectural practice that European institutions never fully acknowledged. In this sense, the particle renders visible what monumental object obscures; its dispersed particles tracing the material and political dependencies hidden beneath classical whiteness.

The question of neocolonialism is embedded within the broader postcolonial agenda, and its dynamics can be traced materially through Pentelic marble. Just as postcolonial studies emphasise the complexity and variety of coloniser–colonised relations, the circulation of marble reveals similar entanglements at both architectural and particulate scales. Decolonisation, whether political or cultural, did not dissolve the genealogies embedded in the material itself. The extraction, trade, and deployment of Pentelic marble were structured within international frameworks that constrained the agency of modern Greece: quarries, workshops, and architectural projects were shaped by pre-existing economic, aesthetic, and institutional circuits designed for European benefit. Control, in this sense, frequently operated through indirect channels. Political independence did not automatically translate into material autonomy; instead, domination persisted through architectural and cultural norms, global markets, and professional hierarchies.

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<sup>243</sup> Knud Erik Jørgensen, “A Multilateralist Role for the EU?,” in *The European Union’s Roles in International Politics* (Routledge, 2006), 30–46.

The marble itself participates in this layered structure. Monumental surfaces and public buildings express prestige and authority, while fragments, offcuts, dust, and residual particles testify to the dispersed, often unacknowledged labour that sustained them. These residual particles reveal the subtler, persistent effects of hegemonic structures in which power endures in material, institutional, and epistemic forms. Even as modern Greece gained formal independence, it inherited circuits and conventions of architectural practice, quarrying, and material deployment that had been shaped under conditions of asymmetrical power. Pentelic marble, when examined at the particle scale, preserves this history in dispersed form, registering the persistence of these structures within the material itself. In this way, the white marble particle exposes the continuity of hierarchical relations in subtle but perceptible forms, mapping the endurance of core–periphery dynamics and reshaped coloniser–colonised relations within architectural matter.

Viewed through the lens of Pentelic marble, the movements of the European Union can be read as asymmetric exertions of power,<sup>244</sup> shaping which architectural materials, labour, and forms are visible or valorised, and which remain peripheral. Core states, at the centre of policy and historiography, establish hierarchies that position others, including modern Greece, as subordinate within both material and epistemic circuits. Marble extracted from Greek quarries circulates globally, yet its monumental deployment is interpreted primarily through Eurocentric aesthetic frameworks. At the same time, dispersed fragments, dust, and local architectural practices are rendered peripheral and largely invisible. The emerging spatial imaginaries of core and periphery are never neutral; they inscribe hierarchy in both built form and material practice, positioning territories whose quarries, artisans, and architectural labour do not conform to canonical European narratives at the margins of architectural recognition and value. Scholarship centred on the European Union, with its policy-oriented focus, often reproduces this framing by positioning Europe as the active driver of architectural history while overlooking the historical conditions and material foundations that underpin it. Redressing this imbalance and decentring Eurocentrism requires attention to the material and architectural “Other”:<sup>245</sup> the quarries, particles, and dispersed labour that produce marble architecture beyond the core’s gaze. In this way, the European empire continues to be constructed not only through policy or ideology, but through the circulation, valorisation, and monumentalisation of material itself. Pentelic marble, in its monumental surfaces

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<sup>244</sup> Kyriakos Mikelis, “Neocolonial Power Europe? Postcolonial Thought and the Eurozone Crisis,” *French Journal for Media Research* 5 (2016): 5, <https://frenchjournalformediaresearch.com:443/lovel-1.0/main/index.php?id=753>.

<sup>245</sup> Hartmut Behr, “EUrope–History, Violence and” Peripheries”, *Rev. Eur. Stud.* 4 (2012): 7–17.

and particulate residues, bears witness to both the consolidation of power and the ongoing marginalisation of peripheral labour, landscapes, and knowledge. At the particle scale, what monumental form conceals becomes visible: the subtle persistence of hierarchies embedded in matter, architecture, and the distribution of recognition across Europe and its peripheries.

The issue extends beyond a particular form of economic governance to the material and architectural interface through which asymmetrical power is enacted, in which certain nation-states occupy subordinate positions within global and regional circuits. Modern Greece exemplifies this condition: extracted Pentelic marble circulates in international architectural markets and monuments, yet the nation itself frequently appears at the lower end of hierarchical networks of decision-making, valuation, and recognition. A recent illustration of this dynamic is captured in the “EU states as debt colonies” argument, notably the designation of Greece as a “debt colony.”<sup>246</sup> From the perspective of marble and architecture, parallels emerge between these economic pressures and historical mechanisms of imperial control. Just as imperial regimes structured the extraction, circulation, and monumentalisation of marble to consolidate authority, contemporary bureaucratic, economic, and intellectual interventions similarly regulate and constrain Greece’s architectural and material agency, through public procurement frameworks that prioritise cost efficiency over material specificity, heritage regimes that stabilise marble as a classical surface while obscuring contemporary extraction, and construction economies that fragment labour and marginalise local craft practices. Loan arrangements, austerity measures, and conditionalities are not neutral instruments; they function as structural mechanisms that shape what is built, which materials are valorised, and which architectural labour is visible. At the particle scale, this becomes evident: dust, offcuts, and fragments of Pentelic marble circulate quietly, preserving a genealogy of localised labour and resource extraction. The material white particle thus reveals the subtle continuities between past colonial frameworks and present forms of asymmetric governance, registering both the violence and the persistence of hierarchical control embedded in matter itself.

The neocolonial dynamics of European integration are also legible in the material and architectural production of the so-called “European South,” a category whose discursive and material contours have been traced by the Greek architect Lila Leontidou.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Nikos Kotzias, *Greece: A Debt Colony*, Patakis, (Athens, 2013), 288.

<sup>247</sup> Lila Leontidou, “The Crisis and Its Discourses: Quasi-Orientalist Attacks on Mediterranean Urban Spontaneity, Informality and Joie de Vivre,” *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action* 18, no. 4-5 (2014): 552, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2014.939477>.

Within this framework, the South is constructed through a North–South distinction that operates not only economically but also culturally and architecturally. While monumental marble surfaces circulate internationally and accrue prestige in Northern Europe, the quarries, workshops, and local architectural labour of the South remain largely peripheral. At the scale of particles, dust, chips, offcuts, and other materials often treated as quarrying waste, the extraction, labour, and material flows that sustain grand facades elsewhere become visible, even as the region that produced them is rhetorically and materially marginalised. Globalisation and post-crisis neoliberal policies have not dissolved these asymmetries. Rather, they reproduce uneven development and inequality, shaping both the conditions of marble production and its architectural deployment. Power is exercised not only through formal regulation but also through epistemic and material hierarchies, in which architectural labour is recognised, marble is valorised, and which built forms define aesthetic authority. In this sense, the European South is positioned as the Other of the North: excluded in representation, yet a necessary counterpart within systems governed by rules and standards designed for Northern benefit. At the same time, Pentelic dust accumulates as a material consequence of ongoing labour, creativity, and ecological transformation that these hierarchies obscure. The material white particle, in turn, reveals the invisible yet enduring entanglement of knowledge, power, and geography, recording a genealogy of matter's marginalisation and resistance. Finally, the persistence of neocolonial mentalities and practices within the European Union can be traced through the circulation, deployment, and valuation of Pentelic marble. Sovereignty, at both the national and material level, is shaped not only by formal political arrangements but by the hierarchies embedded in architectural and economic infrastructures. The EU does not emerge as an inherently anti-colonial entity; its policies, markets, and aesthetic regimes reproduce neocolonial patterns, transforming certain states into debt colonies, while valorising Northern architectural forms, monumental marble, and design norms over the labour, quarries, and workshops of the South. At the particle scale, these dynamics take material form in dust, fragments, and offcuts, whose dispersion and accumulation register the uneven conditions of extraction, labour, and valuation. Pentelic marble, in its monumental facades and particulate residues alike, thus becomes a site for assessing the subtle continuities of neocolonial control, the asymmetries of recognition, and the enduring hierarchies of value between a Northern core and a Southern periphery. Recognising this enables critical contemplation on the possibility of a postcolonial Europe, one attentive to the genealogies of material, architectural, and epistemic domination still at work.



FIG. 3.2 Diamond wire cutting at Mount Pentellicus. Photograph by the author, 2025.

Human activity is increasingly legible not only at the scale of landscapes but also within the very matter of materials, including Pentelic marble. Just as humans are recognised as geomorphic agents capable of reshaping the Earth's crust, so too do quarrying, crafting, and circulation render Pentelic marble an active participant in planetary and cultural transformations. Following an expanded interpretation of Bruno Latour's notion of the critical zone,<sup>248</sup> the marble's existence can be considered across multiple strata: from the visible, polished surface that mediates human perception, down through its granular and particulate structure, to the bedrock and the geologic processes that formed it (Fig. 3.2). In this sense, the whiteness of Pentelic marble at the particulate level is neither static nor merely aesthetic; it is materially produced through extraction, abrasion, and transport processes that reorganise its crystalline structure and surface reflectivity. Latour's

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<sup>248</sup> Alexandra Arènes, Bruno Latour, and Jérôme Gaillardet, "Giving Depth to the Surface: An Exercise in the Gaia-graphy of Critical Zones," *The Anthropocene Review* 5, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019618782257>, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1177/2053019618782257>.

expanded notion of the critical zone unsettles the idea of the Earth as a thin, living skin by emphasising its thickness and depth. This perspective allows Pentelic marble to be understood not as a passive geological substrate beneath culture, but as part of a vertically entangled material field in which atmospheric conditions, quarrying practices, and mineral transformations intersect at the scale of the particle. The granular particles of marble operate as sites of ongoing transformation, where chemical reactions, mechanical stresses, and environmental exposure alter crystalline bonds, fracture patterns, and surface behaviour. Concerns associated with the Anthropocene, such as fragility and reactivity, are materially enacted at the scale of the marble particle, where each fragment participates in ongoing genealogies of construction and decomposition. Pentelic marble, in its molecular and particulate form, is entangled with humans yet exerts material constraints and deviations that shape how it can be worked, transformed, and circulated, resisting complete capture by ideals of purity, classical beauty, or modernist surface logic. This agency does not appear at the level of interpretation but in the interruption of practice. During extraction, drill holes and wedge placements intended to produce regular blocks often trigger fracture propagation along pre-existing crystalline planes, producing irregular breaks and unusable fragments. During polishing, variations in grain size and mineral composition result in uneven reflectance, requiring repeated adjustments of pressure, speed, and abrasive sequence. Even at the scale of dust, particle dispersion follows the material properties of brittleness and cohesion, rendering containment attempts futile. In these instances, marble does not simply undergo transformation but conditions how transformation can occur. Its agency becomes operative precisely where human intention encounters material limits, deviations, and resistances that demand continual recalibration.

This perspective aligns with the “geologic turn” identified by writers Elisabeth Ellsworth, Jamie Kruse,<sup>249</sup> and Alla Ivanchikova,<sup>250</sup> which emphasises attunement to deep temporalities and interspecies interactions between the living/non-living.<sup>251</sup> Pentelic marble offers a particularly potent lens in this regard: its particles are produced through processes that bind human and non-human transformations within the same material continuum, bridging the temporalities of ancient quarries, classical monuments, and contemporary architectural projects. At this scale,

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<sup>249</sup> Elisabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse, *Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life* (Punctum books, 2012).

<sup>250</sup> Alla Ivanchikova, “Geomediations in the Anthropocene: Fictions of the Geologic Turn,” *C21 Literature: Journal of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Writings* 6, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.16995/c21.35>, <https://dx.doi.org/10.16995/c21.35>.

<sup>251</sup> Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

whiteness is no longer an abstract ideal but a condition emerging from uneven geologic and sociopolitical genealogies, a granular effect of extraction, circulation, and sedimentation processes that unevenly remove impurities and reorganise mineral composition (Fig. 3.3). It is precisely through its particulate form that Pentelic marble escapes ideological totalisation and forces a field of material experimentation, as variations in grain, fracture, and hardness require continuous adjustment in cutting, polishing, and assembly techniques, where each particle, fragment, and dust mote contributes to the ongoing negotiation between human design, geologic process, and environmental contingency. In sum, Pentelic marble at the particle scale demonstrates how matter itself participates in shaping and reshaping the world. Human intervention is evident but no longer dominating; instead, it is entangled with the material behaviours of marble's particles, which circulate, react, and endure in ways that exceed and redirect human intentions. The modern reshaping of material landscapes is thus inseparable from the granular dynamics of marble, whose whiteness, fragility, and persistence are simultaneously physical, historical, and political. By attending to these particles, we acknowledge a decentered, decolonial materiality, one in which the microcosm of marble is part of the macrocosm of earthly and human transformations.



FIG. 3.3 Marble blocks prepared for export. Photograph by the author, 2025.

Viewed through the particulate life of Pentelic marble, architecture can be understood not as an autonomous object, but as a form of terraforming enacted through the mobilisation of geological matter. Buildings are not autonomous objects imposed upon the Earth but material reconfigurations of it: accumulations of displaced stone, fractured minerals, and reorganised genealogies of strata.<sup>252</sup> Each architectural form emerges through acts of cutting, removal, grinding, and transport that transform bedrock into fragments, dust, and assembled mass. In this sense, architecture does not merely sit on the Earth; it is composed of the Earth, reworked at multiple scales through surface transformations and subsurface excavation. At the scale of the marble particle, every building corresponds to an excavation elsewhere.<sup>253</sup> The polished surface of Pentelic marble carries within it the void of the quarry, a genealogy of absence produced by extraction, and the residues of cutting and abrasion. Architecture thus expresses geological formations materially: each structure functions as a displaced pit, while the city becomes a composite terrain of hollows and accumulations. The whiteness of marble at this scale registers these movements as a genealogical material condition, formed through the grinding and circulation of mineral matter rather than through ideals of permanence or monumentality.

Urban space, from this perspective, is an assemblage of mineral flows. Pentelic marble particles move from mountain to quarry, from block to fragment, from architectural surface to dust, entering complex supply chains that redistribute geological matter across vast distances. These circulations produce a stratified urban genealogy of displaced geologies in which materials from disparate extraction sites are recomposed into dense architectural fields, often severed from their original sites. The city appears as a condensed geological formation, yet one that systematically erases the landscapes and labour conditions that made it possible, stabilising urban form as a unified object detached from its extractive origins. Architecture's participation in extractive economies becomes unavoidable at this scale. When marble is apprehended as a particle rather than a surface, the discipline's role in sustaining global regimes of extraction comes into sharper focus. Pentelic marble's particulate afterlives expose architecture not as a neutral cultural practice but as a material agent embedded in uneven geographies of resource depletion and environmental transformation. Attending to these granular processes

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<sup>252</sup> Pierre Alain Trévelo and Antoine Viger-Kohler, *The Earth is an Architecture* (Spector Books, 2021).

<sup>253</sup> Nicholas Korody and Lyosha Kritsouk, *Non-Extractive Architecture vol. 1 on Designing Without Depletion* (Moscow: V-A-C Foundation, 2021).

demands a reconsideration of architectural responsibility, one that acknowledges how design decisions are inseparable from the ongoing reshaping of geological matter and the political conditions under which it is mobilised.

Reading the particular life of Pentelic marble, the geological dimension of architecture demands an expanded understanding of what architecture is and where it occurs. Architecture can no longer be confined to the moment of construction or to the building's visible form. Still, it must encompass the full sequence of material processes that marble undergoes: from geological formation and quarrying, through cutting, transport, and assembly, to abrasion, decay, and waste. At the scale of the particle, these processes remain materially present within architecture itself, embedding a genealogy of environmental transformation and social labour into the very substance of the built form. Pentelic marble exposes architecture as an inherently extractive practice. Its whiteness is produced through the removal, fragmentation, and displacement that precede architectural appearance. Architecture's expertise lies not only in design but in concealment:<sup>254</sup> the systematic masking of the vast extraction networks that make buildings possible. Marble particles perform this concealment with particular efficiency, presenting continuity, purity, and stability while materially depending on dispersed sites of quarrying, labour, and infrastructural transport. At the intersections of mineral flows, buildings composed of Pentelic marble are sustained by distant landscapes that remain absent from architectural expression. Each polished block or slab rests upon a network of excavated voids elsewhere, binding architecture to holes in mountains, discarded fragments, and residual dust. In this sense, buildings do not sit on the solidity of their immediate sites but on a dispersed field of extractions that spans multiple genealogies of geography and temporality. The marble particle is produced through these absences, as extraction removes mass, redistributes material, and leaves measurable voids across quarry landscapes. Pentelic marble allows this expansion to be understood materially rather than metaphorically. The built environment can be reimagined as a geological map of interruptions and removals: quarries carved into mountains, infrastructures cut through landscapes, and waste deposits accumulating beyond sites of use. Seen through marble's particulate afterlives, architecture appears not as a collection of stable objects but as a dynamic system of material flows and gaps, in which construction and extraction are inseparable. This reorientation challenges the discipline to confront a genealogy of extractive violence and to recognise that architectural form is inseparable from the geological and political conditions that produce it.

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<sup>254</sup> Korody and Kritsouk, *Non-Extractive Architecture vol. 1 on Designing Without Depletion*.

When read through the particulate condition of Pentelic marble, Western modes of architectural construction appear as practices grounded in the systematic disavowal of their material conditions of possibility. The apparent autonomy and cleanliness of architectural form rely on the suppression of colonial histories, racialised labour, extractivism, and environmental contamination that underpin the production of building materials. Marble's whiteness, long mobilised to stabilise ideals of classical continuity and cultural authority, operates as a material screen that obscures the uneven geographies of extraction and pollution, enabling architectural production. At the scale of the particle, these suppressed conditions become materially legible as genealogies of quarrying, displacement, and abrasion that precede architectural appearance. The concentration of planetary resources within the built environment is sustained by an economic model rooted in colonial expansion and maintained through capitalist modes of extraction that alienate both labour and land. Pentelic marble's circulation from mountain to quarry, from block to fragment, from surface to dust exposes how architectural consumption depends on asymmetrical flows of material, energy, and value. These flows displace environmental degradation and social harm onto distant landscapes and future temporalities, allowing architectural economies to externalise their material costs. Marble's particulate afterlives materialise what architectural accounting systematically excludes: the unpaid ecological and labour debts embedded in each block, slab, tile, and polished surface. This structural disconnection between architectural economies and extractive practices produces an unsustainable model detached from material reality.<sup>255</sup> Pentelic marble offers a material counterpoint to this abstraction. Its particles result from the energetic and geological labour required to sustain architectural form, revealing how claims of infinite growth depend on continuous material destruction. As anthropologist David Graeber observes, capitalism's demand for perpetual expansion is inseparable from cycles of erosion and ruin.<sup>256</sup> Marble's fragmentation materialises this genealogy of simultaneous geological loss, demonstrating that no architectural construction occurs without it.

Architecture can no longer disavow its complicity. Each marble particle is an entanglement of materials drawn from sites of extraction that leave lasting traces on landscapes and communities. Pentelic marble, in particular, exposes the persistence of colonial logics in which Greece is repeatedly positioned as a reservoir of classical matter while contemporary extraction and labour conditions remain marginalised. To attend to marble's particles is therefore to confront

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<sup>255</sup> Korody and Kritsouk, *Non-Extractive Architecture* vol. 1 on *Designing Without Depletion*.

