

4-27-2016

# Greek Performance of Identity in Museums and Monuments

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## Recommended Citation

Burton, Samantha, "Greek Performance of Identity in Museums and Monuments" (2016). *Grants & Fellowships*. 6.  
<http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/honors-grants-and-fellowships/6>

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## **Greek Performance of Identity in Museums and Monuments**

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In this proposal I am requesting funding for a trip to Greece during which I will travel to numerous cities, museums, monuments, and archaeological sites that often attract tourists in order to glean a better understanding of the ways in which selected Greek museums and the state-organized tourism industry select their materials to display and exhibit in galleries and museum shops in commodification of ethnic identity. I will explore the ways in which Greek voices can be conveyed to tourists in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, including through museum exhibits, street art, and dialogues between tourists and locals. I will work closely with fellow Honors student Alfredo Hernandez, who will be researching the impact of recent tourism initiatives within Greece and their effect on the Greek economy following the crisis.

This semester I am attending a course on Representations of Greece: Ancient and Modern taught by classics professor Katerina Zacharia. The course has an engaged learning component which includes an internship with the Los Angeles Greek Film Festival.

Within the course, I have learned about theories of cultural representation and the ways in which countries use discourse to create a certain performance of their identity. Representation, in short, is when members of a culture use language to produce meaning<sup>1</sup>. This language is broad and expansive: it encompasses not only words and phrases but gestures and symbols as well. The correlations between levels of material, conceptual, and signifying representation and understanding are “governed by our cultural and linguistic codes and it is this set of interconnections which produces meaning”<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, a semiotic approach to representation deals with signs within a culture and what meanings they convey<sup>3</sup>; this includes everything from the exhibits a museum puts on display to the graffiti on street corners to the baubles sold only for tourists within shops. Within this is the knowledge that there are power dynamics that exist within every relationship, a balance between the subject and its position. In all cultural heritage places and tourist destinations, the culture there puts on a certain show of its identity for outsiders. The tourist is often placed as the subject, and positioned within the a representation of the culture which they are in that they want to see; often the tourist will never delve deeper into the culture in which he is visiting. I want to occupy the role of this tourist in Greece but dive deep into the culture and listen to the many voices of Greece.

Greece has faced numerous hardships in its long history: Ottoman Occupation, World War II, the Greek Civil War, the financial crisis of the mid-2000s, and most recently the massive influx of refugees crowding the shores. Unemployment rates and suicide rates are at an all-time high, and the future of Greece seems entirely unknown<sup>4</sup>. The Greeks know their tragedies, though, and in the face of tragedy Greece stands strong, and the Greeks persevere.

Greece attempted this in 2004, when it hosted the Olympic Games. The Olympics are a powerful symbol of Greek culture and heritage. The Games were born in Athens in 776 BC, then reinvented in Athens in 1896, placing Athens again as the cradle of Western civilization. Athens hosted them again in 1900, then spent an entire century trying to bring the Games back to their birth city without avail. Finally Athens hosted the games in 2004, and in doing so used the event as a platform for an exuberant celebration of Greek culture (as every city that hosts the Olympics does). This included a display of their rich history- not just classical antiquities that most outsiders associate with Greece but a full depiction of every era of the country, Ottoman occupation and Byzantium and independence and everything in between. In doing so, though, it spent exorbitant amounts of money and sent the country tumbling into a deficit that later came to

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<sup>1</sup>Hall, Stuart, Jessica Evans, and Sean Nixon. *Representation*. London: Sage, 2013. Print

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *Agora: From Democracy to the Market*. Dir. Yorgos Avgeropoulos. Small Planet Productions, 2014.

a head in 2008<sup>5</sup>. Greece was then thrown into a financial crisis that was crushing to the economy, compounded by the fact that tourism levels decreased as Greece became viewed as unstable by potential visitors.

In the wake of this, it seems Greeks continue to display their cultural heritage to cling to their national identity to overcome this challenge. Since 2004, the Olympic installations have become dilapidated, since the country did not have the funds to keep them up. Recently, the Greek government has even proposed repurposing the Olympic village into housing for the influx of refugees crowding Greece.

