Museums and Material Culture: Regionalism versus Nationalism in the Archaeological Museums of Greece

by

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ABSTRACT

Scholars such as Margarita Díaz-Andreu and Yannis Hamilakis have thoroughly explored the way in which nationalism and national narratives have worked with and against archaeology throughout the last few centuries in Europe. The concept of nationalism is often spoke of in a nebulous way and said to have direct influences on the material culture and its record. In this paper I will argue that the correlation runs strongly in the opposite direction: that the material culture is being used in the museums to shape national narratives and promote nationalism. This is not the full story, however. With the introduction of New Museum Theory in the 1980’s and its spread to Greece in the following decades, regional and local museums are implementing practices that interact with and even contradict these national narratives. In focusing on four archaeological museums which deal with the Bronze Age Argolid (the National Archaeological Museum, the Archaeological Museum of Nauplion, the Archaeological Museum of Argos, and the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae), I hope to show just how these regional museums are adopting New Museum Theory and providing a more nuanced picture of the historical narrative in the face of nationalism.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Warrior Vase, a piece of Mycenaean pottery dated to the Late Helladic period, around 1200 BCE, stands in a display case towards the rear of the Mycenaean Hall in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. It has been elevated above the other materials to eye level. The piece has become one of the most famous pieces of pottery from the Mycenaean times, easily recognizable by the presence of processing soldiers with spears and shields. In *Baedeker’s Greece*, the Warrior Vase is mentioned as included in the 1980’s displays from Mycenaean graves. At some point, it seems the Warrior Vase was removed from its position in the Mycenaean Hall and placed in the pottery exhibits. The Blue Guide of Greece from 2005 states that the first floor galleries contain the pottery collection, which “spans all periods from the Neolithic to the Classical” and that “the Mycenaean Warrior Vase, with its procession of armed soldiers, also stands out.”\(^1\) The piece connects the Mycenaean period to the long tradition of pottery development in Greece, and even “stands out” as a seminal piece. However, in the National Archaeological Museum catalogue published in 2009, and during my trip the summer of 2008, the Warrior Vase was back with the rest of the Mycenaean finds. It is significant that such a seminal piece of pottery from Mycenaean times would be appropriated into the chronological history of Greek pottery displayed on the first floor. Perhaps even more interesting is its subsequent return to the Mycenaean collection. This

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one item and its varied display in the collections highlights how changing museum displays can give varied impressions about cultural chronology and possession.

Museums are formalized institutions of culture and learning which have a much more recent history than might be assumed. They echo the long history of collection and observation, but the first public museums were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Europe (though their roots are deeper – see Schnapp 1996). They have come to represent institutions for education and for cultural experience. Children of all ages are taken on field-trips to see the great museums in their countries. Visitors to foreign countries often plan their itineraries around visits to museums. They do so in order to gain an appreciation for the art, history, and culture of the region they are visiting – the museum is a key part of an educated tourism. Cultured residents of communities often become members at their local museums to support the institution. Arguably, this gives visitors a sense of ownership in the museum and a certain cultural standing: their role as contributors makes their voices heard and respected. Museums focus on their membership bases and attempt to cater the exhibitions to the need of the community at large and their contributing members. Donors, artists, collectors, and the like attend events at the museum and socialize in circles of patronage and collection. While the majority of collecting has become a public affair institutionalized in museum buildings, there is still a great deal of individual reputation concerned, and collectors and donors are able to display their status to the communities through honors and displays dedicated to them.²

² Edward P. Alexander, Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Functions of Museums (Nashville: AASLH Press, 1979), 119.
In addition to these individual interactions in the museum, outside institutions make their marks as well. Government often has influence or even a direct hand in the operations of a museum. Everything from the small tax breaks for art galleries to the state and country funding of national museums brings the government into the mix. Many museums also deal with foreign governments, particularly those which are involved or concerned with ideas of repatriation. Each museum in each country has different practices and concerns, but collection of ancient artifacts from a variety of cultures often means difficult paths of navigation through antiquities trade and ethical displays. Educational societies and institutions also have a hand in museums. Many museums arise as part of a university and must find a place in the mission statement and code of ethics of that university. Even those institutions outside direct academic connection are often involved with them. Museums which display ancient art, history, and archaeology, much like the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, must often deal with the archaeological services and antiquities markets. These institutions often determine what has meaning and value and subsequently have direct, immediate effects on the collections and holdings of museums around the world. Museums also often interact, align, and compete with themselves in a variety of ways. Monetary concerns also play a huge role in museums’ functions, even in those flush with cash. Most museums’ primarily goal is to get visitors through the door, especially in those instances in which visitors are accompanied with an admission ticket. Money often has a direct impact on the facilities and collections. Museums must be able to afford and maintain the buildings which house their collections. These buildings can be massive, purpose-built
structures or ad hoc, adaptable locations. The size of the buildings controls the amount of storage and exhibition space, which in turn controls the collecting and display practices of museums.

This is just a brief, incomplete sample of the many and varied people, businesses, governments, and conditions which can affect the display practices of every museum. New Museum Theory, which arose in the 1980’s, began to deal with these concepts and how they play out in the museum. Marstine states that museums were no longer seen as monolithic, unified, authoritative voices. The multiplicity of concerns and ideas, both externally and internally, was recognized to have a direct effect on the displays, and therefore, the educational narrative formerly supplied by the museum. When these are placed against the narratives received from other museums, education, and pop culture, the picture can become both more cohesive and more confusing.

The issues raised in these studies pertain quite centrally to the archaeological museum structure of Greece. Over the last two centuries or so, the modern nation-state of Greece has used the archaeology and material culture of the past to validate their place in modern society and in the historical timeline. The heavily nationalistic view of the modern government has impacted the administrative structure, funding, and collecting of all the museums in Greece, and many other museums worldwide. New legislation in 2003 encouraged the establishment of “units of museographic research” in some national

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4 Ibid., 2.
5 Nation-state can be a problematic term: see Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1991). For my purposes, a nation-state is a country of people united culturally or ethnically and governed from this perspective.
museums of Greece.\textsuperscript{6} The 1980’s and 1990’s in Greece saw many developments in education and technology in the museum,\textsuperscript{7} embracing some concepts of New Museum Theory, which focus on providing a variety of contextual media for visitors to create their own understanding. Museums have switched from an institutional voice to a place for personal reflection and meaning-creation by switching from grand narratives to informed, contextualized discussions.

In particular, this thesis will examine the way this has occurred in the archaeological museums of Greece which deal primarily with the material culture of the Bronze Age Argolid: the National Archaeological Museum, the Archaeological Museum of Nauplion, the Archaeological Museum of Argos, and the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae. The Mycenaean civilization that inhabited the area during the Late Bronze Age is a rich and fascinating culture to explore, and one which deals with issues of nationalism and regionalism itself. The terms nationalism and regionalism are weighty and can often be unwieldy. When I discuss nationalism in this paper, I am referring to the ideological underpinnings of the nation-state: the construction, promotion, and presentation of national narratives which are thought to unite a culture behind its nation-state. Regionalism, however, functions in a more restrained capacity. I am speaking in particular of the attempted definition, cohesion, and association with a finite area, often geographically delimited, perhaps even at the expense of national identity. There can be, and frequently are, various regional trends within modern-nation states. It is my


\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 373.
argument that the narratives presented by museum displays both on a regional and national level can influence and shape these various identities and promote the concepts of nationalism and regionalism.

The archaeology and material remains of this culture can make powerful statements about the longevity of Hellenic occupation and culture, both in the region and in national narratives at large. The modern nation-state of Greece was rather late to involve itself in the archaeology and display of this culture, accept where it functioned as a prelude to the Classical Golden Age narrative. Instead, the Mycenaeans have come to be seen as important regionally, particularly in the area of Pylos and the Argolid. The Argolid in particular, with its dense settlement pattern, variety of material culture, and (mythic) claims to be the longest inhabited area in Greece, provides an excellent opportunity to explore how this region is presented in the museums of Greece and what understanding of the Late Bronze Age Mycenaeans it gives.

This thesis examines the Prehistoric and Bronze Age remains from four museums: the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, the Archaeological Museum of Nauplion and the Archaeological Museum of Argos, which are regional museums, and the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae, which is a site museum located at the uncovered ruins of Bronze Age Mycenae. Each museum, through the traditions and practices of its collection display, provides a different view of the Bronze Age Argolid. These museums, which might well be the only exposure to the Mycenaeans that many visitors receive, present the region differently and influence the narrative of Mycenaean culture and how it fits in the modern national and worldwide narratives.