<sup>256</sup> David Graeber, "Consumption," *Current Anthropology* 52, no. 4 (2011).

architecture's material responsibility directly, acknowledging that architectural form is inseparable from the violences inscribed into its material origins. Aligned with the geologic turn, this perspective demands a shift toward geoeconomic thinking, in which resources are no longer understood as bound to sovereign territories or isolated sites, but as planetary matter circulating through uneven systems of power. Pentelic marble, dispersed across global architectural projects, exemplifies this planetary genealogy of circulation. Its particles traverse borders while anchoring architecture to distant excavations and depleted terrains. Rethinking architecture through this lens requires not only a critique of extractive growth models but a decolonial reworking of architectural imagination itself, one that rejects the fiction of limitless material availability and insists on confronting the material, political, and ecological consequences embedded within every particle of stone. Architecture is a practice of terraforming and capitalist architecture, when examined through the particulate life of Pentelic marble, actively operates in reverse. The extraction, fragmentation, and circulation of marble entail the removal of geological mass, the contamination of air and water through dust and slurry, and the displacement of social and ecological costs away from sites of architectural consumption. Rather than sustaining worlds, architecture under these regimes contributes to defuturing, a process that systematically diminishes the conditions for human and non-human life and forecloses alternative futures. As sociologist Rolando Vázquez observes, European colonial powers, imagining themselves as pioneers of civilisation, invaded territories in ways that abruptly dismantled local ways of life and precluded possible futures.<sup>257</sup> Viewed through the particulate lens of Pentelic marble, this logic becomes materially tangible. The quarrying, cutting, transport, and global circulation of marble enact a comparable narrowing of possibility, translating colonial modes of territorial disruption into material practice. Each marble particle incorporated into architecture results from the removal of landscapes and the displacement of labour. Terraced mountains, pulverised quarry faces, depleted aquifers, dust-laden working bodies, and fragmented chains of extraction and fabrication persist within polished surfaces as material residues. These residues are produced through genealogies of colonial and extractive processes that persist within architectural form, even where buildings appear clean, autonomous, and detached from their conditions of production. Recognising how modernity and coloniality operate through defuturing is therefore critical for rethinking architecture as a sustainable practice. Sustainability, in this sense, cannot be reduced to impact mitigation or technical optimisation. It requires the diversification and revitalisation of future material, social and ecological

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<sup>257</sup> Rolando Vázquez, "Precedence, Earth and The Anthropocene: Decolonizing Design," *Design philosophy papers* 15, no. 1 (2017).

possibilities. Pentelic marble is mobilised within modern capitalist architecture through colonial genealogies of land extraction and labour exploitation. Confronting these entanglements at the scale of the particle is necessary for architecture to move toward a genuinely decolonial practice, one that operates within social and ecological limits and cultivates futures that remain open, plural, and materially just.

### 3.1.3 Processes Without Centre

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Pentelic marble is not approached as a deterministic substrate from which political meanings mechanically follow, nor are material processes treated as causally sufficient explanations for social or historical configurations. Rather, this section traces how material formations, labour relations, and discursive regimes co-produce one another within shifting assemblages of power and genealogical knowledge. Marble is not granted agency in a reductive or anthropomorphic manner, but understood as participating in networks of action that exceed human intention while remaining historically and geographically situated. Nor is decolonisation mobilised as a transferable metaphor that could be applied to material contexts without remainder. As articulated in the course of this inquiry, decolonisation names a set of uneven genealogies that cannot be abstracted from the material, territorial, and labouring conditions through which they are enacted. The analysis therefore resists both metaphorical transposition and deterministic explanation, following instead the granular and contingent relations through which marble, labour, and institutional frameworks continuously reconfigure one another, producing effects structured through genealogies of contingency. This positioning allows the dissertation to engage thinkers such as Jane Bennett without reducing material vibrancy to metaphor, and to read decolonisation through the work of figures such as Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Sara Ahmed, and Philip Deloria not as interchangeable theoretical references, but as positions that help differentiate between metaphorical abstraction and materially grounded critique.

What emerges is not a generalisable model, but a situated genealogy in which concepts remain accountable to the specificities of the material formations they seek to describe. Decolonisation is not a metaphor; it is a struggle, enacted through dust, fragments, and the labouring conditions through which marble is extracted and processed. It cannot be lightly applied to Athens, its architecture, or its materials, especially when the material record, down to the marble particles themselves, registers uneven genealogies of labour and extraction. When the language of decolonisation is absorbed uncritically into familiar critical vocabularies, it loses

force and risks reproducing the very conditions it claims to unsettle.<sup>258</sup> Pentelic marble exemplifies this: its whiteness has been repeatedly mobilised to stabilise classical continuity, European origin, and cultural innocence. At the particulate scale, however, these narratives fracture. This fracture is not conceptual alone. It occurs in the material conditions of quarrying and processing, where dust generated by cutting and transport accumulates unevenly across bodies, surfaces, and the surrounding environment. Fine particles infiltrate the air, settle in the lungs, coat machinery, and disperse beyond the quarry, exceeding attempts to contain them. These movements are not incidental but follow a genealogy of the stone's material properties: its brittleness, grain, and fracture behaviour, redistributing the effects of extraction across spaces and populations. In this way, the marble particle does not simply signify fractured narratives; it materially enacts their dispersal. Dust, chips, and residues refuse the polished genealogy of Athens as a singular cradle of the West, destabilising the monumental object through which that narrative is typically secured. They are produced through extraction, labour, and exhaustion, persisting as dispersed material effects that cannot be reconciled with conventional heritage discourse. Pentelic marble expresses what political theorist Jane Bennett describes as the "vibrancy" and political agency of matter.<sup>259</sup> Bennett argues that nonhuman substances are not inert or passive but participate in the world as agents whose material properties help shape events, practices, and outcomes beyond the scope of human intention. At the particulate scale, Pentelic marble demonstrates this capacity vividly: dust, fragments, and chips are not merely byproducts of extraction or production, but material effects of labour, ecological transformation, and colonial entanglement. These particles, though small and dispersed, accumulate, disperse, and infiltrate environments in ways that materially condition the environments through which air, surfaces, and bodies interact; they settle in distant spaces, accumulate in the quarry, and interact with workers, machinery, and the built fabric. In doing so, they interfere with the stabilisation of marble as a neutral or passive material, revealing that even ostensibly stable surfaces are underpinned by complex networks of material and social relations. Their material activity enters directly into the material conditions through which architectural power is organised and maintained insofar as it participates in the conditions through which power relations in architectural production are disclosed and sustained: the labour of quarry workers, the extraction of natural resources, and the imposition of aesthetic hierarchies all leave traces within the marble itself. Vibrancy, in this sense, is

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<sup>258</sup> Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012).

<sup>259</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

not metaphorical: the marble particle does not “speak” in a literal sense, but its presence participates in processes through which histories of extraction, labour, and circulation remain materially present and environmentally effective, mediating between past and present, quarry and monument, extraction and display.

By recognising this agency, architecture can no longer be understood as a purely human endeavour; rather, it emerges as an assemblage in which matter, labour, and environmental processes are mutually constitutive. Pentelic marble expresses both historical and ongoing forms of power and simultaneously exceeds attempts to stabilise it within singular genealogies of control, purity, or neutrality, asserting that material processes themselves participate in shaping social, political, and ecological worlds. Decolonisation cannot be reduced to improvement, reform, or critical awareness. It resists domestication, naturalisation, and neutral application as it unfolds through genealogies of struggle. Like the marble particle itself, it possesses vibrancy and agency, acting beyond the frameworks that attempt to contain it and exposing genealogies of material, social, and ecological entanglements embedded in its whiteness, heritage, and authority. When we attend to Athens through its Pentelic marble, postcolonial and coloniality theories illuminate two interlinked genealogies of colonial domination embedded in matter itself. External colonialism appears in the extraction of Pentelic marble from its quarries, where fragments of the mountain are removed and transported along genealogies of extraction to feed aesthetic, economic, and cultural appetites (Fig. 3.4). These particles, once part of the mountain’s structure, are reclassified as resources: labourable, transportable, and ultimately convertible into monuments, facades, and expressions of classical authority that enrich those who control their circulation. The marble’s whiteness, polished and monumentalised in foreign capitals, erases the genealogies of extraction, labour, and environmental alteration. At the same time, the displaced particles continue to mark Athens as both origin and object of consumption. Internal colonialism operates differently yet resonates materially in the marble itself. Within the borders of Athens and modern Greece, the control, circulation, and use of Pentelic marble reproduce genealogies of labour, access, and cultural authority. Quarry workers, stonemasons, and transporters shape the mountain’s matter, yet their labour is effaced; only the polished surfaces reach the city and the global stage. At the scale of the particle, fragments and dust remain as traces of this governance, recording genealogies of unequal labour, value, and recognition. Segregation of access, economic divestiture, and social hierarchies are inscribed in the materiality of Pentelic marble. Its particles thus map both external and internal colonial dynamics: from the mountain’s slopes to the city’s monuments, the marble’s matter carries the sediment of extraction, control, and territorial authority, resulting from processes of extraction, control, and territorial authority at the smallest scale.



FIG. 3.4 Monowire diamond saw at Mount Pentellicus. Photograph by the author, 2025.

In Athens, Pentelic marble reveals that decolonisation will take different shapes depending on how the mountain, the quarries, and the city are engaged, though these shapes often overlap. The classical distinction between external and internal colonialism only partially accounts for the dynamics at play in the marble's extraction, circulation, and use. Unlike cases where metropole and colony are geographically separate, in Athens the colonising logic operates through both modes simultaneously: the mountain, its quarries, and the city are entangled in a single spatial and political field. External colonialism is visible in the removal of marble blocks and particles from Mount Pentellicus, their transportation to monuments, buildings, and export markets, where the mountain's matter is converted into wealth, prestige, and cultural authority. Internal colonialism is evident in the governance of the mountain and its labour: who may access the quarries, who works the stone, and how value, recognition, and agency are distributed within Athens. At the scale of marble particles, this dual coloniality is present as genealogies of dust and fragments left by extraction and processing: residues that mark the labour, extraction, and environmental transformation that sustain the city's monuments and the national narrative of classical heritage. Like settler colonial logics elsewhere, this form of domination leaves no clear separation between mountain and city, between resource and polity: Pentelic marble's particles circulate through both external and internal structures of control, demanding a decolonisation that attends to material conditions, to dispersed labour, and to the

granular genealogies encoded in the whiteness of the stone. The mountain itself, its quarries, and the stone beneath the surface are the most valued, contested, and materially operative resources (Fig. 3.5). The extraction and circulation of the marble enact a genealogy of epistemic, ontological, and cosmological violence: the mountain is remade from a living terrain into property, its matter mined, classified, and circulated to sustain monuments, cities, and national narratives. This violence is not a single event but a continuous process, inscribed each day in the shaping of the stone, the management of labour, and the transformation of slopes into roads, pits, and workshops. The marble's granules result from a genealogy of extraction, labour, and environmental modification in ways that polished surfaces obscure. Human relationships to the mountain are constrained to production, ownership, and aesthetic utility, while older epistemologies and ontologies of the land, the ways it might have been known, inhabited, or sensed, are effaced or dismissed, and have been so since times immemorial, throughout conditions in literally every single human-matter relation. The marble, once integral to the mountain's rhythms and local ecologies, is transported, shaped, and dispersed, its particles reterritorialised along genealogies of civic, cultural, and international ambition. In this process, the histories embedded in the mountain are erased, the labouring bodies are rendered invisible, and the mountain's material presence is transformed into a resource. The mountain's particles, however, remain as residual traces: dispersed, yet insistent, persisting as material effects of the violence, erasure, and appropriation inherent in the production of Athens' monuments and the city's classical legacy. At the same time, the exploitation of Pentelic marble in Athens reveals a parallel logic of subjugation and dispossession embedded in matter itself. Quarry workers, often labouring under hierarchical and precarious conditions, are consigned to the mountain's slopes in ways that make their labour woven into a genealogy of extraction. The mountain's stone becomes both a commodity and a medium through which human presence is controlled: blocks, slabs, and particles are mobilised to accumulate cultural and economic value, while the labouring bodies remain largely unacknowledged. In this sense, the workers' presence on the land is treated as expendable; their labour is transformed into the polished surfaces of monuments, while their recognition, mobility, and agency are constrained. The violence of this labour produces a double effect: it materialises authority in the whiteness and circulation of the marble while rendering the human and ecological costs invisible. Like chattel in settler colonial contexts,<sup>260</sup> the mountain's workers and the microparticles of marble they mobilise are both productive and dislocated, both essential and erased, inscribing in the stone the entanglement of value, control, and dispossession.

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<sup>260</sup> Erica Neeganagwedgin, "Chattling the Indigenous Other: A Historical Examination of the Enslavement of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 8, no. 1 (2012).



FIG. 3.5 Subterranean extraction of Pentelic Marble. Photograph by the author, 2025.

In Athens, the extraction and circulation of Pentelic marble reveals a similar logic of domination and self-justification. The government and private entities that control the quarries and the mountain see themselves as holding authority over the stone, the slopes, and the human and ecological networks entangled with the marble. They position themselves as more capable, more deserving, and more “civilised” because they can make the mountain yield beyond what might be considered natural or sustainable. The mountain is expected to produce without limit, to feed monuments, facades, and cultural prestige that signify Athens’ claim to classical heritage. This excess production is made possible through the labour of quarry workers, whose effort cannot be fully compensated because the wealth it generates is tied to the mountain itself: property, territory, and material capital extracted from the earth. The traces of this labour and extraction remain: fine dust and fragmented grains resulting from abrasion, force, and repeated mechanical processing required to transform the mountain into a monument. In this system, those who labour and the mountain itself are positioned as subordinate: the stone is reduced to a resource, the workers to instruments of production, while those controlling the process are naturalised as both superior and normal. The whiteness, polish, and mobility of Pentelic marble become the material evidence of a genealogy of hierarchy, a granular record of the claim to dominion over land, matter, and labour that underpins Athens’ classical authority. The extraction and use of Pentelic marble illustrates that

controlling matter is not equivalent to mere occupation or utilisation; it is a form of settlement. Quarry owners, architects, and city authorities do not simply work with the mountain; they assert dominion over it, supplanting older relationships to the land embedded in its slopes, veins, and particles. In this sense, those who govern the marble do not behave as immigrants,<sup>261</sup> who might be beholden to the mountain's rhythms, the local knowledge of its quarrying, or the practices of labourers and communities. Instead, they become the law of the mountain, imposing modes of extraction, circulation, and aesthetic value that overwrite prior epistemologies: the ways the mountain might have been known, inhabited, or sensed. Pentelic marble thus participates in a genealogy of settler landscape formation, in which control over stone, slope, and dust enforces authority and erases prior knowledge rather than simply integrating with it. Thus, control over land and matter produces complex, overlapping structures of domination. The mountain's quarries, long entangled in diverse human practices, are now sites where extraction, labour, and circulation intersect, producing value for some while dispossessing others. These practices are not new or exceptional, but emerge from a long genealogy in which stones and quarries have always been enmeshed in human activity, whether for substance, construction, or strategic purposes. Those who manage and work the marble are not uniform: they include elites, artisans, labourers, and migrants, often from different regions, whose engagement with the mountain reproduces hierarchies of access, control, and visibility. The Pentelic dust bears witness to this entanglement, its dispersed particles carrying traces of both labour and extraction, of those who are marginalised and those who benefit from the mountain's displacement. Just as settler colonialism complicates decolonisation by entwining empire, settlement, and internal control,<sup>262</sup> the mountain's matter shows how Athens' monuments and quarries are sites of layered domination: production, prestige, and dispossession are inseparable, and the traces of control exist at every scale, from polished surface to microscopic particle. In such a context, decolonisation is not straightforward: it must reckon with overlapping structures of labour, circulation, and material authority, as well as the dispersed genealogies contained in the mountain itself.

When decolonisation is treated as a metaphor, it risks becoming as malleable as the marble itself, susceptible to being shaped to perform particular meanings, to serve discursive or aesthetic agendas, rather than being enacted materially or politically. This malleability is not external to the present dissertation. It shows the broader

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<sup>261</sup> Adam J Barker, "The Contemporary Reality of Canadian Imperialism: Settler Colonialism and The Hybrid Colonial State," *American Indian Quarterly* 33, no. 3 (2009): 325-51.

<sup>262</sup> Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 7.

tendency of critical and scholarly practices to abstract from the material and social realities that sustain them. Claims to liberation can circulate at the level of discourse, aesthetics, or theoretical repositioning, including within work that seeks to critique extraction while leaving intact the material relations that underpin the circulation of marble. In the case of Pentelic marble, such abstracted approaches to decolonisation have often served those who reinterpret its genealogies, display them, or theorise the material, rather than the land, labour, and ecological formations through which it is continuously produced. The long histories of extraction, transport, and architectural use show how marble has repeatedly been mobilised for aesthetic, civic, and economic ends. At the same time, the terrains, ecosystems, and workers that sustain these processes remain marginalised within these genealogies. The mountain's slopes, quarries, and dispersed particles register ongoing displacement and transformation, resisting any simplified or singular reading of their past. Decolonisation in this context demands more than restitution, reform, or technical control over quarrying practices; it requires recognising that the mountain, its stone, and its granular residues have never been singularly occupied, worked, or known. They have been engaged through uneven, conflicting, and situated relations that refuse to be consolidated under a single authority, narrative, or framework. Each grain of marble results from processes of labour, environmental transformation, and material reconfiguration, inscribing histories of extraction, power, and social hierarchies within the material itself. This means that decolonisation cannot be merely performative or symbolic. It must contend with the active, material agency of the marble particle, whose very presence unsettles claims of neutral ownership, clean emancipation or aesthetic putrity. For this reason, decolonisation remains an unsettling, ongoing process.<sup>263</sup> The mountain, the marble, and all those entangled in their circulation, including this dissertation and its author, are implicated, transformed, and called upon to confront the enduring entanglements of matter, labour, and power. In Athens, Pentelic marble reveals a parallel logic of appropriation and anxious identification. Those who control the quarries and monuments sometimes seek a closeness to the mountain they themselves exploit, as if mastering the stone could also master the histories embedded in it.

As author Philip Deloria describes, settlers in the United States play at being indigenous;<sup>264</sup> Athenians and their agents have historically attempted to claim intimacy with the marble while controlling its slopes. The mountain's slivers, powder,

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<sup>263</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Canada: Grove Press, 1965), 36.

<sup>264</sup> Philip J Deloria, *Playing Indian* (Yale UP, 2022), 4-5.

and microfragments carry the traces of labour, extraction, and environmental transformation that cannot be domesticated or fully assimilated into a coherent surface of classical authority. Yet the desire to domesticate, to polish, and to monumentalise the marble is associated with a settler anxiety: a wish to reconcile oneself with the material, to inhabit it fully without confronting the displacement, erasure, and labour being part of every fragment. Treating decolonisation as a metaphor functions in the same way: it is a premature attempt to contain responsibility, to feel mastery over what one has appropriated, whether stone, land, or labour. The particles of Pentelic marble refuse this containment. They record the work, the extraction, and the ongoing presence of what has been displaced. They persist as material effects of histories that those in power wish to domesticate or forget, refusing incorporation into the polished monumental object through which authority is typically expressed. The desire to reconcile the marble with authority is inseparable from the violence that made such authority possible, just as the mountain's matter quietly insists on its own terms.