Since then, Greece has been attempting to re-vamp tourism to revitalize its economy. Museums and monuments in Greece portray the gravity of their antiquities, the power of their ruins, the heartiness of their exhibitions. Greek tourists hotspots have become more technologically advanced in attempt to attract new, young tourists, such as a through a program that allows a visitor to point his iPad at the Acropolis to see a visual representation of how the Acropolis looked at different points in the past<sup>6</sup>.

**I plan to travel to Greece in order to be able to ask the questions of how the different voices of Greece are conveyed to tourists, principally through museums and monuments but also through street art, commodities sold for tourists in shops, and through the treatment of and conversations with tourists (myself and Alfredo) by local Greeks, and what these voices are trying to convey, particularly in the wake of the recent financial crisis.**

My research will be focused on museums and monuments within Greece given the recent tourism initiatives by the Greek government aimed at these places. I will study both temporary and permanent exhibitions and, where relevant, I will review the choices of what is displayed. However, I will also recognize Greek graffiti and street art and consider its role in the cultural heritage of the city. For example, in my walk from my hotel in Athens to the National Archaeological Museum, I will pass a large installation of graffiti that recounts students of the polytechnic school there who were killed by Greek police during riots; in this and in many other places, I hope to be exposed to a different voice from that of the government. I will immerse myself in the city life of the places I visit. I am curious to learn what image of Greece the people of Greece are producing, and to what audience is this performance aimed.

To do so, I will spend 14 days in Athens, two days in Delphi, three days in Crete, two days in Santorini, and two days in Mykonos exploring monuments and museums. During my time in Greece, I will go to numerous museums (see a detailed list below) and study what is displayed (and, of equal importance, what is not displayed), how it is displayed, and the reactions of visitors there. I will also comprehensively study the demographics of visitors to various

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<sup>5</sup> Malkoutzis, Nick. "How the 2004 Olympics Triggered Greece's Decline." *Bloomberg*, August 02, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Pterneas, Vangos, Galini Scarlatou, and George Karakatsiotis. "Acropolis Rock: Your Personal Tour Guide." *Acropolis Rock*.

museums. I will talk to museum administrators to learn about which museums are most popular among tourists and why. I will also talk to tourism professionals within the city to learn more about where funding for museums is from, and how it is allocated among museums. I will talk with professionals that my faculty advisor, Dr. Katerina Zacharia, has connections with in Greece, including at various museums and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens.

Given my position as an American student who has never been to Greece, I will occupy the role of tourist to see how “outsiders” view Greece by what is presented to us by the Greeks themselves. I have the skills necessary to do so thanks to my Representations of Greece class, in which I have learned key anthropological questions to ask to uncover true meaning and representation; who is conveying meaning here, what are they trying to say, and who is their intended audience? I will probe for hidden layers in Greek culture, with the help of my own lenses that I will bring, including those not only of a tourist but of a student who has studied Greek culture and the ideas of discursive representation in a culture. I hope to appreciate the public organized discourse of tourism, discern other voices and other formations within Greek culture. Many Greeks speak English, and because of this it will be easy for Alfredo and I to talk to numerous locals when we walk around the cities and eat meals.

I will return from Greece just in time to attend the Los Angeles Greek Film Festival (June 1-5), with which I have an internship this current semester. It will give me a chance to reflect on what I saw in Greece and how that is portrayed on screen.

Given the very recent nature of these topics, little conclusive research has been done, and none to the extent that my research will cover. A 2010 study entitled "Greek Museum Media Visibility and Museum Visitation: An Exploration of Cultural Agenda Setting"<sup>7</sup> covered many of the same questions but failed to consider museum and monument tourism in anywhere other than Athens and Thessaloniki; I feel in order to understand the many facets of Greek representation for tourism, I must go to many different places that attract tourists, such as Crete and Santorini. Most studies in this arena focus on Athens as the cultural hub of Greece, and while in many ways this is true, that does not take away from the cultural significance that other archaeological museums and sites hold. Additionally, because of the joint research I am conducting with Alfredo, I will have not only a broad understanding of what museums and monuments are doing to attract tourists but also a notion of whether or not this is working.