8 Ibid., 367.
CHAPTER II

MUSEUM STUDIES

This paper begins with a discussion of the development of the museum and the issues of museum theory that have shaped its form and function. Over the last two to three hundred years, museums have grown, spread, and developed rapidly into many forms and uses. Museums play an important role in society, in the organization of artifacts, and knowledge, one that is ever changing and adapting. Museums negotiate difficult, beneficial, and powerful relationships with material culture, archaeologists, universities, wealthy donors, political units, foreign powers, and the public. Their role as the promoters of cultural knowledge and humanism is an underlying driver in everything they do. In a survey of American educational institutions for children, museums were rated most trustworthy and objective, above books and television news.\(^9\) This is a powerful validation of the modern museum, but at the same time a potentially dangerous or naïve acceptance of this disciplinary technology.\(^10\) This chapter attends to the development of the museum tradition into what is largely present today and discusses some crucial themes in understanding the museum’s role and function and how these affect their interactions with the academic and public worlds.

Μουσεῖον in ancient Greek originally meant a shrine or haunt of the Muses\(^11\), goddesses who were patrons of those educated and skilled in the fine arts. Generally, it

\(^9\) Marstine, Introduction to *New Museum Theory*, 4.
came to refer to a school of art and poetry, a place of intense reflection and study of the arts, a (quasi)secular temple to the Muses. During the Hellenistic period, it also came to embody a specific philosophical school and library, a place where the learned came together for study and edification, particularly the Musaeum at Alexandria. Lee explains the etymological history of the words *muséum* and *musée* as they came down to the French language in the eighteenth century. In her article, she explains the conflicting references to both the *Musaeum* of Alexandria, affiliated with the idea of political patronage, and the Hill of *Musée* in Athens, associated with performances of poetry and art. Quatremère de Quincy in the early nineteenth century explained the origins and their proper uses. *Muséum* referred specifically to the *Musaeum* of Alexandria, “where scholars had engaged in literary researches and philosophical debate, not in collecting works of art or any kinds of objects for their own sake.”12 In contrast, *musées* were “various collections of rare objects with special emphasis on works of art.”3 The *musée* was an off-shoot of the *Muséum*, but both had heritage in the classical world with the remarkable enterprise of the Alexandrian Ptolemies.

The Ptolemaic Dynasty in Egypt not only produced the first *musaeum* in Alexandria, but they provided patronage to it that invited scholars from throughout the Mediterranean to study.13 The *Musaeum* included the famous Library of Alexandria, both of which were lost to time. From descriptions of the Library and *Musaeum*, we are told that philologists such as Callimachus studied the great texts of various cultures,

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combined together under one roof in Greek, Latin, and Egyptian languages. Lee, in her discussion of the tradition of the *Musaeum* described it as “a monumental depository of learned scholarship that had been but was no more, [it] embodied the survival of the past through translation and reconfiguration, one form yielding to another.” While the lack of sources and its eventual disappearance make it difficult to speculate about the makeup of the *Musaeum*, it did seem to function in some sort of collector and conservator role, definitely with texts in the Library. Young Lee states that this is what brings the *Musaeum* into the genealogy of the modern museum: “it was not a collection of things but a body of scientific and literary knowledge.”

Pergamon and the Attalids might give us our first instance of collection of objects with the intent of the preservation and spread of culture. Attalus I brought in a great deal of art, including statuary and paintings, from the areas that he had conquered. These members of the Diadochoi began a systemized tradition of the collection and study of texts and objects in order to preserve and spread cultural knowledge. This would continue in some manner or form throughout history with the transfer of obelisks and statues to Rome and Constantinople, the preservation of texts in monasteries, and the cultural raids and plundering of the Crusades. Yet the emergence of the museum in our modern understanding occurred in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, thanks to the Renaissance and the increasing popularity of collecting.

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14 Lee, 386.
15 Ibid., 386.
16 Abt, 117.
Collecting is a human trait that has defined and shaped our history in a multiplicity of ways. The cultivation of grain and spread of agriculture began not simply because of our ingrained hunter/gatherer nature, but because individuals singled objects out, selected them for their excellence, and carried them home with them. But the Renaissance brought about a new period of collection that would introduce important foundational concepts for the rise of the modern museum. The Renaissance emerged in Italy, which was beginning to embrace again classical scholarship and material culture, thanks in large part to the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453 and the rediscovery of several important Roman remains.\footnote{For a discussion of “The Forerunners of the Renaissance” see Alain Schnapp, \textit{The Discovery of the Past} (London: British Museum, 1996), 104.} This reemergence of the classical world certainly began to shape and influence the collections of the periods. The royalty and nobility of the period began to amass large collections of treasures from throughout Europe. Objects were bartered, sold, discovered, and appropriated into collections all over Europe.\footnote{Richard Stoneman, \textit{Land of Lost Gods: The Search for Classical Greece} (Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1987), 84-109.} In addition to previously collected natural and religious rarities, objects from history became important features of every collection. “Excavations” at Pompeii and Herculaneum in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries originally excited interest because of the fantastic sculptures and curiosities that were emerging from underneath the rock-solid lava. Material from the ancient world began to be collected and circulated throughout European circles.

While an interest and intrigue was developing among those scholars pursuing interests in the Roman world, Johann J. Winckelmann began developing a brand new
area of classical study: that of Greek art. Winckelmann, a German by birth, was appointed as Librarian and President of Antiquities at the Vatican. The Vatican, much like the classes of European nobility, had begun collections of ancient materials during the Renaissance, primarily material from Rome. Winckelmann began an analysis of Greek sculpture based on the Roman copies, and established a four-tier structure based off previous interpretation of classical poetry.\(^\text{19}\) Winckelmann’s attention to Greek art ignited an interest in the elite collectors of the Great Powers and, arguably, became the basis for future disciplines of classical archaeology and art history.\(^\text{20}\)

But it was not enough for the wealthy to amass a bizarre collection for display: they began the crucial step of classification and ordering. It was desirable for these individual enthusiasts to arrange a collection in a way that ordered their lives, the world, and history. As Schnapp states, the collection became “a microcosm of the world, interpreted as a macrocosm.”\(^\text{21}\) Collections grew and became gathering points for scholars, but they primarily remained a subject of the private domain. These “cabinets of curiosities” were collected in private homes, palaces, universities, and societies with restricted access. Large sections of the population were unable to see these objects, but there was still a potential for private display.\(^\text{22}\) Even though they had a mostly private nature, the cabinets attracted attention and became tools in displaying status and knowledge. Scholars began to publish illustrated catalogues of their materials. Often


\(^{21}\) Schnapp, 167.

\(^{22}\) Abt, 121-122.
these included frontispieces that contained prints showing the display of the curiosities. In the middle of the sixteenth-century, Samuel von Quicchelberg in Antwerp created the first “imaginary museum”, essentially a formation of a museum in all but actuality, with the introduction of a catalogue of the ideal cabinet. He divided the materials of his cabinet into categories and showed their progression, providing a framework for teaching and introducing knowledge from the collection. From this imaginary museum, he could show the development of nature and humans, the relationships between times, and create a complete historical narrative. Julian Thomas states that collections “now enabled the observer to gain mastery over the things of the world from a position of exteriority, looking down on the array of specimens and appreciating their classificatory order.”

These cabinets continued for some time, especially among the private educational societies of Europe.

Ancient Greek material culture occupied a complicated place in this early period of cabinet collecting. Objets d’art had arrived from the Greek world or, more circuitously, through Rome and had become part of great collections. But the rising class of scholars and antiquarians began to seek a great deal more material. According to Stoneman, scholars and antiquarians of the ancient Greek world had for a long time given their attention to coins and portable antiquities: things which could give a glimpse into the history and culture but, more importantly, could be easily moved and stored as members of a cabinet. Concern with the larger, more immovable features of material

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23 For a great discussion on Quicchelberg’s work as a theoretical model for the propagation of knowledge see Schnapp, 169-170.
25 Stoneman, 119.
culture, like sculpture and architectural features, had largely focused on Rome, where any aristocratic male would visit. Various scholarly-minded groups emerged on the scene in Europe to encourage this study, much like the Society of Dilettanti founded in London.\(^\text{26}\) This society, whose membership was based upon a visit to Italy, funded the expedition of Stuart and Revett to Greece to record the architecture and ruins and to bring the images back to Europe for study. The publication of these architectural drawings played a huge role in the architecture of the “Greek Revival.” Scholars and societies began to come together in their study of the ancient world and to discuss collection practices, attempting to create a full range of objects for examination and study amongst a group of scholars.

The collections that were being amassed were dramatically influenced by the revolutionary nature of Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Revolutions in Britain and France, while of different sources and orders, led to a new form of political interaction. The state came to be seen in the service of the people. Radically new political theories made the round, such as John Locke’s, which stated that the right to rule came from the people. In these revolutions, the nation-state was born and people were united not only politically, but also culturally.\(^\text{27}\) In such a situation, it is no wonder that material culture became an important tool of identity on a much larger scale. The people and the state began to recognize the importance of historical connections for a cultural basis. In the following two examples, England and France, the people and individuals in

\(^{26}\) Stoneman, 120.

these nation-states established some of Europe’s first public museums and led to the creation of the national museum archetype.