Those who control the quarries and monuments seek to, borrowing Sara Ahmed's thinking, "become without becoming" the mountain itself:<sup>265</sup> to claim intimacy with the marble while treating it as an object separate from its histories, its labour, and its slopes. They attempt to "take" the mountain, its stone, prestige, and material authority, without "receiving" its becoming: without acknowledging the ongoing material, ecological, and temporal processes through which the mountain persists and transforms. In this sense, "becoming" is not merely an appropriation of form, whiteness, or symbolic value, but an encounter with the mountain's genealogies of fracture, particle, and rhythm continually shaping what can emerge from it. To "become marble," therefore, is not to possess it, to stabilise it within human frameworks, or to inscribe it with monuments and narratives; it is to engage with its capacities to act, resist, and persist, to allow oneself to be transformed by the particle, the quarry, and the slopes themselves. The mountain's particles result from extraction, abrasion, and circulation, making marble legible as prestige and heritage. Yet, these very traces exceed human mastery, resisting total absorption into singular narratives of aesthetic or civic value. The material simultaneously embodies and denies, incorporating labour, environmental transformation, and genealogical entanglements even as dominant frameworks attempt to erase them. Just as settler fantasies imagine indigenous peoples can hand over land and knowledge for safekeeping, Athenians and their agents have imagined they could

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<sup>265</sup> Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality* (Routledge, 2013), 32.

“fully receive” the mountain: its whiteness, surface, and circulation made to serve monumental ambitions, while the mountain’s own rhythms, microfractures, and dispersed particles remain unacknowledged. This fantasy forecloses the mountain’s futures, producing a superficial control that masks the deeper, ongoing agency of matter. Yet the mountain, and the marble particle, resist this containment through their genealogies of dispersal and persistence. In its dispersal, granularity, and sedimented histories, it asserts a form of political and material vibrancy that exceeds human intentions, reminding us that becoming is never unilateral. *Becoming marble* entails recognition of this tension: it is an engagement with the mountain’s capacities to transform, resist, and endure, an acknowledgement that its processes, histories, and potentials cannot be fully possessed. The marble’s whiteness and solidity thus coexist with dust, fragments, and microresidues that carry the traces of labour, extraction, and ecological transformation, insisting on presence, resistance, and continued unfolding. In this sense, “become without becoming” is both a methodological and ontological principle: one can work with, learn from, and be transformed by marble, yet cannot fully subsume its agency; one participates in its circulation without erasing its vibrancy.

The international division of labour<sup>266</sup> cuts through Athens itself, organising bodies according to their proximity to extraction, reward, and recognition. Quarrying, cutting, transporting, and polishing marble produce a stratified labour field in which some bodies are stabilised as durable workers and others are rendered disposable. At the mountain and in the workshop, certain forms of labour are recognised as legitimate and civic, while others remain excessive, precarious, and replaceable. The marble particles are unevenly distributed within this division with particular clarity. Dust settles on those bodies whose labour is most exposed, while finished surfaces circulate elsewhere as architectural value and cultural capital. Participation in the Athenian marble economy can therefore offer a conditional form of belonging. For some, particularly migrants and minoritised workers, entry into the system entails becoming a subordinate settler: attached to genealogies of heritage production without access to its rewards or authority. The movement of labour towards Pentelic marble often follows earlier movements of value, drawn to resources that have already been displaced, reclassified, and concentrated through prior regimes of extraction. This pursuit may be framed as anti-colonial insofar as it names global inequality and seeks access to opportunities previously denied. Yet it does not amount to decolonisation. Anti-colonial critique frequently affirms the figure who

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<sup>266</sup> Gayatri C Spivak, “Scattered Speculations on The Question of Value,” (1985): 73–93.

gains inclusion within extractive and circulatory systems while leaving intact the genealogies of control over land and material.<sup>267</sup> In the case of Pentelic marble, such critique risks reproducing the very logic it seeks to contest. The mountain remains property. The stone remains a resource. The particles remain available for further circulation. At the particle scale, Pentelic marble exposes the limits of this anti-colonial horizon. Labour, mobility, and partial empowerment remain tethered to the ongoing settlement of land and matter rather than to their return, refusal, or release. This logic extends a genealogy of anthropocentrism. The marble, its dust, its ecological entanglements, and its temporal rhythms do not become postcolonial. They continue to be acted upon, managed, and consumed. At the particle scale, Pentelic marble exposes the limits acted upon, managed, and consumed. The particle does not promise liberation; it clarifies the genealogy of control.

Read through Pentelic marble, the difference between Paulo Freire's<sup>268</sup> and Frantz Fanon's<sup>269</sup> approaches becomes materially legible. A Freirean framework would locate liberation in a genealogy of consciousness of those who labour on the mountain, treating oppression as an abstract condition shared by interchangeable workers and opposed by an equally abstract figure of domination. In this view, the quarry becomes a pedagogical site, and emancipation is imagined as a mutual human awakening among those who cut, manage, and circulate the marble. Yet such abstraction dissolves the mountain's specificity. It becomes unclear who is oppressed and who governs the stone, and an innocent third position emerges within a genealogy of ethical proximity: those who "stand with" the workers while continuing to benefit from the marble's extraction, circulation, and monumentalisation. This gesture reproduces a fantasy of ethical proximity, where sympathy substitutes for structural rupture. A Fanonian lens, by contrast, insists on the irreducible materiality of the colonial situation. Applied to Pentelic marble, decolonisation is never redemptive, never reconciliatory, never reformist. It confronts genealogies of domination rather than redeeming them. If it assumes any of these forms, it is no longer decolonisation. It is a disordering of established relations, a violent unmaking of the systems that have rendered the mountain a resource and its matter a carrier of cultural authority. At the scale of the marble particle, this distinction is decisive. Dust and fragments do not participate in humanist reconciliation. They result from extraction, abrasion, and force, bearing

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<sup>267</sup> Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor."

<sup>268</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (The United States of America: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc, 2005), 42.

<sup>269</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 36.

the unresolved violence of quarrying and circulation. In Freire's humanist horizon, humans act as subjects who read and then write the world, treating earth, water, animals, and stone as objects to be transformed. Pentelic marble exposes a genealogy of humanist limitation. Its particles result from histories, asymmetries, and material debts that cannot be overcome through shared humanity alone. Decolonisation, as Fanon insists, is not a clean passage into an abstract future but a rupture within an already fractured terrain, implicating land, matter, and the unresolved afterlives of colonial violence.

Freirean pedagogies reveal how colonisation is often displaced from land and matter into consciousness. In this framework, the quarry becomes a scene within a genealogy of mental domination rather than a site of extraction, and "internal colonisation" is recast as a condition of thought to be overcome through awareness. The implied solution is that once minds are decolonised, the mountain, its stone, and its histories will somehow follow. Such an approach leaves untouched the most unsettling question posed by poet Aimé Césaire: what, fundamentally, is colonisation?<sup>270</sup> In the case of Pentelic marble, this question cannot be answered in abstraction. It demands attention to the genealogy of apparatuses that order relations between the mountain, its quarries, the labour that fractures the stone, the city that monumentalises it, and the civilisational narratives that render this process natural and desirable. Colonialism here is not lodged solely in perception. It is assembled materially through genealogies of quarrying permits and extraction quotas, property regimes that fix the mountain as an asset, heritage laws that protect selected surfaces while authorising ongoing removal, labour hierarchies that distribute risk and disposability, transport infrastructures that detach stone from site, and aesthetic canons that determine which fragments may circulate as value as Pentelic marble moves from mountain to monument, with these mechanisms examined in detail in the next chapter. At the scale of the marble particle, this apparatus becomes undeniable. Dust settles where labour is concentrated, fragments accumulate along genealogies of incomplete extraction, and only selected surfaces are allowed to circulate as value and prestige. To ask what colonisation is, in Athens, is therefore to refuse metaphor and to insist on specificity: to trace how particular relations between land, stone, bodies, and knowledge are continuously produced and maintained. Any answer that bypasses the mountain and its matter, or relocates colonisation solely in the mind, reproduces the very abstraction that allows Pentelic marble to remain a resource rather than a contested terrain.

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<sup>270</sup> Robin DG Kelley, Aimé Césaire, and Joan Pinkham, "Discourse on Colonialism," *Trans. Joan Pinkham. New York Monthly Review* (2000): 32.

Read through Pentelic marble, incommensurability names a rupture in genealogies of land, stone, and value.<sup>271</sup> Decolonisation in Athens cannot be understood as a redistribution of positions within an existing hierarchy, nor as a simple reversal of roles between those who extract, labour, and benefit from the mountain. The aim is not to rotate bodies through the familiar genealogy of authority and dispossession that has structured the marble's history, but to break that configuration altogether.<sup>272</sup> Such a break would require the suspension of exclusive control by institutions that govern Mount Pentelicus and its quarries as property and resource, the dismantling of extractive regimes that render the marble a civilisational material, and the undoing of metropolitan frameworks that continue to claim the stone as foundational to Western culture. This rupture is inseparable from wider anti-imperial struggles, yet it cannot be equated with them. The decolonisation of Pentelic marble is neither parallel nor proportionate to struggles elsewhere, and it offers no settled resolution, least of all to those who have benefited from the marble's circulation. At the scale of the particle, the stone makes this incommensurability palpable. Dust, fragments, and residues accumulate without closure, carrying overlapping genealogies that cannot be reconciled or resolved. Pentelic marble participates in the same planetary logic that has rendered salt, oil, and water objects of conquest and war. Incommensurability, here, is not an abstract principle but a material condition, one that insists on rupture rather than compromise and leaves the order that produced the marble fundamentally unsettled, a material condition shaped through genealogies of rupture.

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<sup>271</sup> Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

<sup>272</sup> Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and The Colonized* (Routledge, 2013).

## 3.2 Entangled Grounds

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### 3.2.1 Human-Stone Relations

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The genealogies of Mount Pentelicus unfold across timescales that precede and exceed human presence. Its formation began in deep geological time, through tectonic movements within the Earth's crust that generated the initial elevations from which the mountain gradually emerged. Over extended durations, these early formations were continually reworked through pressure, uplift, erosion, and sedimentation, forming a genealogy of geological reconfiguration. Long before human life appeared, the mountain was already in motion, shaped by material processes that did not move toward a final form but remained open to further transformation. As life forms emerged, evolved, and disappeared, Mount Pentelicus continued to change. Its present configuration is not the result of a singular moment of formation but the temporary outcome of ongoing geological activity. Within human experience, however, the mountain has often been approached as something stable and enduring. It appears to predate human time and is assumed to persist beyond it, producing an understanding of the mountain as largely timeless. This perception is not unique to Mount Pentelicus but is common among mountains more broadly, which are often imagined as a single enduring object rather than as material processes in motion. The position of mountains further reinforces this sense of stability occupied within cultural and intellectual traditions. Across religious, mythological, and philosophical accounts, mountains are frequently associated with origin, elevation, and sustained effort. Such framings tend to privilege endurance over transformation, stabilising a genealogy of permanence. They draw attention away from the fact that the mountain is never fixed. Mount Pentelicus is continuously altered by geological forces operating across multiple temporal scales. What appears stable within human memory is the provisional outcome of persistent material activity. From this perspective, the mountain is not outside time but is constituted through genealogies of change, shaped by rhythms that unsettle assumptions of fixity and continuity.

Every mountain, as a material and inhabited site, operates within concrete human space and time. It shapes patterns of movement, labour, and settlement, and through these processes it generates a genealogy of events. In doing so, the mountain becomes entangled with human histories while also conditioning the possibilities of action that unfold around it, refusing to be reduced to a passive

object of human interpretation. Mount Pentelicus has long functioned in this way. Its effects have been intensified by a layered past marked by repeated and overlapping forms of engagement, in which different actors have interacted with the mountain under changing historical conditions. There are many ways to approach such a past. The mountain is often read as an archive: a repository of sediments, materials, ruins, and scars through which genealogies of extraction, settlement, and environmental transformation can be reconstructed. In this view, the mountain appears as a stratified record of events, its slopes and quarries bearing the accumulated traces of human intervention. Rather than treating the mountain as a more truthful archive, the counter-archive names a condition in which material processes and dispersed traces disrupt the coherence of archival ordering itself,<sup>273</sup> unsettling inherited historical narratives. The mountain's materials, fractures, and dispersed particles not only preserve historical evidence; they disrupt the categories through which such evidence is usually interpreted. Fires, landslides, quarrying, and erosion reorder the terrain, displacing traces and complicating attempts to stabilise the past into a singular story. Mount Pentelicus, beyond just containing history, actively shapes how history is assembled and understood. Its slopes and sediments become a counter-archive that unsettles inherited genealogies of continuity, heritage, and classical origin. The focus here is therefore not on constructing a comprehensive historical narrative but on following fragments as they emerge within this unstable field. The modern history of Mount Pentelicus is approached through brief episodes drawn primarily from archival photographs and newspaper reports.



**FIG. 3.6** Penteli from the northeast. Photograph by Dorothy Burr Thompson, 1888. American School of Classical Studies at Athens Photographic Collection.

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<sup>273</sup> James L. Smith, "Anxieties of Access: Remembering as a Lake," *Environmental Humanities* 13, no. 1 (2021).

The fragments drawn upon in this chapter do not provide unmediated access to the experiences they appear to describe. Photographs, newspaper reports, institutional records, and anecdotal accounts are products of specific genealogies of production, shaped by institutional priorities, narrative conventions, and historical limits of visibility. What can be read as voices emerging through these materials are therefore not treated as self-present testimonies, but as effects of mediation, partial inscription, and selective preservation. In this sense, the chapter does not claim to reconstruct a complete account of events, but to assemble a situated reading of dispersed traces, aware that what appears is inseparable from what remains unrecorded or rendered illegible. These materials offer partial and situated glimpses rather than a complete record. They expose moments when the mountain enters human documentation, while its dispersed marble particles continue to migrate across terrain, resisted by neither archive nor boundary. Yet, they also point to what escapes such records: the transformations of terrain, the dispersal of marble particles, and the environmental processes that exceed archival capture. The fragments that appear involve human actors from different periods, but they cannot be separated from the mountain itself as a material site that shapes, enables, and constrains action. For this reason, the sections that follow do not impose a single linear reading. They may be approached from different positions and in varying sequences, either independently or in relation to earlier parts of the chapter. One such fragment is the earliest known photograph of Mount Pentelicus, taken in 1888 from a point northeast of the mountain. The image, from the collection of the American archaeologist Dorothy Burr Thompson and held in the archive of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, shows the mountain covered by dense forest (Fig. 3.6). Later that same year, this forest was destroyed by a fire that burned Mount Pentelicus and its surrounding areas for five days, as reported in a 1957 newspaper article entitled “Attic Walks.”<sup>274</sup> Marble extraction at Mount Pentelicus resumed in 1836, particularly at the site known as the Cave of Mount Pentelicus. After centuries of inactivity since the Roman period, the ancient quarries gradually returned to operation, while licenses were simultaneously granted for the establishment of new quarries across the mountain. Initially, extracted marble was used to construct public buildings in Athens, which was declared the capital of Greece in 1834. As the city expanded, Pentelic marble increasingly entered private projects, and its demand grew steadily. This demand reached a peak in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, when rapid urban growth prompted the proliferation of neighbourhood marble workshops throughout Athens. For many, Mount Pentelicus became closely associated with its quarries, yet the circulation

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<sup>274</sup> “Αττικοί Περίπατοι [Attic Walks],” *Ελευθερία [Freedom]* (1957): 4.

of its stone extended far beyond the city. History repeated itself on a transnational scale. Thousands of years after supplying marble to the Greek world in antiquity, Mount Pentelicus again became a central source of white stone. Records show that Romanian clients commissioned marble for a statue of Take Ionescu in Bucharest;<sup>275</sup> French clients obtained Pentelic marble for a sculptural monument to Pablo Picasso in Marseille;<sup>276</sup> and American authorities incorporated it into the construction of their embassy in Athens.<sup>277</sup> Most of the modern-period quarries were located on the mountain's southwestern slopes, facing Athens, on land owned by the Monastery of Penteli. To manage these holdings, the monastery organised competitive leasing auctions.<sup>278</sup> Until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, these tenders primarily concerned agricultural land or grazing areas, with quarrying remaining a secondary activity. Through these arrangements, the mountain and its marble actively shaped patterns of labour, ownership, and circulation, embedding genealogies of labour, ownership, and circulation.



FIG. 3.7 Quarry workers at Dionysos quarries. Photograph, 1955. American School of Classical Studies at Athens Photographic Collection.

<sup>275</sup> Ελεύθερον Βήμα [*Free Tribune*] (1929): 2.

<sup>276</sup> Ελευθερία [*Freedom*] (1963): 8.

<sup>277</sup> "Αττικοί Περίπατοι [*Attic Walks*]," 3.

<sup>278</sup> Ελεύθερον Βήμα [*Free Tribune*] (1931): 4.

From the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, conditions on Mount Pentelicus underwent a significant shift. Rapid urban expansion and the growing demand for construction materials prompted the Monastery of Penteli, as the principal landowner, to intensify the leasing of areas suitable for quarrying across large portions of the mountain. This property regime is succinctly captured in a remark by the Greek poet Dimirrios Kampouroglou. Although referring to earlier historical relations on Mount Pentelicus, his observation articulates the enduring genealogy of ownership that shaped the mountain's use: "It did not belong to Penteli; rather, the mountain belonged to the Monastery."<sup>279</sup> These accounts emerge from archival fragments that do not simply document events but organise them according to particular regimes of visibility. What appears here as description is therefore already shaped by the limits of recording, the perspectives embedded in the sources, and the gaps that structure what can be known. The following fragments are read with this condition in mind, not as transparent testimonies, but as mediated traces through which both human and material processes become partially legible. Quarry labour during this period was physically demanding and often dangerous (Fig. 3.7 and Fig. 3.8). The photographs depict workers whose appearance and positioning suggest a socially stratified genealogy of labour, possibly including racialised or migrant labourers, expressing broader patterns in which extractive industries frequently relied on marginalised populations to perform the most hazardous form of labour. In the decades following the resumption of extraction, mechanical equipment remained limited, and work relied primarily on human strength and skill. Workers drilled holes at regular intervals along planned lines of separation and placed explosive charges at their base. Detonations fractured the marble into large blocks, which were then subdivided into smaller pieces for transport. The resulting fragmentation rarely followed the intended geometry, as shock waves travelled unevenly through the stone, exploiting microfissures and mineral inconsistencies that could not be mapped in advance. During extraction, drill holes and wedge placements intended to produce regular blocks often trigger fracture propagation along pre-existing crystalline planes, producing irregular breaks and unusable fragments that redirect subsequent cuts and handling. Repeated blasting destabilised rock faces, producing cliffs, flying debris, and hazardous working conditions, scattering stone particles across slopes and work sites. Safety measures were minimal, and accidents, often severe or fatal, were common.<sup>280</sup> The harshness of quarry life extended beyond the worksite, forming a genealogy of risk and precarity. Until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most workers lived in temporary shelters at

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<sup>279</sup> Dimitrios G. Kampouroglou, *Ο Αναδρομάρης της Αττικής [The Wanderer of Attica]* (Athens: Hellenic Editions, 1996).

