

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ
WORLD HERITAGE LIST N° 404

A) IDENTIFICATION

Nomination : The Acropolis, Athens

Location : Attica

State Party : Greece

Date : June 27, 1986

B) ICOMOS RECOMMENDATION

That the proposed cultural property be included on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria I, II, III, IV and VI.

C) JUSTIFICATION

The ideal World Heritage List, as dreamt by the writers of the Convention in 1972, reserved a very special place for the Athenian Acropolis from the very beginning. This cultural property is so celebrated that its meaning shifted from a common noun to a proper noun. To mention "acropolis" today no longer means referring to those upper towns, both fortresses and sanctuaries which existed in every urban settlement in Antiquity, but, in most instances, to the unique site of the Athenian Acropolis.

The Acropolis is located on a rocky promontory 156 m above the valley of Ilissos; it covers a surface area of less than 3 hectares. From the 2nd millennium B.C., it was a fortress protecting places of worship and royal palaces, some foundations of which were discovered near Erechtheion. Access to the plateau was protected by a wall, known by the name of Pelasgicon, that existed prior to the invasions of the Dorians who threatened Athens beginning in 1200; some remains of its Cyclopean masonry may still be found in the base of pyrgos or "bastion" of the temple of Athena Nike, to the west, but also to the south of the Parthenon and to the east of the museum. A underground stairway, built near the north facade, opened onto a reservoir, whose inexhaustible source flowed in both summer and winter.

After the fall of the tyrants, Hipparchus in 514 and Hippias in 510, the Acropolis was reconstructed. The Pelasgicon, which a Delphic oracle declared cursed, was destroyed. The upper town, deprived of its ramparts, was weakened, and in 480, the Xerxes' Persians took it over, looting and burning the sanctuaries. Paradoxically, the looting of the Acropolis in 480 B.C. guaranteed the conservation of one of the most impressive

collections of archaic sculpture in the Greek world: the statuary of the temples built in the 6th century by Pisistratus and his successors was either hastily thrown into ditches as the Persians began their approach or was recuperated then reused in the rampart that Themistocles ordered built after their departure. The rampart was destroyed in 472-471, at the same time as a wall known as the "Long Walls" enclosing Athens and its port at Piraeus.

With Pericles, the 5th century B.C. marks the apogee of Athenian democracy. It was also the golden age of drama, with Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides; of philosophy, with Socrates; and of art, with Phidias, Ictinos, Callicrates and Alcámenes, to mention just the architects and sculptors who worked on the Acropolis.

A period of several decades, from 447 to 406 B.C., saw the successive building of the main temple dedicated to Athena, the Parthenon; the Propylaea, the monumental entrance which replaced the Pisistratus gate, built on the very site of one of the entrances to the citadel of the old kings; the temple of Athena Nike; and the Erechtheion - the four masterpieces of classic Greek art.

Although the disastrous Peloponnesian War and the capitulation of Athens in April 404 B.C. caused the demolition of the Long Walls, they did not affect the Acropolis monuments. The sacred hill of Athens, whose monuments were the admiration of all, continued to be beautified by the masters of the time and the powerful personalities of the moment, including the sovereigns of Pergamon, Cappadocia and Egypt, Roman emperors such as Claudius and Hadrian, and wealthy private citizens like Herod Atticus, the private tutor of Marcus Aurelius.

The first incidence of damage to the monumental heritage of the Acropolis came at the time of the Herulian raid in 267. Since then and in spite of long periods of relative calm, the monuments and the site have been damaged many times. The Byzantines did not put the Theodosius Edit (435), prohibiting the demolition of pagan temples, into application: rather they converted the temples into churches and removed their art treasures to Constantinople. After the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1204, Athens was put into the hands of Frankish lords who had little respect for its ruins: from 1225 to 1308, the seigniors de la Roche camped in the Propylaea, which had been turned into a castle, and the Latin archbishop held services in the Parthenon which had become Notre Dame of Athens. When the Turks took over the city in 1456, it became a mosque, and Erechtheion was used from time to time as the harem of the Turkish governor. In 1687, the most tragic of dates, the siege of the Acropolis by the Venetian armies of Morosini resulted in the explosion of the Parthenon, which the Turks used as a powder magazine. During the brief time Morosini was in Athens, he was one of the first to pillage the Parthenon for some of its admirable sculptures; his brutal intervention

caused new damage to the Temple of Athena. In the 19th century, with official authorization from the Sultan, Lord Elgin, ambassador of the King of England to the Sublime Porte, completed the pillaging by acquiring marble sections which since 1815 have been the pride of the British Museum.

After a century of excavations and improvements of the site, the Acropolis is now a testing ground for the most innovative open-air conservation techniques aimed at safeguarding the marble sections which have been affected by heavy atmospheric pollution.

ICOMOS is pleased by the long-awaited proposal to include the Athenian Acropolis on the World Heritage List and notes that this exceptional cultural property meets criteria I, II, III, IV and VI of the "Guidelines".

- **Criterion I.** The Athenian Acropolis is the supreme expression of the adaptation of architecture to a natural site. This grand composition of perfectly-balanced massive structures creates a monumental landscape of unique beauty consisting of a complete series of masterpieces of the 5th century B.C.: the Parthenon by Phidias, Ictinos and Callicrates (447-432); the Propylaea by Mnesicles (437-432); the Temple of Athena Nike by Mnesicles and Callicrates (448-407); and Erechtheion, completed in 406.

- **Criterion II.** The monuments of the Athenian Acropolis have exerted an exceptional influence, not only in Greco-Roman antiquity during which time in the Mediterranean world they were considered exemplary models, but in contemporary times as well. Throughout the world, Neo-Classic monuments have been inspired by the Parthenon or by the Propylaea.

- **Criterion III.** From myth to institutionalized cult, the Athenian Acropolis, by its precision and diversity, bears a unique testimony to the religions of Ancient Greece. It is the sacred temple from which sprung fundamental legends about the city. There, in the presence of Cecrops, the first mythical king of Athens who arbitrated their contest, Athena and Poseidon fought for possession of the country. Poseidon made a source of salt water spring forth; Athena offered the olive tree which, cut by the Persians in 480, grew again the following year. The site of the Acropolis is where another mythical king, Erichthonios, was born subsequent to the attempted rape of Athena by Hephaestus. It is also where Aegeus, believing that his son Theseus had been devoured by the Minotaur, threw himself into the sea which now bears his name.

Beginning in the 6th century, the Athenian Acropolis was the place where myths and beliefs gave rise to temples, altars and statues corresponding to an extreme diversity of cults which have brought us the Athenian religion in all its richness and complexity. Athena was venerated as the goddess of the city (Athena Polias); as the goddess of war (Athena Promachos); as the

goddess of victory (Athena Nike); as the protective goddess of crafts (Athena Ergane), etc. Most of her functions are glorified at the main cult temple dedicated to her, the Parthenon, the temple of the maiden-goddess.

- **Criterion IV.** The Athenian Acropolis illustrates civilizations of Greece over a period of more than a millennium. From the royal palace of kings in the 15th century B.C. and the Pelasgic walls of the first fortification, to Odeon, constructed in 161 A.D. by Herod Atticus, a unique series of public monuments was built and conserved in one of the densest spaces of the Mediterranean.

- **Criterion VI.** The Acropolis is directly and tangibly associated with events and ideas which have never faded over the course of history. Its monuments are still living testimonies of the teachings of Plato and Aristotle, the Philippics of Demosthenes and the preachings of St. Paul. These monuments are the memory of a precious part of the cultural heritage of mankind.

ICOMOS, May 1987