The Ashmolean is often seen as the first museum intended for the use of the public. Ashmole did not donate his collection to the state because of his support of the monarchy in the civil war.\textsuperscript{28} Oxford University had institutional control, but the museum was named for Ashmole and his legacy was ensured. But the first modern, public museum arose in the context of the French revolution. The Louvre, originally a palace for French royalty, housed the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture and was already well associated with the collection of art for the study of these scholars. In the process of the French Revolution, Louis XVI was executed and his property, including the Royal Academy and the Louvre, were seized by the National Assembly. In August 1793, they displayed some of Louis XVI’s collections in the Louvre, now renamed the \textit{Musée Français}.\textsuperscript{29} In this revolution, the French knowingly held onto the term \textit{musaeum} and its implications of the Musaeum of ancient Alexandria in their development of the \textit{musée}, making direct linguistic and thematic connections to the ancient past.

With the revolutionary period of France, the museum not only became public, but began to play a very public role in the life of the state. As Abt said, “The transformation of the formerly restricted Louvre into a truly public space, one in which the treasures of the people’s adversaries were now rendered accessible, reified the revolution’s accomplishments in a manner that few other acts could.”\textsuperscript{30} People, and the state, began to

\textsuperscript{28} Abt, 125.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 128.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 128.
realize the very crucial role that objects could play in politics. Louis XVI’s collection was no longer a cabinet of curiosity, but the physical remains of the history, glory, and prestige of the French people. Cultural remains and objects of the collection can become a discourse of identity for the new nation. Kane states that cultural history “can be a creator of community”\textsuperscript{31} and “can be invented by a society through the use of material artifacts.”\textsuperscript{32} State control and the introduction of national museums present an entirely new take on the educating role of museums. The use of archaeology by nations is a concept that has been extensively studied,\textsuperscript{33} but often this discussion does not directly translate to museums and the propagation of this archaeological knowledge.\textsuperscript{34}

Related to the issue of nationalism and museums is the idea of world heritage. European collectors had nearly pilfered the countries of Greece and Rome for antiquities, objects which displayed the longevity of European culture and ideas. The Greeks and later Romans were seen as cultural ancestors to the modern Greeks. Many, particularly European, national museums desired to display not only their national heritage, but also world heritage. Having a piece of ancient Greece or Rome validated a nation’s place in the genealogy of European culture. After nations began to expand in the world through trade and conquest, issues of colonialism and imperialism came to be important discussion points in museum display. Imperial powers and explorer nations such as

\begin{footnotes}
\item[31] Susan Kane, Introduction to \textit{The Politics of Archaeology and Identity in a Global Context} (Boston: Archaeological Institute of America, 2003), 3.
\item[32] Ibid., 6.
\item[34] However, for a discussion related to prehistory, see Olsen and Svestad.
\end{footnotes}
England and France saw it important to express not only their place in European history, but also their place in the world and their interaction with various cultures abroad. These nations and their national museums often defend their collecting practices on the grounds of their position as curators of world heritage. Diaz-Andreu, discussing the situation in France, says that “the state considered it worth appropriating antiquities from the collections of the conquered, and moving them large distances to be exhibited in the capital city.”

This is a topic which I will discuss more in depth in the next chapter, particularly with respect to the situation in Greek archaeological museums. The appropriation of antiquities will become especially important when discussing modern Greece’s role as descendant and rightful steward of ancient Greek culture. This did not sit well with many European nations, who felt they also had a share as descendants of ancient culture.

With the emergence of national and world heritage museums, collections began to grow and needed new spaces to be stored and displayed. In some countries, the museum developed as a repository for cultural knowledge. Diaz-Andreu and Champion state that “[t]he object was to store the original documents, considered the pristine sources of knowledge, selected and ordered in accordance with the objective sought: the creation of a national history.”

In some instances, royal palaces and public buildings were reincorporated and housed museum displays, such as the Louvre in Paris. In other situations, new buildings had to be built to ensure the proper organization, preservation,

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36 Díaz-Andreu & Champion, 9.
and display of the nation’s cultural resources.\textsuperscript{37} Often these buildings had façades similar to Greek temples. In the 1800’s, museum architecture became standardized thanks to Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand.\textsuperscript{38} Intended to house paintings, sculptures, architecture, as well as temporary exhibits, his plan included four wings with separate entrances arranged in a square around a Greek cross with a central rotunda.\textsuperscript{39} This layout facilitated the distribution and organization that became essential to every museum display.

The development of the modern museum also had a crucial role to play in the development and legitimization of the practice of archaeology. Prior to the emergence of the new, scientific archaeology arranged around what Alain Schnapp calls the principles of typology, technology, and stratigraphy,\textsuperscript{40} antiquarians devoted their time to the systematic analysis of materials and collections. Because of their passion and pursued collecting, collections began to grow and be turned over or into museums. The arrangement and display of archaeological items set the standards for typologies that would affect the practices of budding archaeologists. As Olsen and Svestad have stated, “exhibited artefacts became statements which substantiated the very system they themselves were the result of.”\textsuperscript{41} Museums also became places where curators and archaeologists could experiment with classification and display models. The contextual display of archaeological materials could safely combat with classification by type or age. Museums and archaeologists began a symbiotic relationship in which archaeology’s

\textsuperscript{37} Bjørnar Olsen et al., \textit{Archaeology: The Discipline of Things} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 43.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 225.
\textsuperscript{40} Schnapp, 303.
\textsuperscript{41} Olsen and Svestad, 12.
field work provided artefacts for the museum, and the museum provided scholarly
legitimacy and a place for serious speech acts. Curators could experiment with various
methods of display and interpretation culled from the vast body of materials being
supplied to them. Isolated display cabinets and the cataloguing of artifacts helped
solidify ideas of classification, not just for the museum, but also for the archaeologists.

Museums also give scholars a chance to classify and approach human and
geological development from different angles. Museums have split into different
categories: natural history, science, technology, archaeological, history, art, the list
continues on into current times. Archaeologists could work in any number of modern
museums, all of which have different materials and audiences. Primarily at issue here is
the difference of display among natural history, art, and archaeology museums. All three
often attempt to synthesize a body of material to present a narrative of human culture,
often linear, but do so from very different perspectives. Natural history museums seek to
explain human interaction with the earth, flora, and fauna. Art museums focus on those
“prize achievements” of past (and current) cultures, namely what has been deemed
worthy of preservation and display as the pinnacle of human creative achievement.
Archaeological museums attempt as thorough a picture of human life, but often focus on
architecture, household, and grave goods. Archaeological displays tend to focus on
provenance in display, showing material as it was found, in its proper context, with its
companion materials. Yet it can still fall into traditional patterns of display, particularly by
chronology or type, especially in larger national museums.

42 Olsen et al., 42.
Museums and archaeology continue to have an important relationship, not only through their symbiotic exchange of materials and knowledge, but also through their involvement in material culture and display studies. For both the academic archaeologist and the museum curator, the study of objects and what they can do or say is an important component of their work. David Crowther states that the endeavor of archaeology is the “collection, preservation, research and presentation, largely of material culture” and the museum is uniquely placed “not just to reflect this process but to control it.”

Museums play an important role in legitimizing and presenting the results of archaeological research to the public. The public’s interaction with objects is informed by the archaeological work and the knowledge and narrative presented by the museum, but ultimately is a personally informed matter, as well. While they cannot control the individual experiences and interpretations that each museum visitor will bring, there is a great deal of work, research, and planning that goes into the display of material culture.

There is much more to museum display than setting out objects and allowing them to speak for themselves. Most modern museums need visitors to survive and as Stevenson astutely points out, “whereas viewers of artworks may be content with making their own interpretations, visitors to an archaeological museum, for example, may be less content with an unexplained artefact.” Important in this statement is the assumptions

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made about display and interpretation in various types of museums. Gathercole brings these assumptions to light in his brilliant chapter, “The Fetishism of Artefacts.” In discussing the role of objects and their transformations into artefacts, he observes that “the distinction between object and artifact lies at the heart of curatorship.” Thus museums, or more appropriately curators, take objects and make them artefacts by giving them cultural significance and meaning. He argues there is nothing intrinsically meaningful about these common objects. But in the museum they are collected, stored (or expunged), preserved, conserved, displayed, and explained. Each of these activities gives the object a cultural definition and allows the curator to make statements about the cultures that produced them. Jenkins also recognizes the museum’s duty to the visitor and to “reflect the community that it serves.” According to some material culturalists, curators have an obligation to serve the community and to reflect its interests. In recent museum studies, a great deal more attention has been paid to visitor interaction and education. Many museums now feature Education Departments to facilitate this. These departments have examined new methods of presenting information and allowing visitors to construct their own narratives. Roberts says that this fosters a theoretical awareness on the part of museums and shows that museums are themselves constructing narratives which may not be “objective” or “neutral.” This type of forward thinking is more often seen in smaller, more avant-garde museums. The large, national and world heritage

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museums frequently do not have an Education Department and only occasionally offer materials or experiences which encourage multiple interpretations or narratives.