<sup>280</sup> Τα Νέα [The News] (1958): 6. Τα Νέα [The News] (1971):2. Τα Νέα [The News] (1975): 16. Ελευθερία [Freedom] (1964): 10.

the foothills of the mountain, frequently provided by employers. During winter, heavy snowfall could isolate workers for days, cutting off access to the quarries.<sup>281</sup> Under these conditions, human presence was bound to the mountain's material rhythms, shaped by physical resistance, seasonal transformations, and the ongoing processes of fracture and removal that defined the quarry's life. The blocks extracted from the slopes and the dust dispersed by blasting carried with them the traces of this labour, remaining materially present through fracture patterns, dust residues, and surface alteration produced during extraction and handling. Historical accounts report that in 1907, quarry workers, most from the Greek island of Karpathos, took up arms to demand unpaid wages from the bankrupt British-owned company that controlled the quarries, "Marmor Limited." At the same time, the forest near the workers' dwellings was scattered with bleached bones, sedimenting a genealogy of illness and dispossession. These remains, largely from cattle, originated from a sanatorium higher up the mountain, where bones were boiled to prepare meals for tuberculosis patients and later discarded in the surrounding forest. For the quarry workers, the forest was avoided because of both the unsettling sight of bones and the fears of infection. Therapeutic practices of the period often placed sanatoria in rural or mountainous locations, where the air was believed to be clean and conducive to recovery. Such locations also ensured the isolation of tuberculosis patients, whose illness was perceived as a near-certain death sentence. Several sanatoria operated at different times on Mount Pentelicus and in its vicinity. Within these institutions, lives appear in the record as marked by prolonged illness, confinement, and the slow passage of time. Most of these experiences remained largely undocumented, rarely extending beyond the walls that enclosed patients until the end of their lives. These genealogies nonetheless linger within the mountain's terrain. In this sense, the mountain retains traces in a quasi-literal way: through residues, dispersions, and material transformations rather than through documentation. They form part of its layered genealogy, depositing biological, social, and material traces onto its slopes. Thus, the mountain does not merely contain history as a passive archive; it denies being reduced to a historical object, holding the dispersed remains of events, bodies, and practices that continue to shape its landscape. Human presence, labour, illness, and vulnerability intersected with the mountain's terrain, leaving marks that were persistent within its genealogical formation.<sup>282</sup> The forest, the discarded bones, and the laborious pathways of quarry work all attest to the entanglement of life, death, and extraction, tracing a genealogy of Mount Pentelicus' ongoing becoming.

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<sup>281</sup> Ελευθέρον Βήμα [Free Tribune] (1940): 4. Αθηναϊκά Νέα [Athenian News] (1940): 1. Ελευθερία [Freedom] (1965): 8.

<sup>282</sup> Ελευθέρον Βήμα [Free Tribune] (1937): 2.



FIG. 3.8 Quarry workers at Dionysos quarries. Photograph, 1955.  
American School of Classical Studies at Athens Photographic Collection.

The social world of the quarry workers was largely closed, shaped by the demands of the work and the conditions it imposed on daily life. Living arrangements, patterns of interaction, and the physical intensity of quarrying structured both the workforce and their shared experiences. Despite often coming from similar places of origin, the workforce appears, in the available records, as internally diverse, following genealogies of migration and labour. A diversity that increased from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards with the arrival of many workers from the Cyclades. Under such circumstances, incidents of violence and conflict were not uncommon.<sup>283</sup> Over the roughly 1.5 centuries of modern quarrying at Mount Pentelicus, a wide range of events unfolded there, some documented and others deliberately concealed. In one case, the advance of a quarry uncovered a significant cave, whose entrance workers reportedly quickly filled in to avoid state intervention and disruption to operations. Other accounts describe the frequent discovery of ancient architectural elements, small columns, basins, and unfinished sculptures, often buried beneath debris. Statues were occasionally found, sometimes producing sudden wealth for quarry owners, as in the case of a sculptural group depicting a sow with piglets. Likely, the most remarkable discoveries were never recorded, even as rumours, within the tightly bound community of workers. These fragments, from antiquity to more recent periods, persisted in the landscape, embedded in everyday quarrying practices. In both cases, material processes and human experiences, what is accessible is not presence itself but traces that require interpretation within genealogies of appearance, operating across an interface where human intention meets material contingency. Objects such as a large unfinished statue, later documented with photographs, were repurposed within the quarry rather than treated as distinct historical artefacts. In this way, Mount Pentelicus remained layered with residual matter, where the past and present intersected through genealogies of circulation and reuse. The mountain, its marble, and the labouring bodies operating upon it coexisted in a network of action and transformation, producing a landscape structured through genealogies of human and material entanglement.

Contemporary extraction technologies have fundamentally altered the relationship between workers, stone, and landscape. Whereas earlier quarrying depended upon combinations of manual drilling, blasting, wedge splitting, and controlled fracture, contemporary operations increasingly rely upon drilling rigs, diamond-wire saws, hydraulic equipment, and mechanised cutting systems. These technologies enable

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<sup>283</sup> Ελεύθερον Βήμα [*Free Tribune*] (1933): 4. Το Βήμα [*The Tribune*] (1967): 4.

larger volumes of stone to be detached with unprecedented speed and precision while simultaneously transforming the scale of intervention on the mountain itself. From a genealogical perspective, these technologies reorganise the conditions through which marble becomes available. Extraction increasingly operates through assemblages linking geological formations, machinery, labour practices, transportation infrastructures, environmental management systems, and global markets. The marble block emerges from a technological network that reshapes both landscape and labour. Dust, debris, offcuts, and abandoned quarry faces become material traces of this expanded extractive condition. At the same time, the marble enters wider networks of circulation that connect the mountain to international markets, diplomatic architectures, restoration economies, and global regimes of heritage and construction.

Taken together, these accounts restory Mount Pentelicus as a site of entangled material and human genealogies. Approaching the mountain as a counter-archive, as I introduced at the beginning of the chapter, these entangled histories are not merely recovered but actively restoried, challenging inherited narratives and revealing relations often erased from conventional accounts. The mountain is never a backdrop for labour, conflict, or discovery; it emerges through the work, movement, and presence of those who inhabit and extract from it, as well as through the material processes that exceed and redirect these actions. Forests burned and quarries expanded, reworking the mountain's surface and redistributing marble particles through erosion, blasting, and handling. Bones lay scattered in the forest, while fragments of marble were shaped, moved, and repurposed through ongoing extraction. The mountain does not passively receive the blows of history or anthropogenic intervention; its slopes, materials, and fractures participate in these processes, redirecting labour, channelling movement, and conditioning what forms of extraction or habitation become possible. Within this shifted field, marble itself emerges not only as a resource or product but as matter in motion, circulating through genealogies of labour, tools, infrastructures, and demand. These processes unfold across multiple scales, from monumental blocks to dispersed fragments and microscopic dust. It is this genealogical perspective, the ongoing movement and dispersal of material, from block to fragment to particle, that the following section takes up, tracing the micropolitics of Pentelic marble and its capacity to reshape both mountain and human worlds at the smallest scales.

### 3.2.2 Landscapes as Archives

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The account that follows is assembled from archival traces, published testimonies, and retrospective reconstructions, each of which offers only partial access to the events described. What can be known of Mount Pentelicus and its quarries emerges from uneven, sometimes contradictory records, in which administrative documents, press accounts, and material remnants offer fragmented, situated access rather than a continuous or complete genealogy. A profound sense of scale may strike a visitor standing today within one of Mount Pentelicus' abandoned quarries. Vast exposed rock faces and deep voids testify to the time, labour, and force invested in their formation. These spaces carry material evidence of prolonged excavation, of removal sustained over decades. There is a longstanding tendency to view the act of digging into a mountain as carrying universal resonance, a gesture beyond its immediate context, transforming the mountain into a monumental object of human projection rather than a site of ongoing geological activity. This perception changes, however, when attention shifts from individual quarries to the mountain as a whole. Seen in this wider frame, the quarries emerge as zones of intense intervention, and the mountain appears fundamentally altered. Few mountains in Greece have been transformed on a scale comparable to that of Mount Pentelicus. From the 1950s onwards, quarrying intensified without effective regulation, with large quantities of explosives releasing forces akin to sustained bombardment. Across most quarries, the operational logic was consistent: maximise profit, minimise cost, and treat environmental impact as secondary. For the Greek composer Georgios Lambelet, Mount Pentelicus evokes a violent wounding, redeemed through the creation of enduring temples and heroic monuments:

*They ripped open your snow-white breasts,  
those who, from your divine depths,  
brought Olympus' abysses to light,  
raising immortal temples and monuments to heroes.*<sup>284</sup>

Witnessing here is not singular but dispersed: recorded in fragments of administrative correspondence, in press accounts that oscillate between celebration and critique, in the material persistence of excavation scars, and in accounts that survive only indirectly. What appears as a coherent narrative is therefore assembled from partial and unevenly distributed genealogies of evidence, each carrying its own

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<sup>284</sup> Georgios Lambelet, Νέα Ζωή [*New Life*] 5, 59 (1909): 351. *Penteli*, the area from which Mount Pentelicus takes its name, is grammatically feminine in Greek; Mount Olympus is the home of the Greek gods and the highest peak in Greece.

positionality and limits. The distribution of benefits described here is reconstructed from available records and accounts that foreground institutional, economic, and public actors. The absence of certain perspectives, particularly those of quarry workers engaged in extraction under varying degrees of regulation or illegality, limits the extent to which this configuration can be fully reconstructed. In this system, all human actors appeared to gain. The Penteli Monastery increased rents through quarry leases; quarry owners and workers profited from largely unregulated extraction; marble artisans benefited from abundant supply; private clients could obtain high-quality stone at relatively low cost; and the state collected taxes from these activities. By the mid-1970s, when quarrying restrictions threatened this arrangement, strategic responses emerged from all stakeholders,<sup>285</sup> each seeking to protect their position within the mountain's material and economic networks.

Ultimately, between 1976 and 1978, all quarries on the southwestern side of Mount Pentelicus were forced to cease operations. This development was publicly presented as a triumph of rational planning and as vindication for those who had long protested the destructive effects of quarrying. In practice, however, the decisive factor appears to have been the planned commencement of military works in 1977, centred on the cave. Protests, which had been voiced intermittently for decades, had never slowed extraction in any significant way. These protestations are themselves accessible primarily through institutional responses and media coverage, which mediate how dissent is recorded and preserved. They were often mobilised as a pretext for the creation of investigative committees and the announcement of studies, which, under the guise of careful examination, effectively deferred action indefinitely. As early as 1897, the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs, the authority overseeing the Penteli Monastery, had established a committee to determine whether large-scale exploitation of Pentelic marble might alter the geographical symmetry of Attica or risk exhausting the mountain's reserves.<sup>286</sup> The quarries on the southwestern slopes fell silent toward the end of the 1970s. This pause, however, proved temporary. By the late 1980s, the military works around the cave had been abandoned, and marble extraction resumed illicitly (Fig. 3.9). The perspectives of quarry workers, particularly those operating under illicit conditions, are largely absent from the archival record, surfacing only indirectly through legal cases, accidents, and press reports. Their activities are thus encountered primarily through secondary traces rather than direct testimony. Initially, these operations were cautious and limited in scale. Lookouts were posted, work was scheduled for times when few visitors were present, and

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<sup>285</sup> Το Βήμα [*The Tribune*] (1975): 3.

<sup>286</sup> Τα Νέα [*The News*] (1977): 9.

measures were taken to reduce exposure. Over time, however, the illicit activity grew increasingly overt. Occasional legal action against quarry crews resulted in acquittals or nominal penalties. Even serious accidents and fatalities did little to interrupt the work, exposing a genealogy of impunity.<sup>287</sup> Here, the continuity of extraction is conditioned not only by economic and legal factors, but also by the continued presence of extractable stone, accessible fracture planes, and workable terrain within the mountain itself. In this way, the mountain continued to be materially and socially reshaped, as marble was removed and landscapes altered, creating residual effects that persisted long after the sound of explosives faded.

Contrary to what one might hope, or what a well-intentioned yet uninformed observer might expect, this situation has persisted to the present day, and in increasingly aggravated form. Whereas in the 1990s protest articles appeared regularly, today related denunciations rarely reach public view. Whereas illegal quarrying networks had become overt in the 1990s, today their activities verge on provocation. Whereas members of these networks could once extricate themselves easily from legal scrutiny, today it is the complainant who is most likely to become entangled in bureaucratic complications. Looking at the present in light of the recent past, overquarrying can be read as emerging from repeated alignments between demand, regulatory gaps, and the mountain's material availability. A similar dynamic is evident in the uncontrolled subdivision of land and the broader rhetoric of "development," through which the mountain continues to be treated as yet another tract available for exploitation. Across these fragmented and partially overlapping accounts, witnessing cannot be stabilised within a single perspective; instead, it disperses like marble particles across the mountain's terrain and genealogies, operating at an interface where exposure, participation, and consequence meet. Mount Pentelicus itself, together with those who encountered and inhabited it, is encountered in the record only through these distributed traces, within which different forms of exposure, participation, and consequence become partially legible. At once victims and participants in the mountain's world, the exposed faces of abandoned quarries stand as enduring material reminders of this genealogy, which is actively maintained, reproduced, and inscribed in ongoing extraction, bureaucratic neglect, and the persistent circulation of marble.

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<sup>287</sup> Ta Néa [The News] (1992): 19. Ta Néa [The News] (1993): 31. Ta Néa [The News] (1994): 26.



**FIG. 3.9** Illegal marble quarrying at Mount Pentelicus. Photograph, 1992. From Ta Néa [The News] newspaper, 27 March 1992.

Unregulated quarrying left multiple scars, marking the mountain and permanently altering its appearance. Yet it was primarily recurrent wildfires and uncontrolled land subdivision that, particularly from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, reshaped the genealogy of Mount Pentelicus. Fire not only removed vegetation but also altered the stability and permeability of the terrain, making previously forested areas more accessible and, in some cases, more susceptible to subsequent intervention. These processes operated in tandem: fires were followed by the subdivision and development of burned land, while the prospect of exploiting fire-damaged terrain encouraged further acts of arson. Economic motives were not always the driving force; social, political, and cultural factors also played a role.<sup>288</sup> The partitioning of land on Mount Pentelicus began relatively early, with large-scale plot sales recorded as far back as the 1930s. The Second World War temporarily interrupted this activity. Still, the post-Civil War wave of rural-to-urban migration, which transformed much of Greece's urban landscape, accelerated the conversion of the Penteli area into a suburban extension. Pressure for residential development, far greater than in the prewar period, encroached upon forested land within a climate of permissiveness justified under the banner of progress. A 1951 newspaper article, written in celebratory, almost rhapsodic terms, described the emerging settlement of Nea Penteli with expressions such as “exemplary order,” “building discipline,” and “the law of the common good”:

<sup>288</sup> Ελεύθερον Βήμα [Free Tribune] (1930): 6. Το Βήμα [The Tribune] (1963): 4. Τα Νέα [The News] (1978): 5. Τα Νέα [The News] (1982): 1. Τα Νέα [The News] (1986): 13. Το Βήμα [The Tribune] (2000): 27.

*Until only a few years ago, it was nothing more than a miserable place, with a few pine trees gnawed by caterpillars and goats, adorned by some even more miserable shacks of the sick and nothing else. Now, one might say, it is a small town galloping towards progress and civilisation. The effort being made is truly moving. Its settlers, with more than three hundred houses built so far, led by their community leaders and the Administrative Council of the existing Building Cooperative, have embarked upon a civilising struggle of the area worthy of particular honour and exaltation.* <sup>289</sup>

Before three decades had passed since this so-called “civilising struggle worthy of particular honour and exaltation,” press coverage of Mount Pentelicus had shifted dramatically. Headlines now invoked historical violence, such as “Not even Ibrahim would have committed such a horrific crime,” referencing Ibrahim Pasha of Egypt, whose scorched-earth campaigns in the 1820s had become synonymous in Greek memory with deliberate devastation. By then, however, it was too late. In the years that followed, Mount Pentelicus was reduced to little more than a suburban park, stripped of trees after successive fires and surrounded by thousands of houses. On the northeastern side, facing Mount Dionysos and hidden from the view of Athens, construction advanced nearly to the ridgeline. Earlier press claims such as “The arsons are in vain... nothing is being built,”<sup>290</sup> intended to discourage land grabbers by denying visible progress, could only provoke bitter irony within a genealogy of denial and encroachment.

Looking back, even to the relatively recent past, one encounters a Penteli that today seems almost foreign. A 1905 account describes a visitor setting out to the nearby Lake Thallosi with a hunting rifle, at a time when wolves still roamed the mountain’s forests.<sup>291</sup> The lake, approximately 100 metres in diameter and relatively shallow, was a site for bathing, strolling, and boating, yet whirlpools tragically claimed the lives of several bathers. In 1964, municipal authorities decided to fill the lake; today, a football field occupies its site, though frequent flooding hints at the water’s former presence. Other sources from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century describe ruins of a watermill near the Penteli Monastery, scattered fragments of ancient marble, coniferous forests, and winters reaching eighteen degrees below zero.<sup>292</sup> A 1921 ascent to Pyriza recalls a solitary landscape: the hiker encountered no one, only two startled

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<sup>289</sup> Εμπρός [*Ahead*] (Athens) 1951, 5–6.

<sup>290</sup> Τα Νέα [*The News*] (1999): 9.

<sup>291</sup> Εμπρός [*Ahead*] (Athens) 1905, 1.

<sup>292</sup> Εμπρός [*Ahead*] (Athens) 1924, 1.

woodcocks and a large hare, noting “absolute desolation on a barren mountain.”<sup>293</sup> By 1934, the census recorded just over 600 permanent residents, confirming the mountain’s sparse habitation.<sup>294</sup> These genealogies of water, forests, structures, and human absence linger in memory and material residue alike. They testify to a Pentelicus shaped not only by quarrying, fires, and urban expansion, but also by subtle ecological and social rhythms long erased from immediate view. The mountain’s surface, its voids, and its remnants now carry layers of genealogical intervention, preparing the ground for the next stage of inquiry: a closer look at marble itself, in its dispersed, granular, and particle-bound forms, where the material life of Pentelicus is revealed at the smallest scales. This transition is itself conditioned by the limits and contours of the materials through which Pentelicus is known, and by the selective visibility of voices that these materials afford. Mount Pentelicus bears the cumulative marks of quarrying, fire, and urban expansion, alongside subtler traces of lakes, forests, and solitary paths. Its scarred surfaces register the entanglement of labour, exploitation, and ecological change, revealing the mountain not as a fixed object but as a dynamic, processual site. These layered interventions prepare the ground for the next section, which turns from quarries and landscapes to the dispersed, particle-bound dimensions of Pentelic marble itself.

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<sup>293</sup> Εμπρός [Ahead] (Athens) 1921, 1.

<sup>294</sup> Ελεύθερον Βήμα [Free Tribune] (1934): 4.

### 3.2.3 Temporal Interferences

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FIG. 3.10 View of Mount Pentelicus from Menidi. Postcard, 1913.  
From *Iranon*.

