

THE PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION OF THE ANCIENT RUINS
IN GREECE AND ITALY

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Summary of Remarks

The basic problem in studying this subject is lack of information. Archaeological journals are mainly concerned with ongoing excavations of new sites or reports of work recently completed. The difficulties of preservation often fall to the governments of the countries involved. The amount of money and effort given to these projects varies, generally in ratio to how many tourists a site is expected to attract. Restoration is a controversial issue, since most archaeologists feel that: (1) it takes away money badly needed for new excavations; (2) it is aimed at merely attracting more tourists; (3) it is not always done correctly. Usually we hear of preservation and foreign restoration projects through articles in newspapers or popular magazines, all too often written by journalists rather than experts.

Preservation has become a major problem due to pollution. Exhaust fumes from automobiles and industry mix with humidity to form sulphur dioxide, which turns marble into a porous and chalky gypsum, giving it a rather leprous appearance. Efforts to deal with this problem have been going on for several decades, but with little success. A major preservation project at present concerns the buildings on the Athenian acropolis, especially the Parthenon and Erechtheum. Although the committee chosen to oversee this enterprise in 1977 was made up mainly of scholars and architects, it is now run by politicians. A completion date is nowhere in sight, and archaeologists have serious concerns about the kind of work taking place.

The plan to turn the forum area of Rome into an archaeological park has also become entangled in politics. This project was first suggested in 1983 by the Communist mayor of Rome, who proposed a three-stage program of preservation, restoration (especially of Trajan's market), and further excavations. When another party took office, the new mayor refused to continue what were considered "Communist" plans.

Two efforts at least are considered worthwhile concerning the touchy subject of restoration. In the early 1950's, the American School of Classical Studies in Athens needed a museum to house artifacts from the agora excavations. It decided to restore the second century B.C. Stoa of Attalus for use as both a museum and offices for the archaeological staff. The work,

carried out between 1953 and 1956, achieved a high degree of accuracy and is one of the best examples of restoration in situ.

One of the great triumphs of Italian archaeology was the recovery and reconstruction of the Ara Pacis, originally built in 13 B.C.. It had to be rescued from a watery grave underneath the Palazoo Fiano. This was accomplished only by some highly innovative engineering techniques. The Ara Pacis was finally reconstructed on a new site in the Campius Martius during 1938, thus allowing it to be seen and studied for the first time in centuries.

The controversy concerning reconstruction is academic; the problem of preservation is vital. Both Greece and Italy need strict pollution codes--there are none at present. Both need long term plans for development impervious to politics. The progress of the present should not be allowed to destroy the monuments of the past.