It is no wonder that museums, which typically emerged from private collections to shrine-like cabinets to fully-fledged institutions, have long been associated with ideas of the archive. As mentioned earlier, the collecting practices of humans have long sought to acquire, accumulate, preserve, and catalogue materials from the known world. This is why museums, which are at heart collections, receive the image of a storehouse – a “repository of memory, location of the collections that form the basis of cultural or national identity, of scientific knowledge and aesthetic value.”50 The archaeologists and curators who feed and nourish these archives play a crucial role in validating cultural and national identities, scientific and aesthetic value, by simply acquiring or rejecting materials. With such significance placed on the archive, the “storehouse” idea of the museum, each decision – whether to purchase or sell, whether to preserve or let rot, whether to display or store – gives credence to the cultural and historical narratives these places are presenting. It is no wonder that so much attention is now being paid to the narratives of the museum and the theoretical underpinnings of their decisions.

The world of museums has not avoided the form of new, theoretical thinking that has overtaken many scientific and humanistic disciplines over the last half century, even thought it has been somewhat late to the party. New Museum Theory, according to Janet Marstine, arose at the end of the 1980’s with Peter Vargo’s The New Museology.51 These

51 Marstine, 6.
new museum theorists began looking at the impact of institutional control in museums and the disciplinary structures they assert. They have examined the structures of collecting and archiving, how each individual role in the museum affects the narratives presented. They believe that the ritual activities of every member of a museum staff have a direct impact on how objects are presented and understood. Marstine states:

Decisions that museum workers make — about mission statement, architecture, financial matters, acquisitions, cataloging, exhibition display, wall texts, educational programming, repatriation requests, community relations, conservation, web design, security and reproduction — all impact on the way we understand objects. Museums are not neutral spaces that speak with one institutional, authoritative voice. Museums are about individuals making subjective choices.\(^{52}\)

They have also looked a great deal at visitor interaction: how guests relate to the objects, to the information presented to them, and to the museum as a whole. Marstine discusses the many ways theorists describe museums, the most prevalent being as a shrine, a market-driven industry, a colonizing space, or a post-museum (an ideal, reinvented institution).\(^{53}\) These views of the museum are important in understanding how visitors react with the museum, but also shed some light on how the museum might think of itself and its role in the public world.

The history and theory of the museum is important for any discussion of display. In particular, New Museum Theory plays an important role in any discussion of the trends behind museums, including nationalism and regionalism. Examining how a museum can be viewed as a shrine, or a colonizing space, is important when one is considering the historical narrative the museum is displaying and the interpretations the

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 2.
\(^{53}\) Ibid., 8-21 for a discussion of each type.
visitors are taking away from it. Greece offers a ripe opportunity for this kind of study. As the direct source for a vast majority of the material culture of ancient Greece, the modern nation-state has made many claims about their role as stewards of this history. These claims, naturally, influence the display of materials at their archaeological museums and by extension, the interpretations. These will be some of the central issues explored when I examine the display at various national, regional, and site museums of Greece.
CHAPTER III

GREECE AND ITS MUSEUMS

In this chapter we now turn to an investigation of the development, organization, and specific function of the museum structure in Greece. Its ancient material culture and museums have had a long influence on the emergence of Western culture and heritage museums. Greece has, since the nineteenth century, developed its own museum structure that has grown independently from the traditions of many other European countries. Contextualizing the framework of its archaeological museums could shed light on the interaction and collecting practices of these various institutions. In turn, this interaction and collection influences the archaeological narrative that is presented to the public. What is displayed to the public and the context it is given often stands as a form of historical narrative, especially in the case of prehistory. Yet material culture is finite; what remains (and what is “presentable”) is a small quantity in high demand. The administrative structure of the museum system has a significant impact on the outcome of these issues. An exploration of the emergence and development of this system is a crucial step in contextualizing this discussion.

With the emergence of the antiquarian, Greece and its material culture played a centrifugal role in spreading ancient culture throughout Europe and the world. But it took a while for the popularity of Greece to compete against the popularity of Rome among scholars and the educated. This popularity can be explained perhaps through the influence of the Grand Tour. While other cultures and countries were involved, Rome and its archaeological sites and remains held a prominent position in the travels of young
men in Europe. Rome was also a long-standing cultural center, where the best minds went to study and train. It had a long history of archaeological awareness, and the excavations begun at Pompeii in the eighteenth century highlighted the majesty and mystery of the area. Greece, on the other hand, lay somewhere on the border with the eastern world. Under Ottoman control, the country seemed somehow less connected with the European world and neoclassicism. Travelling to see the remains of Greece meant dealing with a decidedly non-European culture in most cases, and could be fraught with dangers. Scholars such as Winckelmann and Stuart and Revett began to change the mind of their peers about the temporal, artistic, and architectural primacy of Greece to the academic circles of Europe. Their study and descriptions of Greek sculpture and architecture, respectively, brought ancient Greece back to life for European scholars and encouraged more to include the country on their Grand Tour itineraries.

Even with the rising reputation of Greece and its antiquities among scholars, it was only the arrival of romanticism which brought Greece alive in the popular imagination. Through art, poetry, and travel, Greece and its magnificent ruins presented themselves as a rich area for new study. Its position on the fringes also meant Greece played little to no role in the power struggles of Europe, such as Italy or Egypt did with the British and French. This shift from Rome to Greece brought a great deal of archaeological interest to the area. Topographic and landscape experts such as William Martin Leake made trips to study the landscape, cities, and ruins of Greece. The notion

55 Ibid., 65.
of finding and labeling the sites where Greek history occurred led many Europeans to make expeditionary trips of their own. “Scholars” such as Heinrich Schliemann went to Greece and Turkey to find the great places of Homer’s *Iliad*. When Schliemann announced to Europe that he found the great city of Troy, it excited the general public about the world of epic and of ancient Greece. While his excavation techniques have been proven less-than-satisfactory, his contributions to the development of Bronze Age archaeology cannot be understated. He brought the world of the Mycenaeans and Minoans to prominence for further scholarly research. But Europe’s involvement with Greece was more than just scholarly. Romantic notions of cultural heritage and a new Greek nation may have encouraged people such as Lord Byron to take up arms on Greece’s behalf. In his poem, *The Isles of Greece*, Byron echoes the sentiment of the former glory of ancient Greece, their oppression from the East, and their role as the ancestors of Europeans:

The mountains look on Marathon-
And Marathon looks on the sea;
And musing there an hour alone,
I dream’d that Greece might still be free;
For standing on the Persians’ grave,
I could not deem myself a slave.\(^{56}\)

The increasing archaeological discoveries reinforced the romantic view of classical Greece and encouraged movements towards involvement in the War of Independence and the return of Greece’s cultural glory.\(^{57}\) This Philhellenism, or love or

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\(^{56}\) Lord Byron, “The Isles of Greece,” in *Don Juan in Sixteen Cantos with Notes* (Halifax: Milner and Sowerby, 1837).

desire for the ancient Greek past, had a great role in the liberation of Greece from
Ottoman rule.

But this Philhellenism and the emergence of a new Hellenic nation had different
sentiments for those involved. The Greeks saw classical antiquity as a symbol, one
which would be incredibly important in shaping their new nation. They continued the
European tradition of Philhellenism, but from a superior point of view as the direct
descendants and rightful owners of classical Greek heritage. The Greeks saw the
opportunity to return Greece to its previous glory, the source of Western civilization.
Greece embraced the notion that the great European and Western cultures and nations
were and still are indebted to Greece. This sentiment was prevalent and led to civil wars
(thanks to the introduction of communism to Greece) and further conflicts with Turkey
about land and population control. Even now, the modern Greeks are in a dispute with
the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) over the correct (or incorrect)
appropriation of Alexander the Great’s cultural legacy. In response to this dispute, some
European cultures have claimed that the ancient Greece culture is a world heritage that
cannot be owned or appropriate by a single, modern nation. This ties in with the notion
of “continental archaeology”, as Ian Morris explains in *Archaeologies of Greece*:

> Hellenists created a continentalist rather than a nationalist view of the past,
and did this by glorifying ancient Greece and insisting on its unique, or
even superhuman, qualities. There was still room for disputes over which
nation had the strongest claim on classical Greece, but it was generally
agreed among Northwest Europeans and their colonists that they
collectively held a monopoly on the Greek cultural heritage, and that this

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58 Yannis Hamilakis, “Lives in Ruins: Antiquities and National Imagination in Modern Greece,” in *The
Politics of Archaeology and Identity in a Global Context*, ed. Susan Kane (Boston: Archaeological Institute
of America, 2003), 60.
was crucial to the racial superiority which gave them a mandate to rule the world. This made any nationalist use of ancient Greece by modern Greeks problematic, which in turn made the practice of archaeology by the Greeks themselves a complex matter.  