Looking further back, the landscape transforms once more, taking us to a period when Mount Pentelicus was cloaked in a dense, imposing, and seemingly endless forest. This forest was destroyed in 1888 by a five-day, five-night fire. A 1957 publication captures its scale and grandeur:

*As soon as one left Agia Paraskevi and proceeded further, an immense forest of towering pines, giant plane trees, millennial oaks, olive trees, cypresses, and other species stretched to the highest reaches of Penteli. It was remarkable that so close to Athens there existed such a Swiss- or Bavarian-like forest, such tropical vegetation, such natural grandeur, which dazzled the eyes and intoxicated the spirit of the hiker venturing there. Centuries had worked to shape this forest, which withstood the passage of countless hours and covered the ravines, the hills, and all the slopes of the mountain [...] Springs gushed everywhere, and One could hear the song of the waters from all directions, particularly from the Valanari Creek and the “Great Stream” of the Erasinós of antiquity (the river of the Mesogeia), flooding the forest with melodies unheard of. It seems not implausible to suggest that the Ottomans left Attica forested to the extent of eight-tenths.<sup>295</sup>*

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<sup>295</sup> Fanis Michaloroulous, “Αττικοί Περίπατοι: Το Άλλοτε Δάσος της Πεντέλης και ο Παλαιοντολογικός Θυσσαυρός του Πικερμίου [Attic Walks: The Former Forest of Penteli and the Palaeontological Treasure of Pikermi],” Εμπρός [Ahead] (Athens) 1957, 1–4.

The same publication includes an account by the Greek journalist Michail Mitsakis, who had the opportunity to experience the remarkable oak forest of Penteli and wander along its paths (Fig. 3.10):

*Wandering among these trails for a long time, one encounters no human being. Yet one does not experience a sense of desolation. Solitude does not oppress, but rather pleases. The entire forest appears alive. In its depths, among the rows of trees, beneath the leafy arches, an undisturbed silence reigns. Yet this silence is not dead. All these colossal trees seem almost animate, as if enjoying, each in its own way, the pleasure of existence. Not a single corner of the fissured valleys, the high ridges, the slippery slopes, or the massive backs of the mountain remains dry or barren [...] Every day, at every hour, whether under the unrelenting summer sun, the heavy winter wind, the brilliance of light, or the mantle of darkness, the great forest remained the same: magnificent, imposing, and awe-inspiring. No discordant noise, no jarring sound was heard. As if enchanted by a mysterious, unseen nymph dwelling within its depths, the colossal oak forest appeared to be in a state of slumber...”<sup>296</sup>*

Mitsakis' description evokes awe and admiration, yet it also gestures towards a genealogy of perception shaped by descriptive tradition that frames nature as immersive and self-sufficient. It conveys the singularity of the place, an aura that touches upon the existential while exerting a subtle pull on perception, orienting attention before conscious reflection fully takes shape. This formulation, however, indicates a reading of the text rather than an unmediated access to experience; it is an inference drawn from the tone and structure of the account, rather than a claim to reconstruct the subjective state itself.

Similar sensations recur in other accounts, from Kampouroglou's "The Path of the Cave" to Krystallis' "Penteli", and in the writings of others, pointing to a persistent entanglement of human perception and the material presence of the mountain. Time flows differently for mountains than it does for human affairs. At Mount Pentelicus, it is enough to stand before one of the faces of the ancient quarries to perceive this difference. There, the countless marks left by quarrying tools serve as a reminder of the transience of human existence against the mountain's enduring presence. Each strike registers not only an action upon the stone, but a response conditioned by its

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<sup>296</sup> Michail Mitsakis, *Ελληνικόν Ημερολόγιον* [Greek Almanac] (1888).

resistance, cleavage, and density, undoing the illusion of marble as a stable object awaiting human inscription (Fig. 3.11). A raw trace of the past, more immediate than any museum exhibit, preserving within its material form a genealogy of the actions that produced it. These genealogies, however, are largely irrecoverable; what happened there has, in many cases, been erased by oblivion. Yet echoes of these actions persisted within the ancient quarries for centuries, sometimes surviving into the recent past. These accounts are not approached here as transparent records that relay what was seen or experienced. Rather, they are situated articulations, shaped by the conventions, expectations, and vocabularies of their respective contexts. Each testimony participates in a specific regime of description that frames what can be perceived, articulated, and preserved as meaningful. In this sense, what is presented as a “voice” is always already mediated, assembled through historically contingent forms of attention and narration.



FIG. 3.11 Ancient quarries at Mount Pentelicus. Photograph by the author, 2025.

One striking example is a large, unfinished statue, forgotten in one of the quarries, documented in 1968 by the American archaeologist James Wiseman. Photographs show the unfinished figure lying face down, half-buried in debris, at the entrance of a reopened quarry (Fig. 3.12).<sup>297</sup> There, it had been repurposed as a makeshift workbench, with pieces of marble, hoses, and tools resting upon it. The colossus, as Wiseman described it for its monumental scale, depicted a seated figure from the waist up, roughly 3.50 metres tall and 2.53 metres wide at the base. Its gender was indeterminate, as was its intended identity: deity, mythological figure, or historical person. Representative photographs, published in 1968 by the American art historian Rhys Carpenter,<sup>298</sup> complemented Wiseman's account, showing the statue within the quarry interior, resting on its side against the floor. These traces, tool marks, debris, and abandoned monumental forms suggest how marble persists not only as finished material but also as fragmented, dispersed matter, carrying genealogies of human and geological histories alike. In these fragments, material properties such as fracture, hardness, and response to pressure condition how marble breaks, accumulates, and is reused.

In his publication, Wiseman clarified that the quarry in question was among those near the summit of Mount Pentelicus, supporting the view that the unfinished colossus was most likely a late-period work, created when high-quality marble had already been exhausted in the lower quarries. He further suggested that the statue may have been intended to honour a Roman emperor, proposing that its abandonment was probably due to a flaw in the stone, perhaps an ancient crack visible at the base.<sup>299</sup> In this case, the progression of carving appears to have been conditioned by a genealogy of discontinuity within the stone itself, which redirected the process and ultimately delimited what could be brought to completion. Wiseman also noted that he had informed the Greek Archaeological Service of the find, expressing the hope that the statue might be conserved and presented, possibly in situ, within the quarry from which it originated. Wiseman's account, like Mitsakis', is not approached here as a neutral register of events but as a situated archaeological narration, shaped by disciplinary protocols that privilege certain forms of explanation, such as typological dating, material causality, and the identification of practical constraints, while leaving others unarticulated. Nothing further was ever heard of the

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<sup>297</sup> James Wiseman, "An Unfinished Colossus on Mt. Pendeli," *American Journal of Archaeology* 72, no. 1 (1968), <https://doi.org/10.2307/501826>, <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.2307/501826>.

<sup>298</sup> Rhys Carpenter, "The Unfinished Colossus on Mt. Pendeli," *American Journal of Archaeology* 72, no. 3 (1968), <https://doi.org/10.2307/503555>, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/503555>.

<sup>299</sup> Wiseman, "An Unfinished Colossus on Mt. Pendeli."

unfinished colossus, and its fate remains unknown. The most plausible explanation is that it was eventually cut into sections and sold, as the steadily rising value of Pentelic marble made extraction and transport economically viable, despite the statue's relatively modest size by quarrying standards. It is also possible that fragments from its processing, perhaps a windowsill, a stair tread, or a decorative element, continue to exist today, embedded within everyday architectural settings, held by owners unaware of their material's origin. What, then, might its history have been, as inferred through these partial and mediated accounts? Which ancient sculptor began their carving, what form was envisaged, and why was the work ultimately abandoned? Who approached it, examined it, or laboured nearby? And what might the unfinished colossus have witnessed, absorbed, and retained over centuries of abandonment high on Mount Pentelicus? For some histories, only an echo endures. For others, perhaps the most consequential, nothing remains at all. The genealogies assembled here are therefore not presented as exhaustive reconstructions, but as a composition of traces, each already filtered through specific modes of seeing, recording, and interpreting. The chapter does not claim access to the mountain as such, but works within the limits of these mediated fragments, treating them as both evidence and expression of the frameworks that make them legible.



**FIG. 3.12** View of the Unfinished Colossus. Photograph by Alison Frantz, 1950s. From the *American Journal of Archaeology* 72, no. 3 (1968).

More than the mountain mass itself, it is these overlapping narratives that shape how Mount Pentelicus is perceived. The archetypically elevated, remote, and inaccessible site becomes charged with memories and experiences that draw it closer to the human world, granting it presence and, with it, a name. Yet this name is not inherent to the mountain. It is inseparable from human attempts to know, claim, and situate it within cultural, historical, and material frameworks. Today, no one can determine the original meaning of Penteli; it is known only as an ancient name in use for more than two millennia. In the earliest textual sources, the mountain appears as Vrilissos or Vrilittos, though other names must surely have preceded these, long since lost. Names, however, rarely refer to a singular mountain, and they carry genealogies of projection onto the landscape. Mount Pentelicus bears only a tenuous relation to the stone mountain of quarry workers. Beyond that, the mountain has witnessed intense religious expression, solitary ascents, and acts of human despair. Movements across terrains are profoundly different from those encountered by contemporary hikers. For most today, Mount Pentelicus is synonymous with the extraction of its white marble. This material has secured its global recognition through association with the emergence of civilisation and the flourishing of the ancient world. Yet historical newspapers and archival images expose other genealogies of encounter: at times accessible, at others remote; hospitable in some periods, hostile in others; integrated into everyday human life, or entirely alien to it. These glimpses are not of the mountain in itself but of the ways we see, project onto, and interact with it. In truth, the mountain has no name outside these human frameworks. Its density is produced through our engagement, our stories, and the narrative we inscribe upon it.

In tracing Mount Pentelicus, from its dense forests and monumental quarries down to the dispersed, dynamic particles of Pentelic marble, we follow a mountain where geological processes, human labour, architectural interventions, and the many forms of life inhabiting its terrain interact across overlapping temporalities and scales of material existence. Across these conditions, marble's fracture behaviour, durability, and variability condition what can be carved, removed, preserved, or repurposed within genealogies of material agency. From extraction to abandonment and reuse, these properties participate in shaping the trajectories through which Pentelic marble is worked, circulated, and incorporated into built environments. The mountain's presence is never singular: it is made through labour, desire, conflict, and care, yet it also exceeds these human interventions, persisting in forms both visible and hidden, monumental and granular. Engaging with Pentelic marble at the particle level requires acknowledging the mountain's continuous capacity to transform and be transformed through ongoing geological, ecological, and social

processes and confronting the limits of memory and record. Its traces, unfinished statues, tool marks, fragments embedded in buildings, and scattered dust, speak of histories largely erased yet never entirely lost, of matter in motion, and of a world that continues to unfold beyond human perception. In this way, Mount Pentelicus does not present a single, completed story; its genealogies are ongoing, layered, and entrangled, and the mountain itself remains a site of continuous becoming, where marble acts as both witness and participant.

## 3.3 Mediterranean Materialism

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### 3.3.1 Post-Classical Genealogies

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Autonomy at the particulate scale should not be understood as independence from relations or as isolation from external forces. Rather, it refers to the internal structuring of matter through which responses to forces are mediated, differentiated, and conditioned. Autonomy emerges from a material organisation in which transformations are not imposed uniformly but emerge through genealogies of thresholds, singularities, and differential relations already present within the material. In this sense, autonomy names not separation, but the irreducibility of internal dynamics within a relational field. This chapter turns to Pentelic marble at a scale where inherited hierarchies of form, origin, and value begin to fracture. Reduced to particles, fragments, and dust, the marble no longer upholds classical ideals or architectural authority; it slips out of its form as a monumental object and becomes materially discontinuous. It enters processes of extraction, circulation, abrasion, and residue accumulation, in which its structure is altered through cutting, transport, and environmental exposure. Here, whiteness emerges through genealogies of selection, cutting, grading, and surface treatment, processes that separate, discard, and standardise material according to specific technical and economic criteria. Here, marble is no longer a territorialised instrument of Western architectural thought; in its particulate state, it is materially structured by genealogies of colonial economies, modern bureaucracies, and classificatory regimes. Tracing Pentelic marble into this molecular dispersion opens the possibility of a decolonial material politics, where form is not imposed from above but emerges through entanglements of geology, power, and material change. This movement is mediated by a shift in the conceptual and architectural understanding of surface that emerges through postmodern practices. Here, the surface no longer operates as a continuous interface or stabilising membrane, but as a site of fragmentation, citation, and recombination. The unity of form and meaning is neither secured, as in neoclassicism, nor mediated through a stable perceptual interface, as in modernism; instead, it is dispersed across discontinuous elements that are repeated, displaced, and reassembled. Marble whiteness, in this context, detaches from both its classical authority and its modernist role as a neutral plane, becoming subject to processes of segmentation and redistribution. This condition does not yet engage matter at the level of the particle, but it loosens the coherence of the surface sufficiently to render subsequent material dispersions legible. At the scale of the particle, Pentelic marble

no longer behaves as a stable, obedient substance. Its behaviour exceeds the limits of linear causality,<sup>300</sup> challenging genealogies of linear predictability. Conventional causality imagines a world in which identical causes yield identical effects, rendering marble a passive medium whose outcomes are already predetermined.

In contrast, at the particle level, marble exhibits non-uniform responses under repeated conditions, producing variation and divergence even where interventions are held constant. Matter is no longer merely a recipient of external agency; it actively participates in processes of transformation, resisting and reshaping the forces imposed upon it. This shift reframes causality: matter, living and nonliving alike no longer function as a passive recipient of external force, but as a differentiated structure that conditions how transformations occur. Pentelic marble, in its dispersed state, is materially structured by the conditions of its extraction, processing, and circulation, registering these genealogies in the form of residues, fragmentation patterns, and differential composition. At the particulate scale, Pentelic marble refuses the constraints of classical determinism, acting instead within an interface where internal thresholds meet external force. Its responses to stress, abrasion, weathering, or chemical exposure do not follow simple proportional logic. Increasing force does not guarantee a corresponding effect. Unlike industrially standardised materials, marble resists uniformity: its crystalline lattice, mineral composition, and network of internal fractures create thresholds, delays, and uneven reactions. A minor intervention can provoke dramatic change, while a seemingly stronger force may produce little visible effect, revealing an interface between intensity and material resistance that cannot be predicted linearly. Whiteness at this scale is not a static aesthetic quality but a contested material site, where intensity, resistance, and variation are negotiated at the molecular level. This becomes evident in genealogies of non-uniform response of marble under repeated interventions, where identical processes produce divergent outcomes depending on internal structure. Nonlinearity does not replace linearity; it exceeds it.<sup>301</sup> Linear response becomes only one limited manifestation among many. At the scale of dust, fragments, and particles, marble does not behave as a uniform, obedient material; each particle expresses thresholds and instabilities that diverge from linear causality. Grinding, polishing, and pulverisation do more than reduce scale: they activate latent

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<sup>300</sup> Manuel DeLanda, "The New Materiality," *Architectural Design* 85 (09/01 2015): 1-2, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ad.1948>.

<sup>301</sup> DeLanda, "The New Materiality," 1-2.

conditions that remain dormant at the block or surface level. The same intervention produces divergent outcomes, contingent on the marble's internal organisation at the precise moment of contact.

A more radical rupture with linear causality emerges when the distinction between cause and effect is unsettled entirely. At the particulate level, external forces no longer impose outcomes but act as catalysts for transformations already embedded within the material. Pentelic marble carries a deep history of geological pressures, thermal fluctuations, and mineral alignments. These genealogies generate zones of relative stability and instability that mediate the material's responses. Interventions do not impose change from without; they provoke shifts between pre-existing states. Different forces can yield similar transformations, while the same force may produce divergent effects depending on where and how it engages the material. This is evident in the unpredictable behaviour of marble particles under different conditions. Chemical exposure may erode one particle while leaving another intact; mechanical pressure may shatter one crystalline arrangement, while merely compacting another. Forces do not encounter a uniform substance but a terrain of internal difference. This can be observed directly in the uneven responses of Pentelic marble during cutting and abrasion. When a rotating blade encounters zones of differing crystalline orientation, the material does not yield uniformly: certain areas shear cleanly, while adjacent regions resist, deflect, or fracture irregularly. Similarly, during polishing, denser areas achieve reflectivity at different rates from more porous ones, producing micro-variations across marble's surface that defy uniform treatment. These divergences do not arise from interpretive framing but from the material's internal organisation as it is engaged in the process of transformation. The operative principle is not the isolated cause but the configuration of matter it encounters. At this scale, Pentelic marble is not governed by a single causal law. Its behaviour unfolds through thresholds, triggering points, and transitions between states of relative stability. Causality is distributed, spread across singularities of matter rather than encoded in universal rules.<sup>302</sup> The particle does not follow an external programme; it participates in a contingent, variable, and open-ended material process. Whiteness, in this context, survives not as an immutable attribute but as the ongoing outcome of entangled genealogies of matter and intervention.

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<sup>302</sup> DeLanda, "The New Materiality," 3–4.

At the scale of the material white particle, moving from linear to nonlinear causality demands attention to the marble's own capacity to register, absorb, or resist those forces. It is no longer sufficient to describe pressure, mechanical, chemical, or environmental, as if the material were a neutral recipient. Instead, its internal genealogy of crystalline organisation becomes central. At the particulate level, the marble demonstrates varying capacities conditioned by crystalline orientation, mineral density, porosity, and the microhistories embedded within each particle. These internal differences shape responses to stress, abrasion, and exposure: a strong intervention may produce little effect if it activates a pre-existing threshold. At the same time, a weak stimulus may provoke a significant transformation if it activates a pre-existing threshold. External forces thus operate less as determining causes and more as catalytic triggers that awaken genealogies already present within the material. This perspective reframes how marble can be understood: not merely through measurable properties such as hardness, colour, or mass, but through its capacities. Properties describe the material as it exists at a given moment. Capacities describe what it can do, the potentialities it can exercise under specific circumstances. A neoclassical block or a modernist surface of Pentelic marble carries certain properties regardless of context; its capacities remain dormant until they encounter other bodies, tools, environments, or forces capable of activating them. Polishing activates a reorganisation of the crystalline surface that increases specular reflection; grinding produces fragmentation along lines of structural weakness; weathering induces granular disintegration through differential exposure and chemical interaction.

The distinction between properties and capacities becomes decisive. Properties are actual: a marble particle has a defined size, structure, and chemical composition at any given moment. Capacities, by contrast, may remain unrealised yet real. A particle may carry the potential to fracture, dissolve, or recombine even when none of these processes occurs. These capacities exist within the material regardless of external activation, aligning with Deleuze's concept of the virtual.<sup>303</sup> The virtual is not opposed to the real but to the actual: it denotes a structured field of relations that shapes what a material can become. Pentelic marble, at the particulate scale, exists in this dual register: actual in its present material state, virtual in the range of transformations it can undergo, no longer bound to the monumental object form attributed to it in architectural history. Whiteness, here, is not a fixed, measurable quality but a field of potential responses, emerging through internal differences and material relations. To think marble materially is to attend to this dual condition,

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<sup>303</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994), 208–09. <https://books.google.se/books?id=xt103ExXoLIC>.

where the real exceeds the immediately actual and where matter carries a reserve of change that cannot be reduced to properties alone. The virtual is not an abstraction or a realm external to the material; its reality is embedded in the marble's internal organisation, in the differential relations and singular points that structure how transformation can occur. At the scale of the material white particle, this is evident: the virtual resides within the marble particle itself, a field of possible transformations that exceeds any singular state and escapes the authority of preordained forms. To approach this structure, it is productive to begin with material tendencies rather than capacities. Tendencies describe how matter is disposed to change under specific conditions, revealing the internal logic of transformation before external forces intervene. Pentelic marble, like other mineral substances, exhibits tendencies linked to critical thresholds: under sufficient heat, it leans toward decomposition; under sustained pressure, it leans toward fracture or recrystallisation. Most of the time, these tendencies remain virtual, unrealised yet real, becoming actual only when a threshold is crossed, and a qualitative transformation occurs. Even when no visible change is apparent, each marble particle carries these latent dispositions, traces of past pressures and potential futures. Unlike capacities, which define an open and unpredictable field of possible interactions, tendencies occupy a finite space:<sup>304</sup> under defined conditions, a particle can only traverse a limited set of physical states. It is precisely this finitude and specificity that allows us to engage with the marble on its own terms, liberating it from hermeneutic abstraction and interpretive projection, and attending instead to its material logic and internal genealogy, even as it gestures toward broader, contingent capacities.