I plan to document my findings through photographic evidence of museum exhibits and archeological sites, as well as through write-ups of interviews with professionals. I will synthesize this into a multi-media presentation representing the image of the Greeks that is projected outwardly from their national museums and monuments. In this presentation I hope to have a conclusive view of how numerous Greek voices can be heard by tourists to the country through the different means that Additionally, as part of a project for my classwork with Dr.

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<sup>7</sup> Bantimaroudis, Philemon, Stelios Zyglidopoulos, and Pavlos C. Symeou. "Greek Museum Media Visibility and Museum Visitation: An Exploration of Cultural Agenda Setting." *Journal of Communication* 60, no. 4 (December 2010): 743-57.

Zacharia, I will be creating a Weebly blog on the same topic that will allow me to continue conducting research on this topic before I actually go to Greece that will allow me to take more in-depth strides to study the place of cultural heritage in contemporary Greece. I will be watching numerous Greek films and writing about their portrayal of Greek culture, as well as conducting Skype Interviews with and conversing with Greek filmmakers. These blog writings will be included in my final presentation on the topic.

Below I have included two copies of my prepared day-by-day schedule, the first a clean copy and the second including explanations for why I must visit each place.

**Saturday, May 7, 2016: Travel Los Angeles (LAX) - Athens (ATH), ~ 20-30 hr flight**

**Sunday, May 8: Arrive in Athens, check in to hotel**

**Monday, May 9: Agora of Athens, Goulandris Museum of Cycladic Art**

**Tuesday, May 10: American School of Classical Studies at Athens**

**Wednesday, May 11: American School of Classical Studies at Athens**

**Thursday, May 12: Benaki museum**

**Friday, May 13: Benaki museum**

**Saturday, May 14: National Archaeological Museum**

**Sunday, May 15: NAM**

**Monday, May 16: NAM**

**Tuesday, May 17: Acropolis**

**Wednesday, May 18: Acropolis Museum**

**Thursday, May 19: catch-all day in Athens; meet with professionals**

**Friday, May 20: catch-all day in Athens; meet with professionals**

**Saturday, May 21: Bus ride to Delphi, Sanctuary of Athena**

**Sunday, May 22: Ancient Delphi, Delphi Museum, bus ride back to Athens**

**Monday, May 23: Flight to Crete, Palace of Knossos**

**Tuesday, May 24: Heraklion Museum**

**Wednesday, May 25: Heraklion Museum**

**Thursday, May 26: Ferry to Santorini, Archaeological Museum in Fira**

**Friday, May 27: Ia and Ancient Akrotiri**

**Saturday, May 28: Ferry to Mykonos, Archaeological Museum of Mykonos**

**Sunday, May 29: Church of Paraportiani, Delos Archaeological site**

**Monday, May 30: Ferry back to Athens, wrap up any loose ends in Athens**

**Tuesday, May 31: Fly Athens - Los Angeles**

**Saturday, May 7, 2016: Travel Los Angeles (LAX) - Athens (ATH), ~ 15-30 hr flight**

**Sunday, May 8: Arrive in Athens, check in to hotel**

**Monday, May 9: Agora of Athens, Goulandris Museum of Cycladic Art**

The Agora is the central meeting place of Ancient Greek cities, the hub of spiritual,

athletic, political, and social life.

**Tuesday, May 10: American School of Classical Studies at Athens**

I will meet with Dr. Zacharia's colleagues at the ASCSA. If there is a temporary exhibition, I will study it as well.

**Wednesday, May 11: American School of Classical Studies at Athens**

**Thursday, May 12: Benaki museum**

The Benaki museum is a historical landmark of Athens that houses an impressive collection of artifacts. Free admission to the museum on Thursdays.

**Friday, May 13: Benaki museum**

**Saturday, May 14: National Archaeological Museum**

The National Archaeological Museum is referred to as the National Museum because of its predominance as the largest and best museum in Greece.