The Greeks attempted this symbolic claim to the past as a way to promote their participation as a nation in modern Europe, but ultimately, they came to be seen by some as “a static and fossilized remnant of classical antiquity” and their people as “unworthy descendants of glorious ancestors.”  

But Europe’s increasing involvement with Greece was not without its material consequences for both. Under the control of the Ottomans, archaeological sites and finds essentially lay open for the taking. Winckelmann and others had played their part in promoting Greek materials to collectors. In fact, Vickers and Gill have brought to light the controversial notion of even a simple Greek ceramic pot as a high art object for the market, especially as it was in the eighteenth century. Approval to dig and remove objects to foreign countries was comparatively easier than it would become under Greek rule. Many Greeks saw this activity as a supreme disservice; Europe had played a large part in their liberation, but in the meantime had helped themselves to much of the cultural past of Greece. When the Greek government was finally solidified and a new nation was formed, Greek heritage became a focal point of identity. Indeed George Tolias, in his article National Heritage and Greek Revival: Ioannis Gennadious on the Expatriated Antiquities stated that “the creation of the modern Greek state was understood and promoted as a ‘regeneration’; modern Greeks were considered as natural, cultural, and

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59 Morris, 11.  
61 For an excellent discussion of Greek archaeology objects, including pottery, as art objects, see Shanks 56-65.
territorial heirs to the ancient legacy and therefore the sole responsible for its preservation.”

This attitude towards cultural heritage, whether logically correct or culturally appropriate, had a direct impact on the collection and maintenance of the archaeological record. In fact, George Gennadios, the first man of the modern Greek nation to found a museum in order to protect antiquities, did not see the ancient Greek culture as a universal or world heritage, but as an exclusively national heritage. He claims the modern Greeks themselves are solely responsible for the preservation and restoration of classical Greek antiquities. The first archaeological law enacted in Greece in 1834 echoed much the same sentiment, stating that “all antiquities in Greece, being works of the ancestors of the Greek people, are considered as national property of all Greeks.”

This conception of the modern Greeks as stewards of ancient culture continues today, where lively debate is centered on the idea of the return of the Parthenon (i.e. Elgin) marbles. In the recent book *Dialogues on the Acropolis*, a conversation with Elena Korka, the Deputy Head of the Directorate for the Documentation and Protection of Cultural Goods in the Ministry of Culture, states that only when the marbles are returned, “when they are finally united, will they be viewed properly.”

On the contrary, the British have offered up various reasons for their ownership of the marbles: that the

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63 Ibid., 59.

64 Gazi, 370.

Greeks cannot properly care for them, or that their position in the British Museum is now one of national heritage for England.66

Another complication of this nationalism is its direct and harmful effect on the archaeological record. Archaeology is by definition the destruction of the archaeological record itself; systematic documentation is the counter for this. But every archaeologist associated with a dig faces an important question: what is worth preserving? Where should excavations be halted, and what should be removed to get a better glimpse of what lies underneath? It is a game of losses influenced by practicality, research, funding, nationalism, and a host of other responsibilities. For the Greeks building their new nation, antiquity and its remains trumped all others in importance. Hamilakis states that the ancient buildings and artefacts’ “longevity, and their aura of authenticity” gave them a great deal of symbolic power.67 With the emergence of the national state of modern Greece, archaeology and the expatriation of antiquities became a much more difficult affair for outsiders. The Greeks themselves and their state began to get involved directly in the archaeological scene. They began a campaign to restore the physical manifestations of antiquity as the golden age of Greece. This required the systematic removal of intervening material that obscured or polluted it, what Hamilakis called “the purification of the landscape.”68 This purification was not simply carried out in the landscape, but even in the language. The language underwent a state-sponsored transformation that encouraged the removal of Slavic and Arabic influences and the

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66 Marstine, 2.
68 Ibid., 86.
Hellenization of place-names. The modern Greek nation was concerned with preserving the ‘Golden Age of Greece’: classical temples, red- and black-figure vases, pure marble sculptures and the like. Later periods, often seen as remnants of the Greeks’ subjugation, were dismantled and removed, often with little to no documentation. Much of Greece’s later archaeological record was lost during this ‘purification,’ never to be returned.

It was not just the more recent periods that were neglected, either. Kotsakis states that “Greek nationalism never had much use for prehistoric studies anyway, except for those cases where prehistory could somehow be related to the Greek world.” Big sites associated with the mythology and the “heroic age” of Greece, such as Mycenae and Knossos, were all of the Bronze Age that could really capture the attention of the Greek archaeological service. When Linear B was deciphered by Michael Ventris in the early 1950’s and shown to have linguistic connections with ancient Greek, Bronze Age archaeology could become important for the national cause because it promoted even further the antiquity of Greek culture and inhabitation in the peninsula. Similar issues have been playing out in the discussion of Hellenistic identity. The Macedonians were not considered Greek, even by the ancients themselves. Even though Hellenistic Greece was after the “Golden Age” which modern Greeks appropriated, it still became an important form of identity when FYROM was established. Here, again, the modern Greeks could lay claim to the archaeological record to validate their place in European power schemes. Andronikos promoted the site of Vergina, found in the Macedonian

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province of modern Greece, as validation of this archaeological record, and even proof that modern Greeks had a right to the ancient heritage and its land. These ideas would come to directly impact the presentation of archaeological remains in the museums of Greece.

In this early phase of Greek national archaeology, the clearing of extant ruins was the primary goal, and little searching or digging for new sites was undertaken. The Archaeological Society of Athens was founded in 1837 with the objectives of “locating, re-erecting and restoring the antiquities of Greece.” The Antiquities Service of the new state was still in its infancy and underfunded, so the Archaeological Society of Athens became essential for the early excavation and restoration of sites. While technically a privately-funded enterprise, they continue to work closely with the state Antiquities Service in the promotion and publication of archaeological work all over Greece. But the excavation of ancient sites, known and unknown, began to produce a stockpile of material early on which needed to be conserved, analyzed, interpreted, and displayed. The materials could be compiled, categorized, and presented together to display the long history of the Greek people to themselves and the world. Thus Greece began preparations for its own state-run museums.

The creation of a national archaeological museum for Greece was a long, arduous process which spanned some 64 years. In 1829 Greece set up its first state-mandated museum in Aegina. Some 18 years prior, the Aegina Marbles from the Temple of Aphaia

70 Hamilakis, The Nation and its Ruins, 86.
had been removed from the island and sold abroad, perhaps influencing the newly-formed Greek state to establish its museum here for the protection and conservation of nearby ancient artifacts. With the switch of the capital from Nauplion to Athens, it was logical for a national museum to arise in Athens to preserve the antiquities found there. A Central Archaeological Museum was established by royal decree not long after, but never became as central as its name suggested.\textsuperscript{72} There was no prominent building available for conversion to house the massive amount of materials. Instead, they were stashed in various buildings around Athens, most of them appropriated. One such instance, the Temple of Hephaestus near the Acropolis became an important home for some artifacts. The Temple had been preserved, remarkably intact, because of its use as a Christian church over the centuries. In 1834, it hosted the first reception of King Otto, and was used as a museum afterwards until excavations began in the Athenian Agora in the 1930’s.\textsuperscript{73}

While the collections of the Central Museum were scattered throughout various museums in Athens, the intent for a purposely-designed building remained. In 1866, land was set aside for construction of a museum building, which would be completed a little over two decades later. By presidential decree in 1893, the museum was renamed The National Archaeological Museum and was established for “the study and teaching of the science of archaeology, the propagation of archaeological knowledge, and the cultivation

\textsuperscript{72} Dyson, In Pursuit, 78.
of a love for the Fine Arts.” It is no coincidence that the capital was moved to Athens and the National Museum established there; the remains of the acropolis were quickly becoming the most recognizable symbol of Greece’s antiquity (once the Ottoman remains had been removed, of course). The archaeological finds which had been housed in various buildings were transferred and housed together in the new building. Seemingly from the beginning, the collections were divided by types, materials, cultures, and dates. The website provides the following categories: sculpture, vases, figurines (clay, bronze, and other), inscriptions (later moved to their own museum), pre-Hellenic (Mycenaean), and Egyptian. In 1964, the museum, after long periods of war, was reformatted and “created an exemplary display of the development of ancient Greek art from prehistory to the Roman period.” While it proclaims itself as a National Archaeological Museum, it seems to take a decidedly art historical bent in its displays, concerned with presenting a Greek cultural narrative through its artwork. It also sticks with the “Golden Age” ideal, giving prominence to the sculpture and pottery of the Archaic and Classical periods.