The first key concept is structure, understood not as a static form but as the organisation of possibilities. For Pentelic marble, this structure is shaped by critical points where quantitative changes trigger qualitative shifts. These points are singularities: moments where accumulation becomes transformation, where incremental pressure, heat, or other conditions push the material into a new regime. At the particulate scale, singularities determine when marble moves from cohesion to fragmentation, from solidity to powder, or from reflective surface to diffuse matter. Pentelic marble does not rely on an external principle to organise its potential. Its thresholds, transformations, and internal limits emerge from the marble's relational genealogy and the conditions of encounter that activate them. At the scale of the white particle, the marble appears as a self-determining field, where the virtual is realised not through external imposition but through the material's own organisation. In this sense, each particle carries within it a small transformation: an autonomy

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<sup>304</sup> DeLanda, "The New Materiality," 2.

of internal organisation that destabilises hierarchical models of matter, authority, and causality, and foregrounds the co-constitution of possibility, history, and force. Critical thresholds represent only one type of singularity. At the particulate scale, Pentelic marble exhibits other singular behaviours, not tied to phase changes but to shifts between internally stable states. Like living systems, mineral matter occupies regimes formed through genealogies of stability. A marble particle may exist in a compact crystalline arrangement, a fractured configuration, or as dispersed dust. At any moment, only one state is actual; the others remain virtual, dormant potentials awaiting activation through specific encounters or interventions. These stable states function as singularities, structuring the range of configurations the marble can occupy without dictating which will occur. Mechanical actions, chemical reactions, or prolonged environmental exposure do not impose outcomes from outside. They act as catalysts, triggering transitions across genealogies of latent states embedded within the material itself. Because the number of stable states is finite, these singularities can be analysed without reducing the material to a closed, deterministic system. To do so, it is necessary first to identify the degrees of freedom that constitute a genealogy of material transformation. These are not minor, trivial variations; they are the dominant modes by which the material reorganises itself: fracture, compaction, dispersion, recombination. Once identified, these degrees of freedom can be linked through differential relations, which describe not static properties but rates of change: the relative speed or slowness with which one configuration yields to another.

Each degree of freedom defines a dimension in a space of possibilities. The marble particle is no longer a fixed, passive object but a dynamic field of potential states distributed across genealogies of possibility. Differential relations between these dimensions generate patterns of singularities that organise how the material tends to stabilise or transform. At the particulate scale of Pentelic marble, this complexity is real and observable as dispersed particles transition across stable and unstable configurations. Transitions between stable states, cyclic patterns of breakdown and reassembly, and more irregular behaviours emerge under laboratory, industrial, or natural conditions. Crystalline reordering, dust circulation, and granular flow expose genealogies of stability arising from internal dynamics rather than from external design or authority. Sometimes the marble settles into a stable configuration; sometimes it cycles through a set of states. Under particular conditions, its behaviour becomes irregular yet patterned, approaching what mathematics describes as chaotic.<sup>305</sup> Importantly, the same types of singularities can organise

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<sup>305</sup> Ian Stewart, *Does God Play Dice? The New Mathematics of Chaos* (London: Penguin UK, 1997), 84–94.

spaces of possibility across multiple material processes. A singularity structuring a crystalline formation is not bound to a particular mechanism in the way that a tool or applied force is. Mechanisms describe how a transformation occurs; singularities explain why certain states are repeated, preferred, or returned to. At the scale of the white particle, Pentelic marble demonstrates that material creativity cannot be reduced to linear causal chains. Understanding it requires attending to both the mechanisms that produce a configuration and the structure that governs transitions between states. The life of marble as a material unfolds in the interplay between these two registers, revealing a world of internal dynamism, contingency, and autonomous material agency.

If Pentelic marble at the particulate scale reveals a field of internally differentiated capacities, then the question is no longer limited to how the material is represented, but how it is engaged, handled, and situated within practices that either obscure or activate these capacities. Decolonial trajectories, in this context, do not consist in attributing an alternative meaning to marble, but in interrupting the genealogies through which it has been stabilised as an abstract, whitened, and exchangeable object. Such interruptions may take the form of attending to residues rather than finished surfaces, to fragments rather than blocks, to processes of degradation rather than idealised permanence. Ecological practices emerge where marble is reinserted into genealogies of transformation without suppressing the asymmetries and material costs they entail. Engagement occurs through the registration of thresholds: the moment a tool begins to chatter as it encounters increased resistance within the stone; the shift from continuous cutting to intermittent fracture; or the point at which particulate residue accumulates faster than it can be displaced. These are not interpretations imposed upon marble, but material signals through which its internal organisation becomes operative within practice. What emerges here is a set of material relations in which marble participates as an active, transformative component. Within such a field, practices are not measured by their capacity to stabilise marble into fixed forms, but by their ability to remain responsive to its differential tendencies, its thresholds of transformation, and the uneven histories sedimented within its particulate structure. These trajectories do not exhaust the implications of particulate autonomy, but indicate how such an understanding of matter begins to reconfigure genealogies of encounter, handling, and circulation.



FIG. 3.13 Contemporary Pentelic marble quarry. Photograph by the author, 2025.

The shift from understanding landscapes as primarily shaped by human cultures to recognising the coproductive role of nonhuman materials becomes particularly clear when approached through Pentelic marble. Rather than serving as a neutral substrate awaiting human inscription, marble participates in genealogies of architectural space and modes of knowledge. Its geological formation cannot be separated from the conditions of its extraction and circulation, nor from the transformations it undergoes within them (Fig. 3.13). In this sense, Pentelic marble makes visible a broader reorientation in thought, one that moves away from human primacy toward an account of material participation that complicates authorship, responsibility, and control. The concept of entanglement offers a useful framework for articulating this condition. Commonly understood as a state of intimate intertwining, the term evokes images of materials bound together through contact and constraint. Yet when read through Pentelic marble, entanglement does not refer simply to physical interlacing but to a deeper condition in which stone, tools, bodies, and temporalities are coimplicated. Quarry faces, transport routes, architectural details, and weathered surfaces register how marble is continually caught within overlapping material and historical processes. These processes do not unfold sequentially but accumulate

and interfere with one another, producing a material record that resists linear explanation. Marble thus carries genealogies of multiple times and agencies that cannot be disentangled into discrete causes or origins. This understanding gains further precision when entanglement is considered in quantum physics, where it denotes a condition in which material relations exceed conventional assumptions about proximity, separation, and causality. In this context, particles that appear unconnected behave as parts of the same material system, responding in correlation despite spatial or temporal distance.<sup>306</sup> When applied to Pentelic marble, this perspective unsettles the idea of the stone as a bounded object or isolated resource. The marble block in an Athenian building is materially continuous with the quarry, the labour that extracted it, the tools that shaped it, and the environmental forces that continue to act upon it. These relations do not belong solely to the past but persist in the present, shaping how the marble behaves, deteriorates, and signifies across an interface of ongoing environmental and material forces.

Karen Barad's concept of entanglement extends beyond material connectivity to encompass the production of knowledge itself, linking the material and the discursive in a constitutive relation. By refusing to separate ontology and epistemology, Barad shows that materials and the practices used to apprehend them emerge together.<sup>307</sup> Read through Pentelic marble, the stone does not exist as a fully formed object before it is classified as classical, white, or architectural. These categories arise through practices such as measurement, extraction, display, conservation, and historiography. Each practice shapes what the marble is understood to be, while simultaneously being shaped by the marble's own material responses. Barad's distinction between intra-action and interaction is crucial here. Interaction presumes that marble, human agents, and instruments exist as separate entities before entering relation. Intra-action recognises that these agencies coemerge through their entanglement. The chisel does not simply act upon marble, nor does the marble merely receive form. Their encounter produces both the tool's efficacy and the stone's capacity to fracture, polish, or resist. This co-emergence does not remain at the level of conceptual description. It becomes operative in moments where practice is forced to recalibrate in response to the stone's behaviour. In the quarry, the direction of a cut cannot be determined solely by design intent; it must follow the grain, fissures, and stress lines already present in the marble. A misjudged strike does not simply fail; it propagates fractures that exceed control, reorganising the block into fragments that demand

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<sup>306</sup> Whitney Stark, "Quantum Entanglement," *New Materialism* (2016).

<sup>307</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting The Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and The Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Duke UP, 2007), 33.

a different course of action. Similarly, in carving and polishing, the anticipated smoothness of a surface is continually interrupted by inclusions, microcracks, or density shifts that redirect the tool's movement. Even at the particulate scale, marble particles and dust do not remain where they are produced. It disperses, settles, and infiltrates bodies and environments in ways that escape containment, extending the field of architectural action into domains of exposure and health.

Architectural knowledge of Pentelic marble emerges through these entangled practices rather than from an external, objective standpoint. Objectivity is reconfigured. It is not detachment but attentive responsiveness to the material-discursive intra-actions. What often appears as mediation, whether architectural expression, historical description, or technical analysis, is itself an active material practice. Pentelic marble does not passively transmit meaning. It intervenes, constrains, and redirects the conditions under which knowledge and architecture take shape. Approaching marble through entanglement, an ontoepistemological co-constitution begins to take shape: material agency is not an added interpretive layer, but a foundational condition for the emergence of architectural, historical, and material realities. The recognition of entanglement between human and nonhuman matter finds a concrete and instructive ground in Pentelic marble, whose material history unsettles any clear separation between cultural action and material response. Within architectural discourse, marble has long been treated as a passive bearer of form, meaning, and value, subordinated to human intention and aesthetic judgment. As scholar Stacy Alaimo mentions, new materialism challenges this assumption by insisting on the significance and agency of materiality itself, as well as on the relations that cut across entrenched dualisms such as nature and culture, subject and object, or matter and meaning.<sup>308</sup> In this orientation, stone participates in architectural production not simply as a resource but as an active contributor within genealogies of extraction, fabrication, endurance, and decay. At its core, new materialism challenges a longstanding tendency within Euro-Western traditions to regard matter as inert, mute, and intrinsically devoid of agency.<sup>309</sup> Pentelic marble makes it difficult to sustain this neglect. Its whiteness has often been mobilised as a surface for projecting ideals of purity, permanence, and cultural continuity. At the same time, the stone itself is treated as a stable substrate upon which these values rest. Yet such an understanding suppresses how marble fractures, weathers, and drifts beyond the forms it is made to sustain. From quarry to monument to ruin, the marble insists on its material life, one that

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<sup>308</sup> Stacy Alaimo, "New materialisms," in *After the Human: Culture, Theory and Criticism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Sherryl Vint (Cambridge UP, 2020), 177-91.

<sup>309</sup> Christopher N Gamble, Joshua S Hanan, and Thomas Nail, "What is New Materialism?," *Angelaki* 24, no. 6 (2019): 111-34.

cannot be fully governed by human design or interpretation. The qualifier “new” in new materialism, however, remains deeply problematic when approached through Pentelic marble itself. The claim that matter is lively, responsive, and generative does not originate within contemporary theory, nor does it emerge solely from recent scientific or philosophical developments.<sup>310</sup> As indigenous scholar Kim Tallbear has argued, this insight resonates strongly with indigenous metaphysics, which have long understood matter as relational and active.<sup>311</sup> Pentelic marble bears witness to this uneven distribution of epistemic recognition. While Western architectural theory has historically framed the stone as a silent support for form and meaning, other ways of knowing matter, present in indigenous epistemologies and evident even in medieval European practices, have long acknowledged the vitality of stone, landscape, and material process without framing them as innovations. This tension is articulated forcefully in critiques of the rhetoric of novelty that accompanies new materialism. Scholar Kyla Wazana Tompkins’ scepticism toward movements that name themselves new is particularly relevant here, as such naming often reinstates a heroic narrative of theoretical discovery that obscures prior and ongoing material knowledges.<sup>312</sup> The ontological commitments associated with new materialism, including the decentering of the human, the recognition of nonhuman vitality, and the positioning of planetary life as central to political and ethical thought, are not recent inventions. They are familiar with indigenous worldviews, postcolonial and Black radical thought, feminist critiques of objecthood, and non-Western medical and spiritual traditions. When Pentelic marble is read exclusively through Euro-Western frameworks, these alternative epistemologies are not merely overlooked but actively displaced.

Nevertheless, the persistence of the term new materialism retains a certain pragmatic value, particularly in architectural and theoretical contexts where matter has long been marginalised or instrumentalised. In relation to Pentelic marble, the term signals a deliberate shift away from treating stone as a neutral medium and toward acknowledging the material and historical conditions that make architecture possible. Contemporary practices of extraction, conservation, digital modelling, and environmental monitoring subject marble to unprecedented forms of intervention and manipulation. These practices compel a renewed engagement with materiality, even if that engagement draws upon older materialist traditions that have yet to be

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<sup>310</sup> Sara Ahmed, “Imaginary Prohibitions: Some Preliminary Remarks on the Founding Gestures of the ‘New Materialism,’” in *Women, Science, and Technology* (Routledge, 2013), 23–39.

<sup>311</sup> Kim TallBear, “Beyond the Life/Not-Life Binary: A Feminist-Indigenous Reading of Cryopreservation, Interspecies Thinking, and the New Materialisms,” *Cryopolitics: Frozen Life in a Melting World* (2017): 179–202.

<sup>312</sup> Kyla Wazana Tompkins, “On the Limits and Promise of New Materialist Philosophy,” *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (2016).

fully acknowledged. As scholars Diana Coole and Samantha Frost suggest, the turn toward new materialism arises not from the invention of entirely new ideas but from the contemporary intensity with which matter is being acted upon and reorganised.<sup>313</sup> Pentelic marble today is entangled with global economies, heritage regimes, ecological degradation, and technological mediation in ways that exceed its classical and modern framings. In this context, revisiting materialist traditions becomes necessary, not to celebrate novelty, but to respond critically to present conditions. The prefix new can therefore be understood less as a claim to originality than as a forward-oriented gesture that risks premature celebration. As scholar Anne McClintock's critique of the rhetoric of the post makes clear, such gestures often flatten historical complexity and obscure uneven distributions of power.<sup>314</sup> Applied to new materialism, this flattening is evident in the dominance of Euro-Western and temperate perspectives that continue to frame matter, including Pentelic marble, within familiar theoretical boundaries. A materially attentive approach to marble thus demands not only an expanded account of material agency, but also a proliferation of historically and geographically situated frameworks capable of addressing the political conditions through which matter becomes thinkable, legible, and actionable in the first place.

By a related logic, this discussion proposes a shift away from the modifier "new" in new materialism and towards a Mediterranean inflexion grounded in Pentelic marble, not as a regional curiosity but as a situated condition of thought. Mediterranean materialism names the material and geopolitical entanglements through which geological processes, extractive economies, colonial histories, and architectural practices intersect across the Mediterranean basin. The Mediterranean is approached here as a contested and differentiated field constituted through uneven histories of circulation, extraction, and power. Such a move seeks to foreground theoretical orientations that attend to the entangled agencies of nonhuman matter while emerging from, and remaining accountable to, the climatic, geological, and genealogical specificities of the Mediterranean basin. Pentelic marble, shaped by heat, salt, air, tectonic pressure, extraction, and circulation across sea routes, makes clear that material thinking is never placeless. Yet, despite the frequent claim

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<sup>313</sup> Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, "Introducing the New Materialisms," *New materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (2010): 1-43.

<sup>314</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge, 2013), 12, 396.

within new materialist discourse that material can be approached from anywhere, at any time, and by anyone,<sup>315</sup> the dominant conceptual vocabulary continues to be produced within Euro-Western, continental, temperate contexts. When reading through the genealogy of Mediterranean stone, this imbalance becomes difficult to overlook. Yet, the Mediterranean is also the cradle of Euro-Western centralities, including genealogies of colonial violence, classical hierarchies, and racialised systems of knowledge. The marble itself registers how supposedly universal accounts of matter are entangled with particular histories of empire, labour, classicism, and racialised ordering. Within this landscape, the openness of new materialist thought to nonhuman vitality and material agency risks reinstating an unmarked European subject as the point from which the world is articulated, even as it claims to move beyond human exceptionalism. Pentelic marble's mobilisation across genealogies of European origin narratives makes this risk especially visible. The turn towards matter and towards the nonhuman can, if insufficiently situated, repeat older transcendental gestures by abstracting material agency from the uneven historical conditions through which matter has been quarried, transported, and made to stand for civilisational continuity. From this perspective, the question is not simply how to move beyond the human, but whose version of the human is being displaced,<sup>316</sup> and under what material and historical conditions this displacement occurs. Attending to race through Pentelic marble is therefore not an external ethical addition to materialist inquiry but a structural necessity. The marble's whiteness, its circulation across Mediterranean and colonial routes, and its particulate dispersal through dust and debris all participate in racialised regimes of value, visibility, and erasure. At the level of the particle, marble carries these genealogies in altered form, as residue, exhaustion, and uneven distribution. A Mediterranean materialism attentive to Pentelic marble thus insists that questions of race, labour, and historical violence are not secondary to discussions of nonhuman agency. They are among the very conditions through which matter comes to act, endure, and transform, challenging any materialist framework that claims universality while remaining anchored in a narrow zone of enunciation.

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<sup>315</sup> Martin Holbraad, Morten Axel Pedersen, and Eduardo Viveiros De Castro, "The Politics of Ontology: Anthropological Positions," *Cultural Anthropology* 13 (2014).

<sup>316</sup> Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, "Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement" Beyond the Human," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, no. 2 (2015): 215-18.



FIG. 3.14 Skalkotos workshop. Photograph by the author, 2025.

Analogously, a Mediterranean inflexion of materialism grounded in Pentelic marble insists on the Mediterranean not as a coherent regional unity, but as a differentiated and historically contested field through which materialist thinking can be reworked and unsettled. Here, the Mediterranean functions as an active condition of thought, shaped by genealogies of quarrying, maritime circulation, climatic exposure, and imperial consolidation. Pentelic marble formed and mobilised within this basin is saturated with specific entanglements that do not necessarily register within theoretical frameworks developed in northern, temperate contexts. These entanglements are geological, climatic, and historical at once, and they often remain imperceptible to materialist approaches that assume the general availability and neutrality of matter. The *longue durée* of Pentelic marble demonstrates how every material cannot be approached solely through abstract accounts of nonhuman agency or material vitality. Quarry faces, shipping routes, architectural fragments, and marble dust bear the marks of extraction regimes, enslaved and precarious labour, colonial imaginaries, and racialised hierarchies that have structured the region across antiquity, modernity, and their afterlives (Fig. 3.14). To focus exclusively on marble as lively matter, or on its interactions with tools, microbes, and environments, risks flattening these uneven histories into a smooth ontology of material interrelation. Such flattening can obscure the asymmetries that distinguish different forms of life, labour, and exposure, transforming violence and exploitation

into neutral processes of material becoming. A Mediterranean materialism attentive to Pentelic marble, therefore, demands an analytics that holds together nonhuman agency and the imperial, colonial, and capitalist formations through which this stone has been quarried, circulated, and monumentalised. Marble architecture in Athens and beyond cannot be read apart from the genealogies of political economy and racialised order that sustained its extraction and aesthetic elevation. Nor can its contemporary particulate presence, as erosion, debris, or pollution, be separated from these histories. Rather than treating the Mediterranean as a timeless cradle or coherent cultural zone, Pentelic marble forces an engagement with the region as a stratified material field in which marble's dispersed particles register genealogies of labour, extraction, and racialised order.