**Sunday, May 15: NAM**

**Monday, May 16: NAM**

**Tuesday, May 17: Acropolis**

"For the first time in its long history, the Acropolis is no longer organically connected to the city of Athens. What I mean by that is during other time periods it was the site of religious observances and festivals, while in others it was the civic capital of the city. It was a place where Athenians lived, worshiped, and did business. Now it is solely and exclusively a tourist site. Greeks go there for school field trips but rarely after that. The site now really belongs to foreign visitors." - Thomas Gallant, Professor of Greek history and archaeology at UC San Diego, editor-in-chief of the ten-volume Edinburgh History of the Greeks (Gallant). The Acropolis is the singular most significant tourist area in Greece, the most photographed monument, and the most famous archaeological site, yet it holds nearly no significance to Greeks beyond its tourist pull.

**Wednesday, May 18: Acropolis Museum**

May 18 is International Museums Day, so this will be an interesting time to be at Greece's most famous museum. I am curious to see how many visitors turn up on this day as compared to the other days I will spend here.

**Thursday, May 19: catch-all day in Athens; meet with professionals**

**Friday, May 20: catch-all day in Athens; meet with professionals**

**Saturday, May 21: Bus ride to Delphi, Sanctuary of Athena**

Delphi is a highly popular tourist destination given the relative unknown origins of the settlement and the mystic properties associated with the area.

**Sunday, May 22: Ancient Delphi, Delphi Museum, bus ride back to Athens**

Ancient Delphi was the home of the Oracle of Delphi, the spiritual center of Greece.

**Monday, May 23: Flight to Crete, Palace of Knossos**

The island of Crete is the largest Greek island and home to numerous archaeological sites of importance.

**Tuesday, May 24: Heraklion Museum**

The Heraklion Museum is located in the most densely populated city on Crete and houses numerous artifacts.

**Wednesday, May 25: Heraklion Museum**

**Thursday, May 26: Ferry to Santorini, Archaeological Museum in Fira**

The island of Santorini is widely regarded as the most beautiful island in the Aegean, and

thus is a tourist hotspot. I am curious to see how the island attracts tourists in different ways than Crete and Athens; less archeological sites (though I do plan to spend time in the museum) and more emphasis on beautiful beaches and buildings.

**Friday, May 27: Ia and Ancient Akrotiri**

Ia is the second largest city on the island of Santorini and known as the most beautiful. Ancient Akrotiri is called the Pompeii of Greece given that the settlement was destroyed in 1627 BC by a volcanic eruption.

**Saturday, May 28: Ferry to Mykonos, Archaeological Museum of Mykonos**

Mykonos is another popular tourist destination, one known for nightlife and water sports; a representation of modern Greek tourism.

**Sunday, May 29: Church of Paraportiani, Delos Archaeological site**

The Church of Paraportiani is one of Mykonos's 365 churches on the island. I am curious to study how the Greeks portray their religion (Eastern Orthodox) on a tourist-loaded island, given religion is a crucial element of "Greekness".

**Monday, May 30: Ferry back to Athens, wrap up any loose ends in Athens**

**Tuesday, May 31: Fly Athens - Los Angeles**

Costs:

Food for 25 days ~ \$1000

LAX-ATH flight ~ \$1200

Athens-Delphi Bus ~ \$16

ATH-HER flight ~ \$80

Heraklion-Thira ferry ~\$60

Santorini-Mykonos ferry ~\$70

Mykonos-Delos ferry ~ \$22 roundtrip

Mykonos-Athens ferry ~ \$65

Three weeks of bus passes ~ \$50

ATH- LAX flight ~ \$800

Hotel (Athens Way, May 7-20, 30): ~\$96 per night/ \$1336 total

Hotel (Amalia Hotel Delphi, May 21): ~\$111

Hotel (El Greco Heraklion, May 23-25): ~\$58 per night/ \$174 total

Hotel (Esperas Santorini, May 26-27): ~ \$252 per night/ \$504 total

Hotel (Omios Hotel Mykonos, May 28-29):~ \$225 per night/ \$550 total

Museum Costs: ~ \$150

\*hotel costs are to be split between Alfredo Hernandez and I. Thus I have included the total hotel costs above but will only count half in the funds I am requesting. Hotel total: \$2,675; my hotel costs: \$1,337.50

**Total: \$4,850.50**

Given the \$5,000 budget for Honors funding, this total gives me some room to play with for unexpected costs once I get the project approved and begin booking tickets and rooms.

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