The National Museum in Athens came to play a critical role not only in Greece, but in Europe as well. Since its cohesion into one museum complex, the National Archaeological Museum became the premier museum in not only Athens, but also Greece. It began to rival the other great world heritage museums, such as the British Museum and the Glyptothek, in importance with respect to its ancient collections. It has

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76 The National Archaeological Museum of Athens, ibid.
77 Gazi, 375.
taken on such monikers as “one of the top 10 museums in the world”\textsuperscript{78} and “one of the best, if not the best archaeology museums in the world.”\textsuperscript{79} The National Archaeology Museum holds the vast majority of the “big” finds in archaeology, and now, within the last few decades, further archaeological finds go to regional museums,\textsuperscript{80} in essence implying that the picture of the national archaeology of Greece is complete.

With the coffers of the National Museum bursting, regional and site museums began to have much more important functions in Greece. This began, primarily, with the “big dig” at Olympia, undertaken by German archaeologists since 1875. The Germans, with their development of \textit{altertumswissenschaft}, or the “science of antiquity,” began an extremely thorough excavation at the ancient cult site. The excavators were very obedient and respectful to the new antiquities laws, and their extreme diligence to preserve and record even the minutest of details presented a great quantity of material. In this environment arose one of the first site museums of Greece. Even major discoveries, like the pedimental sculptures, were placed in the local museum built for the express purpose of displaying archaeological material of Olympia. Dyson remarks rather succinctly that “much can be said for keeping the objects in the context of the site where they were found.”\textsuperscript{81} In fact, much can and should be said. He addresses the issue of monolithic museums who acquire so much material that they are no longer able to properly curate or display it.\textsuperscript{61} But there is a great deal to be said for displaying the

\textsuperscript{81} Dyson, \textit{In Pursuit}, 84.
material culture in the near immersive environment of a site museum. Visitors to the
museum are able to receive a contextual understanding of the objects in a way that is
simply not possible at major, national archaeological museums. Many more site
museums, as well as regional archaeological museums, began to pop up across the Greek
landscape and create an elaborate structure and hierarchy of display.

This elaborate hierarchy is maintained and controlled by the Hellenic Ministry of
Culture, which has been subsumed under many different branches of government over
the last several decades. Most recently in 2012, it was separated from the Ministry of
Tourism and combined with other groups to make the Ministry of Education and
Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports. A hierarchical flow-chart (Figure 3.1) on the
Ministry’s webpage shows the former power relations as the Ministry of Culture and
Tourism.

Figure 3.1. Hellenic Ministry of Culture Administrative Flow Chart.
Source: Hellenic Republic Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and
The administration of archaeological field work, restoration of sites, museums, contemporary culture, and administrative support all reported to a Secretary of Culture, under the Deputy and Minister of Culture. Various central and regional divisions, however, responded in kind to all of these groups. The administration was divided amongst groups called ephorates, geographical regions which are holdovers of Byzantine administration. There are 39 ephorates for Classical and Prehistoric Antiquities, and 28 for Byzantine Antiquities. These groups function independently of each other, but all are under the same heading and report to a variety of different secretaries.

Amidst all this administrative chaos, the idea of tourism and audience runs central to the Ministry of Culture, even if they are no longer in the same department. Tourism contributes a great amount to Greece’s annual GDP every year. Travel to the countries of Europe, including Greece, is still considered a perogative of the educated elite classes, with the formalization of study abroad groups and “senior trips.” Also, thanks to the advent of the modern cruise, Greece and its magnificent coastline have become popular destinations for travellers by boat. Many of these travellers get to spend at most a day in each city, and rarely venture any further afield. The museums and sites of these easily accessible port cities might often see more visitors than the more obscure sites and museums of the hinterland. Many, if not most, of the Greek archaeological museums cater to the travellers they are most likely to see and often provide English translations in addition to Greek script on everything from placards to guides to catalogues. This

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decidedly Western bent plays to the strength of Western European and American visitors, those ethnicities and nationalities which have been taught to see a strong tie to the Philhellenism of the past.

In the last several decades, many Greek scholars have attempted to address some of the theoretical issues underpinning the museum structure of Greece. In the 1980’s, various initiatives, like the “Melina Project” were announced to bridge the gaps in museum education. Scholars, like Tsaravopoulos, also highlighted the myriad of issues facing Greek museums, such as:

the monolithic and boring character of many regional archaeological museums … the museums’ treasure-driven rational, the enforced centralized archaeological administration, the lack of a comprehensive national museum policy, … the geographically uneven distribution of museums around the Greek regions and… the burdensome accumulation of hundreds of thousands of archaeological finds overflowing in storage rooms.  

Greek museums have made an effort to address some of these issues, but this is an ongoing struggle that continues. Scholars today still recognize the need for more theoretical analysis of the roles and scope of the archaeological museums of Greece. There is still a great deal of helpful research to be done on how the Greek archaeological museums create narratives and meaning, and on how and why those are presented to the public.

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84 Ibid., 101.
CHAPTER IV
EVIDENCE AND FOCUS

New Museum Theory, or the reevaluation of the museum’s disciplinary technology, has brought a great deal of subjects to the fore of discussion. Material culturalists and theoretical archaeologists are beginning to discuss in depth the limits of an object and the stories it could or should tell. Museums are starting to put more stock in the visitor experience, tailoring exhibits to meet the needs of their communities. Curators and archaeologists are also starting to look closely at the function and interpretive schemes of museums: as shrines, as market-driven businesses, as colonizing spaces. Scholars of Greek museums are also beginning to recognize the issues at hand.

One study that has great promise is that undertaken by Marlen Mouliou and Despina Kalessopoulou, as explained in their chapter, “Emblematic Museum Objects of National Significance”. Mouliou expresses the need to evaluate the narratives that Greek museums present. They consider the dialectical and recursive relationship among objects, museums, and visitors, and seek to investigate the “cultural biography of emblematic objects in the context of a large national museum of ancient art.” In this study, they had the opportunity to survey directly visitors who were interacting with “emblematic” pieces of art like the bronze Zeus, the bronze Jockey, the Mask of Agamemnon, and the Antikythera Mechanism. They also examined the written material provided to the visitor and interviewed the curators of the collections. Through these interviews and surveys, they were able to get a comprehensive understanding of the

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85 Mouliou and Kalessopoulou, 47.
86 Important to note that the authors consider the National Archaeological Museum as a museum of ancient art as opposed to an archaeological museum, an important and informative distinction.
situation at the National Museum. They stressed the fact that visitors “absorb this information (characteristics and aesthetic judgments) but they tend to expand their interest to the symbolic connotations.”

The national or direct cultural significance was something that occurred to most, but was not a primary concern in their minds. They state then that their observations align with Nick Merriman’s ideas about ‘informed imagination’, which seeks the knowledge of the archaeological and historical context of the material provided by the experts, but also accepts the plurality of views, welcoming imagination and creativity in the visitor’s constructions of the past. This ‘ideal’ display scheme seems to be a model that the National Museum, and others, should pursue.

It would indeed be a promising study to take such observations and look at the archaeological museums of Greece. The previously-outlined discussion of the primacy of the archaeological and museological record in establishing the “national narrative” of the early modern Greek state is a question that needs to be considered in these museums under these new theoretical ideals. As Marstine states, and I have quoted earlier, museums are not neutral voices; every choice and decision by the employees is subjective and influences the display of the objects. Here, I will attempt to examine some of these subjective choices and analyze the national and regional pictures they present. In particular, I focus on the museums which deal most directly with the material culture of the Bronze Age Argolid: the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, the Archaeological Museum of Nauplion, the Archaeological Museum of Argos, and the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae (Figure 4.1).

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87 Mouliou and Kalessopoulou, 59.
88 Ibid., 60.
Prehistoric archaeology has slowly gained a prominent place in the classical archaeology of Greece. As already mentioned above, the use of the prehistoric Mycenaeans in national dialogues has a turbulent and often conflicting history. But the Mycenaean displays are prominent in the National Museum and provide an excellent sample for examining how the museums deal with displaying a region.

Some of the evidence gathering may be hampered in this study. I do not have the luxury of visiting the museums and sampling visitor interaction and interpretation or interviewing curators. Instead, I will be speculating more on the display from a removed angle. I have relied on pictures of the Bronze Age displays from the museums, as well as
museum maps and layouts, to examine the architecture of the displays and the relationships between the material objects. In particular, I consulted the National Archaeological Museum’s catalogue for the perspective of the curators and directors. To understand the public’s perspective, I consulted various travel guides, including the Blue Guides, Baedeker’s Greece, and S. Iakovidis’ book on the archaeological museums. All of these forms of evidence are removed from their actual sources and contexts and can be hampered in that way. But with careful analysis and attention, important threads of understanding can be pulled from all three forms to make as cohesive a picture as possible, without direct interaction.