It is at this point that the question of practice can no longer be deferred. What begins to emerge from these entanglements is not a model or a programme, but a set of material orientations that remain tentative, situated, and open-ended. If Pentelic marble cannot be separated from the genealogies of extraction, circulation, and racialised valuation that sustain it, then any engagement with the stone must also operate within, against, and across these conditions. These material constraints begin to register within practice as uneven adjustments rather than coherent strategies. A refusal of abstraction begins to take hold, where marble is no longer drawn toward the smoothness of a universal surface but encountered through its fractures, impurities, and uneven exposures. The stone resists disappearance into form, insisting instead on a material presence that interrupts architectural coherence even as it makes it possible. This insistence does not remain at the level of appearance alone. It folds back toward the quarry, where extraction can no longer be relegated to a distant origin that vanishes once the block enters architectural space. The quarry persists as a condition, shaping what the marble can become and how it continues to act. Within this persistence, practices of reuse, limitation, or even non-extraction begin to register differently, not as external ethical choices imposed upon matter, but as adjustments shaped by the conditions through which marble circulates. To refuse extraction, or to work with what has already been quarried, is not simply to reduce impact, but to interrupt the smooth passage of stone through the economies that sustain its value. At the same time, marble exceeds both surface and quarry, persisting as dust, residue, and dispersed matter that cannot be contained within the scale of the monument or the building. These particulate afterlives do not mark the end of architecture but extend it into domains of exposure, inhalation, and environmental distribution. Marble enters bodies, atmospheres, and ecologies unevenly, binding material practice to questions of health, duration, and vulnerability across an interface of exposure that exceeds architectural intention. What appears as degradation or loss begins instead to register as a different genealogy of presence, one that resists consolidation while continuing to act. These orientations do not stabilise into a coherent framework. They

remain partial, interfering, and at times incompatible, yet it is precisely through this instability that the contours of something like a lithic economy begin to take shape. Not an economy of optimisation or exchange, but a field of constraints, refusals, and situated engagements through which marble is encountered, limited, and reworked. Such an economy does not resolve the tensions between material agency and historical violence, nor does it seek to reconcile them. It remains within these frictions, allowing architectural practice to be shaped by the uneven and ongoing conditions that Pentelic marble continues to carry.

In parallel with the new materialist call to redress the longstanding relegation of matter to passivity within Euro-Western thought, an approach grounded in Pentelic marble insists on confronting genealogies of inattention to non-dominant material thinking. Read through its geological, architectural, and particulate lives, material agency does not appear far from the epistemic conditions that render matter knowable, valuable, and actionable. While new materialist scholarship has expanded its range through genealogies of physics, cybernetics, and technoscience, the marble brings into view forms of material understanding that have long persisted outside these lineages. Mediterranean histories of stone, labour, and landscape register such orientations through practices of quarrying, reuse, craft, and endurance, where relations between humans and matter are articulated through proximity, exposure, and constraint rather than abstraction. Pentelic marble gathers these conditions without resolving them. At the scale of the block, the surface, and the particle, knowledge forms through extraction, weathering, and friction, remaining inseparable from the uneven histories that sustain it. Its afterlives as dust, fragments, and residues do not mark an end but extend these conditions into dispersed, ongoing material fields, where value, exposure, and transformation continue to circulate. This dissertation closes by situating Pentelic marble not as an illustrative case within an existing framework, but as a material condition that presses theory to remain accountable to how histories take form through specific places and operative scales. Traced across object, surface, and particle, marble does not yield a coherent image of materiality but rather unfolds genealogies of tension and limit. These tensions do not call for synthesis. They demand forms of attention capable of remaining within limits, interruptions, and uneven distributions as they unfold. In this sense, the work does not arrive at a final position. It leaves open a field in which matter continues to act, constrain, and exceed, without settling into the terms.

### 3.3.3 Material Openings

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The focus of this dissertation has been the shifting life of Pentelic marble, tracing its movement from the classical ideal to modern surfaces and finally to the micropolitics of its material particles. Across these phases, marble is never a passive substance. It is entangled with human practices, aesthetic ideals, and architectural orders, while also asserting its own genealogies of material agency. The trajectory itself, *Classical Object*, *Modern Surface*, *Material Particle*, operates as a conceptual lens through which processes of territorialisation and deterritorialisation become legible across shifting scales. The organisation of the work traces a movement between object, surface, and particle, not as a linear progression but as interrelated modes through which Pentelic marble becomes legible across different scales and conditions. It becomes possible to see how the arrangement of chapters enacts an intellectual rhythm, in which structure operates as a medium through which theoretical relations are staged rather than merely organised. The movement through the dissertation is thus both a narrative and a conceptual gesture, exposing the layered genealogy of marble, thought, and becoming. The three-part structure of this dissertation maps the shifting life of Pentelic marble across interrelated modes of relation. Each phase, *Classical Object*, *Modern Surface*, and *Material Particle*, corresponds to a distinct genealogy of relation between matter and thought. These phases coexist as overlapping regimes rather than sequential stages, allowing different forms of stabilisation, circulation, fragmentation, and transformation to emerge across the same material field.<sup>317</sup> Across these regimes, marble appears as a stable form, a relational surface, and a particulate assemblage, without these modes excluding one another.

The *Classical Object* situates marble within fixed cultural, historical, and architectural codes. Its whiteness is codified, recognised, and institutionalised, while its meanings are sustained through genealogies of repetition, preservation, and architectural authority. The second phase, *Modern Surface*, traces marble's movement from a stabilised object into a relational surface. Here, marble functions increasingly as an interface through which light, perception, architectural practice, and institutional visibility are negotiated. Finally, the *Material Particle* shifts attention on the particulate condition of marble, exposing genealogies of micropolitical becoming. The dissertation is not simply chronological or descriptive; it enacts a rhythm of thought in which the reader moves from order to relation to emergence, from macro to micro, from codified meaning to material agency. The dissertation itself functions as a theoretical gesture, in which structure performs Deleuze and

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<sup>317</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 213–27, 474–510.

Guattari's philosophical concerns, making the unfolding life of Pentelic marble simultaneously a subject and method of inquiry. The *Classical Object* situates Pentelic marble within genealogies of stability, coherence, and recognisable order. Here, marble appears as a consolidated entity, shaped by architectural canons, historical narratives, and aesthetic norms that render it legible and authoritative. It corresponds to genealogies of stabilisation in which matter, meaning, and social organisation coalesce into relatively durable arrangements. Marble is stabilised through repetition, institutionalisation, and cultural reinforcement, becoming aligned with enduring ideas of form, proportion, and permanence. Classical architecture exemplifies this tendency through its reliance on measured order, formal repetition, and codified relations between parts and wholes. Marble's whiteness, extracted and refined from Mount Pentelicus, is encountered not as an open material condition but as a historically charged material already embedded within established frameworks of cultural and architectural authority. In this context, the material participates in reproducing genealogies of continuity, origin, and legitimacy. This phase resonates with Deleuze's critique of the dogmatic image of thought,<sup>318</sup> where thinking proceeds through recognition rather than invention. Marble, as a *Classical Object*, where thinking proceeds through recognition rather than invention. Marble, as a *Classical Object*, becomes a material that confirms what is already known. Its function is primarily confirmatory, stabilising inherited orders while limiting the scope of variation. Deterritorialisation remains constrained within established boundaries. Examples drawn from neoclassical Athens illustrate this condition clearly. Pentelic marble is mobilised as a consistent material presence across temples, monuments, and later civic buildings, reinforcing a continuity between antiquity and modern nation-building. Literary and archival works further attest to marble's role in shaping collective Greek national identity, as apprehended by certain architects, civic elites, and segments of the broader public, grounding ideas of historical continuity, cultural authority, and modern nationhood through its apparent solidity and endurance. In each case, marble supports large-scale narratives and relatively stable cultural formations. This chapter begins, therefore, from a condition of relative fixity. The *Classical Object* establishes the genealogy from which subsequent transformations emerge. The chapters that follow trace how this apparent coherence is reworked through the relational dynamics of the surface and the dispersed material processes revealed at the particulate scale.

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<sup>318</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 136–46.

The *Modern Surface* marks a shift in the life of Pentelic marble from a stable object to a relational field. It designates a regime in which marble is reorganised as an interface rather than a self-contained object. Within modernist practices, the surface becomes the primary site where material, perception, and architectural technique converge, producing genealogies of mediation distinct from neoclassical symbolism and the micropolitical processes examined at the scale of the particle. While marble continues to carry historical weight, its operation is no longer confined to the stabilised cultural, historical, and architectural frameworks that characterised the *Classical Object*. Instead, attention moves to the surface as a site of encounter, where material, perception, and architectural practice intersect. This phase foregrounds openness, continuity, and movement across previously stabilised relations. Rather than reinforcing fixed correspondences between form and meaning, the modern surface loosens these associations, allowing marble to operate through changing relations of perception, use, and architectural practice. Marble operates as an interface through which light, touch, scale, and bodily presence are negotiated. It mediates perceptual and material relations through modulation rather than fixed representation. The surface acts as a mediator rather than a fixed endpoint, enabling marble to participate in new architectural and aesthetic arrangements. Within modernist practices, classical associations are reworked through abstraction, reduction, and spatial continuity. Yet this movement is neither complete nor irreversible. The relational possibilities opened by the modern surface remain entangled with processes of regulation, standardisation, and institutional control. Within modern architecture, marble surfaces are continually reorganised through technical standards, functional requirements, and institutional norms. The surface therefore remains a site of tension between openness and ordering, experimentation and control. Pentelic marble, even as it appears liberated from classical form, continues to circulate within regulated systems of extraction, fabrication, and architectural display. Examples from modern architecture in Greece and beyond illustrate this ambivalent condition. Marble surfaces are deployed as planes of continuity, reflecting light and emphasising spatial flow, while simultaneously adhering to genealogies of construction logic. In these contexts, the surface becomes a threshold rather than a conclusion, a zone where material agency and architectural intention remain in negotiation. The *Modern Surface* thus occupies a distinct regime of operation, situated in tension with both the stability of the *Classical Object* and the dispersal of the *Material Particle*. Throughout this phase, the dissertation traces not a final transition but a reconfiguration of scale, in which earlier formations persist while being reworked at the molecular level. Deterritorialisation unfolds not through rupture alone but through subtle shifts in

how marble is extracted, processed, circulated, and encountered.<sup>319</sup> The surface opens marble to relationality and movement, preparing the ground for genealogies of molecular descent in which material agency operates beyond the limits of architectural form.

At the scale of the *Material Particle*, attention shifts from surfaces and forms to the molecular condition of Pentelic marble. Marble is no longer encountered as a coherent object or even as a continuous plane, but as an assemblage of particles, fragments, and traces. Here, molecular processes become visible as change emerges from genealogies of local interaction rather than overarching form.<sup>320</sup> Marble's agency becomes perceptible at the point where processes no longer proceed as intended, where fragmentation deviates, where dust disperses beyond containment, and where material behaviour forces a reorganisation of action. At this scale, a fracture does not simply reduce a block but redirects its possible uses; dust extends genealogies of material action into bodies and atmospheres. At the particulate level, processes of fragmentation, dispersal, and redistribution become particularly visible. The particles of Pentelic marble participate in processes of weathering, erosion, and reconfiguration that exceed architectural intention. These processes unfold through material genealogies that exceed both classical and modernist forms of composition. Marble dust, fragments, and residues circulate across sites, mixing with air, soil, and bodies, altering environments in subtle yet persistent ways. Here, material agency is not located in monumental form but in dispersed genealogies of action. At this scale, distinctions between human and nonhuman agency are redistributed, as architectural decisions intersect with chemical, climatic, and geological processes that exceed intentional control. Larger formations persist, yet their stability is continually modulated at the molecular level. Pentelic marble, when approached as a particle, exposes the fragility of the structures it sustains. Examples of this condition can be found in genealogies of reuse, dismantling, and decay, where marble fragments persist beyond their original architectural contexts. Traces of Pentelic marble reappear in contemporary constructions, restoration processes, and urban debris, carrying genealogies of material memory without fixed meaning. Marble resists full incorporation into cultural narratives, remaining active through the movement of fragments, dust, and residues across different contexts. Foregrounding the particle reframes the *Classical Object* and the *Modern Surface* as temporary

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<sup>319</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 508-10.

<sup>320</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 213-27.

arrangements within a broader field of molecular activity. Pentelic marble thus appears as a dynamic genealogical assemblage, continuously shaping and reshaping the architectural, cultural, and material landscapes it inhabits.<sup>321</sup>

The three-part structure does more than organise material into successive chapters. It operates as a conceptual device staged through genealogies of molar and molecular shift. Structure becomes a mode of thinking, not simply a framework for presentation. Each part stages a distinct genealogy of relation, through which marble appears under changing conditions without being reduced to a single interpretation. The reader is not asked to accept a single interpretation of Pentelic marble but is instead drawn into a sequence of encounters that loosen fixed associations and open space for relational understanding. Importantly, the structure resists a simple linear narrative of progress. Earlier formations persist as genealogies within later ones, maintaining a tension between the molar and the molecular, the striated and the smooth. The structure thus sustains coexistence rather than replacement. By foregrounding structure as a philosophical device, the dissertation aligns method with theory. The organisation of the work extends its conceptual concerns, demonstrating how architectural and material research can be shaped by philosophical ideas at the level of form as well as content. In this sense, the dissertation does not simply apply Deleuze and Guattari's concepts to Pentelic marble. It allows those concepts to inform how research itself unfolds, how arguments are staged, and how material agency is brought into view. What follows from this condition is not a programme but a series of adjustments that emerge where material behaviour interrupts intention. If Pentelic marble is encountered as particulate, relational, and continuously reconfigured, then architectural and material practices can no longer operate solely at the level of form or surface. They begin instead to engage genealogies of extraction, dispersion, reuse, and transformation as sites of intervention. Such practices might attend to the afterlives of marble fragments, to cycles of dust and debris, and to modes of construction that work with, rather than against, material variability and decay. They might privilege reversible assemblies, low-energy transformations, or the redistribution of existing material stocks over new extraction, not as ethical imperatives imposed from outside, but as responses emerging from genealogies of the material's own trajectories. In this sense, these practices do not form a unified programme. They unfold as situated

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<sup>321</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 88-91, 503-10.

adjustments within ongoing assemblages, where labour, matter, and environment are reconfigured in relation to one another. What comes into view is a genealogy of stone economy, one that no longer depends on permanence, purity, or origin, but on circulation, mutation, and exposure. Marble here is not secured as heritage, nor dissolved into abstraction, but engaged as a participant in processes that exceed architectural authorship while still demanding responsibility.

Thus, the dissertation aligns with the theoretical framework not as a neutral container but as a device through which material relations become perceptible across scales. By organising the research around genealogies of *Classical Object*, *Modern Surface*, and *Material Particle*, it traces a movement in which stability is progressively unsettled and reconfigured without ever being fully abandoned. Each phase introduces a distinct mode of relation between marble, architecture, and thought, while earlier formations persist as latent genealogies within later ones. Rather than resolving into a linear progression, the structure sustains overlap and tension, allowing molar and molecular, striated and smooth, to remain in active interplay. Within this field of coexistence, Pentelic marble appears not as a fixed material with a singular architectural destiny, but as something continuously produced through genealogies of extraction, circulation, use, and decay. The dissertation's concern with shifting scales thus implies more than an interpretative framework; it suggests the conditions under which marble is handled, redistributed, and transformed, including the residues and fragments that persist beyond formal completion. At this point, material behaviour no longer remains subordinate to design or intention. Fragmentation redirects use, surfaces give way under stress, and dust disperses along genealogies of emergence, extending the material into bodies and environments where it continues to act. Practices oriented by such conditions do not stabilise marble within new formal orders but adjust to its variability, dispersion, and ongoing reconfiguration. In this sense, the concluding perspective is less a summary than a reorientation toward genealogies of material persistence. Pentelic marble remains legible across historical, aesthetic, and political registers, yet its persistence depends equally on processes that exceed these frames and cannot be fully contained within them. To attend to these processes is to recognise that architectural engagement with marble is always entangled with trajectories that redistribute matter beyond the building, beyond the quarry, and beyond the moment of design. The dissertation, therefore, leaves open not a field of abstract possibility but a set of genealogical conditions in which action is constrained, redirected, and exposed, as marble continues to fracture, disperse, and settle in ways that resist closure. This opening toward future research returns to the tensions first set out in the classical object, carrying them into new material configurations.

# Conclusions

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## I Summary of Key Findings

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This dissertation has examined Pentelic marble as a material whose architectural, cultural, and theoretical significance cannot be accounted for through assumptions of continuity, permanence, or inherited classical meaning. Rather than approaching marble as a stable substrate linking antiquity and modernity, the research has demonstrated that its coherence emerges through repeated historical operations that stabilise matter, form, and meaning at particular moments, only to be unsettled again through shifts in scale, practice, and material behaviour. Read genealogically, Pentelic marble appears not as a timeless material essence but as a site where geological processes, political projects, epistemic frameworks, and architectural practices converge and diverge across time.

A first set of findings concerns the production of marble as a classical object. The dissertation has shown that the apparent coherence and authority of Pentelic marble within classical and neoclassical architectural discourse are not grounded in the material itself but are the outcome of historically specific assemblages. These include the canonisation of classical architecture within 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century European art history, restoration practices that privileged stone over colour, and aesthetic theories that elevated whiteness as a visual marker of purity, rationality, and civilisation. Through these operations, Pentelic marble was stabilised as the paradigmatic material of Greek antiquity and subsequently as a foundational reference for Western architectural identity. This stabilisation depended upon selective acts of memory and erasure. Polychromy, quarry labour, environmental transformation, and the social conditions under which marble was extracted and worked were systematically obscured, allowing marble to appear as an autonomous bearer of form. The classical marble object thus emerged not as an inherited continuity from antiquity, but as a historically maintained configuration that required constant epistemic and material reinforcement. Closely linked to this stabilisation was the political mobilisation of Pentelic marble within processes of nation formation. The dissertation has demonstrated that marble's role in the construction of modern Athens was not a simple revival of the classical past but the result of uneven negotiations among vernacular, Ottoman, neoclassical, and modernist spatial practices. Rather than expressing uninterrupted national continuity, marble

functioned as a material archive through which selective memory was produced and cultural erasure enacted. Its deployment helped naturalise particular narratives of Greek identity while marginalising others, positioning marble simultaneously as a symbol of national belonging and as an instrument through which exclusions were materialised. In this context, classical antiquity emerged less as an origin than as a technique: a means through which legitimacy, authority, and cultural coherence were assembled in the present.

A second set of findings concerns the transformation of marble in modernity, in which its role shifted from a structural object to an abstracted surface. As architecture became increasingly aligned with industrialised construction systems, Pentelic marble was deterritorialised from its former architectural depth and reterritorialised within modernist and institutional environments as cladding, panel, and veneer. In this condition, marble no longer asserted authority through mass or tectonics but through surface effects. Its whiteness, smoothness, and reflective qualities were mobilised to project neutrality, clarity, and institutional order. Embassies, state buildings, museums, and corporate architectures used Pentelic marble surfaces as interfaces through which political and epistemic authority was rendered visible while appearing apolitical. The dissertation has shown that this shift did not represent a rupture with antiquity, but rather a reconfiguration of its authority. Classical legitimacy persisted through abstraction, embedded in the surface logic of modern architecture. This surface regime cannot be understood outside broader histories of coloniality and racialised aesthetics. The dissertation has demonstrated that the visual regimes associated with marble's whiteness did not merely reflect aesthetic preference but functioned as political technologies through which European modernity naturalised its own universality. Marble surfaces participated in colonial epistemologies by rendering Western architectural norms self-evident while marginalising other material traditions and temporalities. In this way, coloniality operated not only through territorial control but through visual and material regimes that organised perception, value, and legitimacy. The modern marble surface thus condensed complex genealogies of power into an appearance of timeless neutrality.

A third and decisive set of findings emerges from the shift in scale toward the material particle. By attending to fragments, residues, quarry waste, dust, and dispersed stone particles, the dissertation has demonstrated that marble resists full containment within object- or surface-centred epistemologies. At this scale, marble reveals forms of material agency that are relational, distributed, and entangled with environmental and geological processes. Agency is no longer located

solely in architects, institutions, or symbolic forms but unfolds across interactions among stone, tools, labour, weathering, and time. These particulate states expose the limits of anthropocentric architectural history and challenge conceptual frameworks that treat matter as a passive substrate. The particle destabilises both the monumental coherence of the classical object and the visual authority of the modern surface. It brings into view processes of extraction, exhaustion, and environmental transformation that architectural narratives typically bracket out. Quarry landscapes, scarred mountainsides, and airborne dust reveal architecture as inseparable from geological and ecological systems that operate on scales beyond human time. In this perspective, marble's durability is reconfigured as a condition of ongoing transformation rather than material permanence. Architecture appears not as a stable ordering of matter but as a momentary alignment within broader material flows.

Across these scales, object, surface, and particle, the dissertation has shown that material continuity does not function as inheritance but as an active practice of stabilisation. Antiquity is not transmitted intact through marble; it is repeatedly produced, mobilised, and reconfigured. Pentelic marble participates in shaping historical narratives precisely because it lends itself to multiple forms of coherence that can be aligned with different political, aesthetic, and epistemic projects. Yet these coherences remain provisional. They depend upon exclusions, abstractions, and maintenance, and they unravel when approached through alternative scales or material practices. Within this constellation of findings, the dissertation has articulated Mediterranean materialism as a framework capable of holding together geological specificity, extraction, circulation, and geopolitical entanglement without reducing them to cultural essence. Rather than positing the Mediterranean as a timeless or unified region, this materialism emphasises uneven histories, environmental pressures, and the long afterlives of materials. It resists universalising theories of material agency by grounding analysis in place, labour, and landscape. Pentelic marble thus becomes not a regional emblem but a generative case through which broader questions of materiality, architecture, and power can be rethought. Taken together, these findings do not resolve the question of marble's meaning in architecture, nor do they propose a new stable ontology of material. Instead, they demonstrate that architectural materials are constituted through overlapping genealogies that remain open, partial, and contested. Pentelic marble emerges as a medium through which architecture's investment in continuity, authority, and permanence is both enacted and unsettled. By moving between object, surface, and particle, the dissertation reveals architecture not as a discipline that shapes passive matter, but as one that is itself shaped by the material histories it seeks to stabilise.

## II Research Implications and Contributions

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The implications of this dissertation extend beyond the specific case of Pentelic marble. By approaching architectural materiality genealogically and through scalesifting, from object to surface to particle, the study advances a set of methodological and conceptual contributions that challenge dominant modes of architectural historiography, material theory, and disciplinary selfunderstanding. Rather than proposing a new canon or alternative material ontology, the dissertation contributes a way of thinking with materials that remains attentive to instability, entanglement, and the political work performed by acts of stabilisation themselves. Methodologically, the dissertation demonstrates the creativity of genealogy as an architectural mode of inquiry. Genealogy, as mobilised here, does not seek origins, typologies, or explanatory continuities. Instead, it attends to the contingent operations through which architectural materials and forms are repeatedly rendered coherent, authoritative, and selfevident. This approach enables a critical reorientation of architectural history, shifting emphasis away from stylistic succession and formal precedent toward the practices, classifications, and exclusions through which architectural meaning is assembled. In doing so, the research offers an alternative to both objectcentred historiography and purely discursive critiques by foregrounding the material operations that sustain architectural knowledge claims. Material genealogy emerges as a practice that neither dissolves architecture into ideology nor reifies matter as an autonomous force, but keeps the two in productive tension. At a theoretical level, the dissertation contributes to recent debates on material agency by advancing a relational and situated understanding of matter. Rather than attributing agency to materials as intrinsic vitality or passive resistance, the dissertation demonstrates how agency emerges through interactions among geological formation, extraction practices, labour, institutional frameworks, and environmental conditions. Pentelic marble's agency, its fracture, weathering, dispersal into dust, and reassembly into architectural surfaces cannot be reduced to human intention nor abstracted into a universal material theory. This finding has broader implications for architectural theory and the environmental humanities, suggesting that materials should be approached as historically saturated fields of relation rather than as stable objects or metaphors. The dissertation thus contributes a calibrated position within materialist thought, one that resists both anthropocentric mastery and romanticised animism.

The scale-shifting structure of the research further contributes to architectural theory by destabilising entrenched analytical hierarchies. Architectural discourse has traditionally privileged the scale of buildings, monuments, or urban forms, often treating environmental and geological dimensions as background conditions. By foregrounding fragments, residues, and particles, the dissertation reframes

architecture as a practice within longer, more dispersed material processes. This shift has implications for how architecture's temporal horizons are understood. Geological time, extractive duration, and environmental afterlives do not sit outside architectural history; they actively structure it. Architecture appears less as an autonomous discipline shaping matter and more as one actor among others within extended material systems. This repositioning complicates narratives of architectural permanence and responsibility, opening space for reconsidering architecture's role within planetary and ecological contexts. The dissertation also contributes to critical architectural studies by exposing the persistence of coloniality within modern material regimes. Through its analysis of whiteness, surface abstraction, and the global circulation of Pentelic marble aesthetics, the study demonstrates how colonial power operates not only through territorial domination or symbolic representation, but through material and visual regimes that render particular architectural norms natural and universal. The modern marble surface emerges as a key interface through which institutional authority is mediated and legitimised. By tracing these operations genealogically, the dissertation intervenes in debates on modernism, postcolonial architecture, and critical heritage studies, offering a material account of how colonial hierarchies persist through aesthetic refinement rather than overt imposition.

A central contribution of the dissertation lies in its articulation of Mediterranean materialism as an alternative to universalising material theories. Rather than treating the Mediterranean as a cultural essence or stable region, this framework foregrounds geological specificity, extraction, circulation, and geopolitical entanglement. It situates materials within uneven histories of labour, colonial intervention, and environmental transformation, resisting both regional romanticism and abstract materialism. Mediterranean materialism thus functions not as a bounded theory but as a mode of attention, one that insists on place without essentialism and on materiality without detachment from history. This contribution is particularly relevant for architectural theory, which has often relied on implicitly Northern European or AngloAmerican paradigms when theorising material practice. The implications of this work also extend to architectural heritage and to the discourse on restoration. By demonstrating that the coherence of classical materials depends upon ongoing acts of stabilisation and erasure, the dissertation challenges conservation models that treat heritage materials as carriers of fixed values. Restoration emerges not as neutral preservation but as an active process of reterritorialisation, selectively reinforcing certain narratives while suppressing others. This insight complicates prevailing approaches to classical monuments, archaeological sites, and cultural patrimony by foregrounding the politics of material care, visibility, and omission. Marble's afterlives, its fragments, waste, and reuses, become as significant as its monumental forms, suggesting a reorientation of heritage practice toward material multiplicity rather than idealised unity.

Disciplinarily, the dissertation contributes to architectural philosophy by questioning the epistemic assumptions that underpin objectbased thinking. The movement from object to surface to particle exposes the limits of subject–object frameworks that continue to structure architectural knowledge. Rather than positioning the architect or historian as an external observer of material phenomena, the research foregrounds the coconstitution of knowledge, matter, and power. Architecture is shown to be inseparable from the material genealogies it attempts to stabilise. This reframing has implications for how architectural theory understands its own methods, particularly in relation to representation, abstraction, and critique. Finally, the dissertation contributes a structural experiment in architectural writing itself. Its nonlinear organisation, iterative returns, and scalesifting movements are not stylistic devices but methodological commitments. The structure enacts the argument that materials do not unfold along linear historical trajectories but through recursive and overlapping processes. In resisting summary, closure, and teleological synthesis, the dissertation proposes a mode of architectural scholarship that remains open to contradiction and transformation. This contribution expresses an ethical stance toward material histories that refuses to resolve their tensions prematurely. Taken together, these implications position the dissertation as a contribution to architectural theory that is at once material, political, and methodological. It does not offer a new doctrine of marble, materiality, or modernity. Instead, it proposes a way of thinking architecture through matter that remains attentive to fracture, dispersion, and the contingent production of coherence. In doing so, it opens architectural thought to questions that cannot be fully answered within the present study but remain materially and conceptually pressing. These openings form the ground for the future directions and questions that follow.

### III Future Directions and Emerging Questions

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The findings and contributions outlined in this dissertation do not resolve the questions they raise. On the contrary, by tracing Pentelic marble across object, surface, and particle, they unsettle many of the analytical categories through which architectural materiality has traditionally been understood. The genealogical movement developed here exposes the provisional nature of architectural coherence. It reveals a series of conceptual, methodological, and political questions that extend beyond the scope of the present study. These questions do not indicate insufficient closure but express the nature of materially grounded inquiry itself, which resists final synthesis and instead opens onto further trajectories of investigation.

One immediate direction emerging from this research concerns the environmental afterlives of architectural materials. By attending to marble at the scale of fragments, waste, and dust, the dissertation foregrounds extractive processes and ecological

transformations that architectural history has tended to treat as external conditions. This shift raises broader questions about how architectural theory might more fully engage with environmental humanities and political ecology. How might architectural materials be studied not only at the moment of construction, but across their extended material trajectories, including exhaustion, contamination, dispersion, and ruin? What forms of architectural responsibility emerge when materials are understood as ongoing environmental agents rather than inert resources? These questions suggest the need for further research into the ecological temporalities of architecture that extend beyond the lifespans of buildings and monuments.

Closely related is the question of labour and extraction. The genealogical approach adopted in this dissertation has shown that marble's cultural authority depends on systematic erasures of quarrying labour, artisanal skill, and bodily exposure to material risk. This insight opens avenues for future research that more directly foreground workers, extraction sites, and logistics networks as architectural actors. How might architectural history and theory change if extraction environments were treated as architectural spaces in their own right, rather than as pre-architectural zones of raw material? What critical vocabularies are required to address the bodily, social, and political dimensions of material production without subordinating them to narratives of form or authorship? These questions point toward interdisciplinary engagements with labour history, anthropology, and critical geography that remain largely underdeveloped within architectural discourse.

Another set of emerging questions concerns the epistemic frameworks through which architectural materials are rendered intelligible. The dissertation has demonstrated that objectbased and surfacebased epistemologies rely on stabilisations that conceal material heterogeneity and relational agency. This raises broader methodological questions about the limits of representation in architectural knowledge. If materials do not resolve into stable objects, how should architectural analysis account for processes of fracture, dispersal, and transformation that resist visual capture? What alternative modes of writing, documentation, or analysis might be required to engage with material processes that unfold across incompatible scales and temporalities? These questions suggest that architectural theory may need to further experiment with forms of scholarship that move beyond descriptive or classificatory models.

The notion of material agency itself also remains open to further interrogation. While this dissertation has argued for a relational and situated understanding of agency, it raises questions about the conceptual boundaries between human, material, and environmental action. How might future research navigate the tension between recognising material agency and avoiding the erasure of responsibility, particularly

in contexts shaped by exploitation and inequality? To what extent can agency be distributed without becoming politically diffuse? These questions are particularly pressing in architectural contexts, where material decisions have long-term environmental and social consequences. They point toward the need for theoretical frameworks that combine material agency with accountability rather than treating the two as opposed.

The articulation of Mediterranean materialism as a situated framework opens further comparative directions. While this study has focused on Pentelic marble, its methodological orientation invites parallel investigations into other material genealogies situated within different geological and geopolitical contexts. How might similar approaches reveal the specificities of materials such as basalt, limestone, concrete, or timber in regions shaped by colonial extraction, infrastructural modernisation, or ecological vulnerability? To what extent can a material genealogy remain grounded in place without collapsing into regional essentialism? These questions suggest that Mediterranean materialism functions less as a closed theory than as a transferable mode of inquiry that can be recalibrated across contexts.

The dissertation also raises unresolved questions concerning heritage, preservation, and restoration. By exposing the stabilising operations through which classical materials are rendered authoritative, the dissertation challenges assumptions that underlie contemporary conservation practices. This opens a line of inquiry into how heritage institutions might engage with material multiplicity rather than idealised continuity. What would it mean to curate architectural heritage in ways that acknowledge fracture, reuse, and material loss as constitutive rather than accidental? How might practices of repair, replacement, or restitution be rethought when materials are understood as processes rather than finite objects? These questions extend beyond Pentelic marble to the broader politics of heritage management in a period marked by environmental crisis and contested historical narratives. Several implications emerge from the genealogical approach developed in this dissertation. If Pentelic marble is approached genealogically, then heritage cannot be reduced to the preservation of an original form or the recovery of an ideal state. The classical object, the modern surface, and the material particle reveal that marble persists through processes of transformation, reuse, weathering, fracture, repair, and dispersal. These processes are not external threats to the material's authenticity but part of its historical constitution. From this perspective, heritage conservation might shift its emphasis from the stabilisation of ideal forms towards the documentation and interpretation of material trajectories. Fractures, surface alterations, accumulated repairs, quarry traces, and even material losses become part of the archive through which marble records its passage across time. Such an approach suggests that restoration should acknowledge the multiple

temporalities embedded within materials rather than privileging a single historical moment as uniquely authentic. The case of Pentelic marble is particularly revealing because its history extends beyond monuments and official heritage sites. Fragments reused in Byzantine structures, stones incorporated into Ottoman and modern buildings, quarry debris, and dispersed particles all participate in the material afterlife of the marble. A genealogical approach, therefore, expands the field of heritage beyond the monumental object towards the broader material ecologies through which architectural history is produced and continuously transformed. In this sense, the question is not how to preserve marble in a fixed state, but how to curate its ongoing processes of becoming. Heritage becomes less a matter of recovering origins than of making visible the layered histories, material losses, reuses, and transformations through which materials endure.

At the disciplinary level, the dissertation leaves open questions about the future of architectural theory. By destabilising the centrality of the architectural object and questioning the neutrality of material surfaces, the research suggests a need to rethink the discipline's conceptual foundations. What forms of architectural theory become possible when architecture is no longer positioned as the primary agent shaping matter, but as one participant within extended material and political systems? How might architectural education, criticism, and practice shift if materials are approached genealogically rather than typologically? These are not questions that can be resolved within a single dissertation, but they gesture toward a broader reconfiguration of architectural thinking.

Finally, the movement toward the particle reveals a conceptual horizon that remains largely unexplored. At this scale, architecture encounters phenomena that resist disciplinary ownership: airborne matter, geological dispersal, and environmental thresholds. These phenomena challenge architecture's spatial and representational limits, suggesting that architectural materiality extends into domains traditionally considered outside the discipline. How might architectural theory engage with such dispersed materialities without reducing them to metaphor or withdrawing from them entirely? What kinds of alliances with environmental science, geology, or feminist and posthuman theory might be required to address these questions responsibly? The particle does not offer a new foundation; it opens a field of complexity in which architectural agency is both diminished and expanded.

These directions do not point toward a single future research programme but toward a field of inquiry defined by instability, entanglement, and ongoing negotiation. The questions raised here arise directly from the dissertation findings. By refusing closure, they affirm genealogy not as a method that ends in origin or resolution, but as one that keeps matter, history, and architecture in a productive state of tension.

In this sense, the future directions outlined here are not external extensions of the dissertation but are integral to its argument: that architectural materials, once closely followed, do not lead to conclusions but to further questions that remain open.

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# Curriculum Vitae

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## Education and Qualifications

- 2022 – 2026 Delft University of Technology, Department of Architecture  
PhD in Architecture
- 2022 – 2023 Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm  
Master of Advanced Studies in Architecture & Fine Art
- 2009 – 2015 National Technical University of Athens, School of Architecture  
Diploma in Architecture

## Academic Appointments

- 2026 – KTH Royal Institute of Technology, School of Architecture, Stockholm  
Lecturer in Architecture
- 2022 – 2026 Delft University of Technology, Department of Architecture  
Tutor & Research Fellow in Architecture
- 2013 National Technical University of Athens, School of Architecture  
Research Assistant

## Architecture, Design and Research Practice

- 2023 – Marblescape Research Design Lab  
Founder
- 2019 – 2023 Andreas Martin-Löf Arkitekter, Stockholm  
Senior Architect
- 2017 – 2019 Tengbom, Stockholm  
Architect





# Becoming Marble

A Genealogy of Pentelic Matter and Mediterranean Materialism

Angelos Chiotis

*Becoming Marble* traces the shifting life of Pentelic marble across geological, architectural, political, and epistemic terrains. Rather than treating marble as a stable classical medium, the dissertation develops a genealogy of its successive stabilisations and disturbances, from object to surface to particle, showing how material processes and conceptual formations continually remake one another. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notions of territorialisation and deterritorialisation, alongside postcolonial critique and new materialist thought, the study articulates a Mediterranean materialism grounded in the Attic landscape. The first part, *Classical Object*, examines how Pentelic marble was consolidated as an aesthetic and political substance through architectural whiteness, neoclassical historiography, and colonial knowledge regimes, obscuring labour, exclusions, and racialised imaginaries. The second part, *Modern Surface*, turns to the twentieth century, where marble operates as an interface within modernist abstraction and global power structures, organising visibility, legitimacy, and institutional authority while revealing the fractures of modern universality. The third part, *Material Particle*, shifts scale to fragments, dust, and dispersed residues. Through archival research, quarry ethnographies, and material encounters at Mount Pentelicus, it foregrounds matter's own tendencies and agencies, challenging subject-object logics and linear material memory. Across these movements, the dissertation argues that Pentelic marble does not simply link antiquity and modernity but actively participates in their continual reconfiguration. By moving from the monumental to the particulate, *Becoming Marble* proposes a rethinking of architectural materiality attentive to entanglement, heterogeneity, and genealogies without fixed origins.

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