I examine the material in two separate case studies: National versus Regional Museum, and Regional versus Site Museum. The use of such antagonistic juxtapositions is deliberate. While these museums are all a part of the same administrative system, they are catering to different audiences. In the National versus Regional Museum chapter, I examine the Bronze Age displays of the National Archaeological Museum and the Archaeological Museum of Nauplion. I inspect the displays and their statements about national and regional issues before examining the tension between the two ideas. In the second chapter, Regional versus Site Museum, I look at the Archaeological Museum of Argos and the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae. Here I investigate the displays and statements about regionalism and site specificity before looking at the tension between the two. I then examine the tension between site, regional, and national issues at all museums.
Museum display, I argue, plays a powerful role in defining national and regional identity, specifically in such a charged archaeological environment as modern Greece. The displays are organized in such a way as to influence the visitors’ perceptions of a certain chronological and regional period. In the variety of museums throughout the Argolid, the choices of display are used to make a statement about Mycenaean culture and what it could mean at different levels: for a site, regional, national, and even world heritage perspective. These national, regional, and site-specific interpretations can color visitors’ understandings of not just the Argolid, but the Mycenaean culture as a whole.
CHAPTER V

CASE-STUDY ONE: NATIONAL VS. REGIONAL

This section develops a comparison between the display of the Bronze Age artefacts at the National Archaeological Museum (NAM) and the Archaeological Museum of Nauplion (AMN).\(^8^9\) I will then attempt a synthesis or, more appropriately, a juxtaposition of the interpretations presented.

The National Archaeological Museum has the potential to be a misnomer. One might assume that a national archaeological museum would display the archaeology of a nation-state (more precisely, the land controlled by that nation-state) for the length of human inhabitation. This is decidedly not the case at the NAM. The museum does contain finds from prehistoric and lithic ages. In 2000, the exhibition of the Stathatos collection brought Byzantine remains into the museum for permanent display. There is virtually nothing after the Byzantine period which is displayed at the NAM. This material is instead found in other thematic museums such as the Museum of Greek Folk Culture and the Byzantine and Christian Museum. The focus of the material at the NAM, as might be expected considering the national rhetoric related to archaeology in the country, is on the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods, specifically in sculpture and pottery.

The layout of the NAM is very similar to Durand’s ideal form with four wings forming a square with a Greek cross at the center (see Figure 5.1). Later additions have added a first floor which contains the majority of the pottery collection, as well as the

\(^8^9\) I will be using abbreviations of the names from this point forward, except when the names themselves are crucial to discussion.
finds from Akrotiri. The museum was closed between 2001 and 2004 for renovations and opened back up in 2005 in its current state. The Bronze Age Mycenaean collection has maintained a central position in the museum for many decades. In particular, it is mentioned that Room 4, called the Mycenaean Hall is “the largest gallery in the museum” and that the “entrance hall leads straight into [it].” In fact, the first objects one can see upon entry are those of the Mycenaean Grave circles. Throughout the last decade, the Prehistoric Galleries (Rooms 4-6, Figure 5.1) underwent renovation. A wall was added to the long left-hand room to create two separate rooms (Rooms 3 and 5, Figure 5.2). Room 5, which houses the Neolithic and Early and Middle Bronze Age collections, was shortened, to allow an additional room for Mycenaean finds (Room 3). Room 6 houses the Cycladic finds, primarily the famous figurines and “frying pans”. Room 4 is reserved from the display of the fantastic finds from the Mycenaean centers and grave sites.

90 Freeman et al., 94.
Figure 5.1. Baedeker’s Layout of the National Archaeological Museum.  

Figure 5.2. Blue Guide’s Layout of the National Archaeological Museum.  
A brief moment should be taken to discuss the finer points of position of the Prehistoric remains. These central galleries are called the Prehistoric collection and contain materials from the Neolithic to the Late Helladic periods of Greece. They also contain material from various parts of the Greek world, including the Peloponnese and mainland, Thessaly, and the islands. Early and Middle Bronze Age remains are separated from the Mycenaean hall in their own room. These materials predate the rise of Mycenaean civilization and deserve to be separated chronologically. This collection of material is quite small in comparison to the Mycenaean displays of the center room, and has been reduced to accommodate the expansion of the Mycenaean galleries. Also on the periphery of the Mycenaean collection is the gallery of Cycladic material. The Cycladic cultures, which date nearly contemporaneously with the Helladic and Minoan cultures, had close ties with their neighbors, as far as the archaeology can say. It is also appropriate that this similar, contemporaneous, but distinct culture would be displayed with the prehistoric material. Yet it is, of course, the Mycenaean material which takes prominence.

There is also a section of prehistoric material which is not displayed in this set of galleries. The finds from Akrotiri on the island of Thera are located in Room 48 on the first floor. This second floor room was a later addition to the museum, and when it was determined the Akrotiri Frescoes would be displayed here, they had to recreate the original rooms in which those frescoes were housed. This consideration could be a reason for the Akrotiri finds’ seclusion from the rest of the prehistoric material. Whatever the cause, the finds themselves are outstanding pieces that draw a great deal of
visitor attention, and perhaps their segregation is intended to highlight them and add prominence to their display.

A notable absence of material is any cultural remains of the Minoans. There are many fantastic regional museums on Crete which highlight the fantastic remains found all over the island. If one considers the fact that the NAM has long appropriated “big” finds from various regions and museums of Greece, Crete’s geographical removal from Athens does not seem a strong enough explanation for the large absence of materials here. What materials from Crete are shown are typically those which date to the “Mycenaean occupation” of Knossos, particularly the Linear B tablets found there.

The pinnacle of the prehistoric displays is what has been previously referred to as the Mycenaean Hall (Room 4). This room contains the material remains from the main occupied centers of the Mycenaens during the Late Bronze Age. The NAM’s catalogue states that the exhibit is “developed thematically and according to the geographical provenance of the objects”. The gallery is filled mostly with grave goods, particularly those from elite burials in grave circles or tholos tombs. The displays do more or less follow thematic and geographical arrangements. Specific classes of graves goods are grouped together, such as gold, weaponry, and jewelry (see Figure 5.3).

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92 Gazi, 372.
The Linear B tablets and seal stones collected from various sites are presented together as well. On a slightly larger, more abstract scale, the display follows geographic divisions. The front of the gallery begins with the finds from the Grave Circles at Mycenae, followed by other grave goods from Mycenae and materials from the site. The rest of the central hall contains finds from the Argolid and Peloponnese, including sites such as Tiryns and Vapheio. Room 3, the small side room added in the latest renovations, includes Mycenaean finds from areas in Attica, central Greece, and the Aegean islands. Their position on the periphery of the Mycenaean Hall, much like with the Cycladic material culture, signifies their periphery on the subject. Prominence is given to material from the Argolid and Peloponnese. More than half the finds displayed are from Mycenae itself; in fact, the material seems to flank all the others, as remnants of the columns from the Treasury of Atreus are displayed at the back of the gallery.

Figure 5.3. Side-by-side display cases showing gold Mycenaean grave goods. Source: Photo by Christopher Witmore, August 2007.

The Archaeological Museum of Nauplion (AMN) is located on the west side of Syntagma Square in a Venetian naval arsenal erected in 1713 CE. Unlike the NAM, this regional museum did not have its own purpose-built structure, but instead appropriated another monument to house its displays. The AMN houses material from the Neolithic down to the Hellenistic period, covering well over a thousand years of chronology. Nauplion was an extremely important city during Venetian occupation, and it is no surprise that a monument such as the naval armory would survive and be appropriated as a place of the display of the past. Nauplion has played an important role in the modern Greek world and was the location of the first capital of the new nation-state. Even when the capital was moved to Athens, Nauplion continued to play an important role in the region and became a center of the Argolid. When the finds from excavations at Asine and Dendra were turned over to the Greek government, a museum was founded in 1926 to house the material culture. The museum quickly arose as a regional archaeological museum, displaying finds from the Argolid and areas around the Argolic Gulf.

The displays in the AMN are spread across two floors of the Venetian building. They are arranged chronologically, with the first floor containing prehistoric materials, and the second containing objects from the historic periods. Iakovidis, discussing the layout of the 1980’s, explains the layout of the displays rather thoroughly:

The exhibition rooms are on two floors, each consisting of a large rectangular hall with two parallel rows of showcases along each of the longer sides of the room; a number of choice objects are exhibited between the pillars supporting the roof. The objects are arranged in chronological order, starting from the door, then along the length of the right hand wall, the rear wall, and ending at the left hand wall.\textsuperscript{94}

The AMN includes a great variety of material types and chronological periods. Its exhibits begin with Paleo- and Mesolithic finds from Franchthi Cave, an important site in Greece with the earliest evidence of human inhabitation. There are also displays of Middle Helladic material from Asine, Berbati, and Mycenae, mostly of pottery from graves. The rest of the prehistoric collection is rounded out with material collected from various sites across the region: pottery and a stele from Grave Circle B at Mycenae, frescoes from Mycenae and Tiryns, pottery and a lamp from Midea, small Linear B fragments, the “Lord of Asine” (Figure 5.4), and the armor panoply from Dendra (Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.4. The Lord of Asine.
The displays have been renewed since Iakovidis’ guide was written, but as he pointed out, the choicest material (determined of course by the curators) is selected to be displayed in the center of the room, underneath the arches which support the roof. The architecture itself is being used to frame these display cases and highlight them for the browsing visitor. On the second floor, pieces from the historical period are displayed. Interestingly enough, this includes Sub-Mycenaean and Geometric finds.\(^95\) This provides a contextual link between the prehistoric collections below, and the materials from later historic periods of Archaic and Classical Greece.

\(^{95}\) Ibid., 119.
Both the NAM and the AMN attempt to represent a complete or at least cohesive and vivid understanding of the Bronze Age Mycenaean culture, put approach it from two very different viewpoints. These viewpoints ultimately end up coloring the interpretation of the period. The differences are fundamental, right down to the basics of the display. The NAM arranged their objects by themes, choosing to group together material from various contexts and arrange them by material type. A general geographical organization also overlays this thematic organization; the sites of the Argolid and Peloponnese took prominence in Room 4, with Mycenae being dominant in position and quantity, while material from different periods of the Bronze Age and different territories (such as the Cyclades) occupied peripheral positions in the galleries. The AMN approached display differently, using a primarily chronological organization. Important or noteworthy objects were pulled to the center of the room, but the chronological layout which wrapped around the room allowed them to still be situated in visual proximity to the periods to which they belonged.

The balance of site representation is also handled dramatically different at each museum. Katie Demakopoulou, who analyses the Mycenaean displays at the NAM, states that the prominence of Mycenaean material culture makes evident Mycenae’s superiority in mainland Greece.96 This is a dangerous argument to make on the basis of mere displays, but one which might often occur to visitors as well. The site of Mycenae, one of the first Late Bronze Age sites to be excavated and the supposed type-site for Mycenaean culture, naturally has produced a great quantity of material which has filled the museums of the area. But to argue that large quantities of material equal a large

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96 Demakopoulou, 18.
amount of power, control, or prominence in an area is a fallacy that is often too easy to accept. The curators and registrars at the NAM could have been very selective about what Mycenaean materials were collected, stored, and presented. The display could distort our interpretation of the Mycenaean world. At the AMN, the chronological framework established there was able to give a more cohesive picture of the region throughout time, allowing the region’s sites to receive a more balanced representation. Material is collected and displayed from various sites, even those outside the traditional palace or grave centers. At the AMN, the Argolid is shown to be a much more densely inhabited area that had a rich network of sites interacting throughout the centuries.

The two museums also take very different approaches to their educational and information programs. The NAM takes a much more traditional approach, allowing the displays to primarily speak for themselves. Information plaques are provided for most, but not all, of the objects and usually only list the basics of date, site, and material. They have more recently developed some contextual information, with wall placards providing information about the sites and graves from which the materials came. But these are few and far between, often bland and uninviting. At the AMN, there is a much more contemporary version of museum practice, organized by Evangelia Papi and Charalambos Antoniadis between 2004 and 2009. From the very beginning of the chronology, guests are exposed to rich amounts of contextual information. The earliest and therefore first-encountered displays actually present the objects *in the middle of* contextual posters (Figure 5.6). Throughout the displays, there are frequent interjections of educational material, and not simply of posters on a wall. There are video projections
which highlight the displays and provide some material culture comparisons, even with objects that could be found at the NAM (Figure 5.7). The AMN was able to take advantage of new educational techniques and tools, including a variety of digital media. The AMN’s willingness to accept new media and theories on museum education give them a greater chance of contextualizing and providing a cohesive picture of the Bronze Age Argolid.

Figure 5.6. The First Displays.  
*Source:* Photo by Christopher Witmore, May 2012

Figure 5.7. The Warrior Vase Media Display.  
*Source:* Photo by Christopher Witmore, May 2012
The roles that each of these institutions play in the museum structure of Greece influence the way they handle and present information on the Bronze Age Argolid. The NAM, which should, in theory, be able to give the most cohesive presentation and interpretation of the Bronze Age, is limited by the traditions and format of its museum displays. The primacy of material from Mycenae, thanks in large part to the tradition of Schliemann’s early excavations and the spectacular finds unearthed, is emphasized and in fact interpreted to represent the primacy of Mycenae as a Bronze Age site in the Argolid. The picture of the Bronze Age Argolid is skewed heavily in the favor of Mycenae, and the remaining sites are underrepresented and potentially misinterpreted. The Mycenaean Hall, while a prominent room in the NAM, is part of the segregated Prehistoric Collection. Bronze Age material is rarely featured in the rest of the museum outside these rooms, which gives the sense that the Mycenaeans were a separate, distinct culture (true) which has no connection with the chronological development of the rest of Greek antiquity (false).

The AMN’s role as a regional museum allows it to speak more specifically about the Bronze Age Argolid. The museum itself was specifically formed to house the materials of the region, and has a chance to show a more cohesive representation. The chronological framework allows the materials to be more truthfully representative, and does not skew the perception towards one site at the expense of the others. The AMN’s position, as a regional and subsequently less-visited museum, allows them to break from the traditional mode of Greek archaeological museums and the shrine status that is
attached to the NAM. In turn, it is possible this allows them to embrace new museological theory, which encourages more educational material, more context, and more multi-media involvement.

Therefore, a visitor to each museum may walk away with a different understanding of the Bronze Age Mycenaeans. A viewer who sees the displays of the NAM Prehistoric collection might interpret the Mycenaeans as being only the people of Mycenae. They might walk away with the notion that the Mycenaeans were extremely wealthy and extremely powerful, dominating the world of Greece in comparison to the earlier time periods and the periphery settlements outside the Argolid. This is a much-less nuanced picture than the one presented at the AMN, which shows the vibrancy of sites, materials, and context of the settlements in the Bronze Age Argolid.

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97 Gazi, 378.
CHAPTER VI

CASE-STUDY TWO: REGIONAL VS. SITE

This section develops a comparison between the display of the Bronze Age artefacts at the Archaeological Museum of Argos (AMA) and the Archaeological Museum of Mycenae (AMM). As before, I attempt a juxtaposition of the interpretations presented, but then compare the images of the Bronze Age Argolid across both museums’ displays.

The Archaeological Museum of Argos (AMA) was inaugurated in 1957, with a new building dedicated in 1961. This new building was a gift of the French School of Archaeology in Greece, which was responsible for the excavations that occurred at the site of Argos. The museum has a hybrid status. Its primary function appears to be as a museum for the finds coming from the excavation at Argos. But the museum does display material from another site of the Argolid, Lerna. This is why I have dubbed it “quasi-regional”. The more recent guide books make a point of mentioning that this is a smaller museum, and most of the significant finds can be found at the NAM.\(^98\) The AMA’s role as a regional museum is playing against its position in the region of the Argolid. Argos has, throughout its history, been in competition against other cities for primacy in the region. More recently, Argos and Nauplion seem to have a rivalry over which city is the unofficial capital of the Argolid. Argos’ acquisition of the Lerna finds then made the museum a regional, as opposed to simply a site, museum. This could then have implications for Argos’ role in the region as well.

\(^98\) Freeman et al., 220.
The museum does give a broad range of material chronologically, with finds dating from the Middle Helladic to the post-Roman period. The AMA does not seem to accommodate an audience as large as the NAM or AMN. Many of the information placards and materials are written in modern Greek only, which provides difficulties for most foreign visitors. French appears on some of the archaeological finds from Argos, since the French have been heavily involved with the excavations there for decades. The only English information placards appear in association with the Lerna Room, again in response to the excavation history of the site by J.L. Caskey and his team. For archaeological context, a model of the site of ancient Argos and pictures of the architectural remains are provided in the galleries.

The museum is divided geographically and temporally. The first floor contains the remains of the site of Argos. The displays are arranged chronologically from the entrance to the rear of the room. Iakovidis describes cases on both sides of the room progressing in sequence chronologically from Middle Helladic and Mycenaean objects to Proto-Geometric, Geometric, Late-Geometric, and Archaic finds.\(^9^9\) The majority of the objects seem to be pottery and bronze from tombs. The Archaic remains carry some notably important pieces: the vase of Odysseus blinding Polyphemus (said to be one of the earliest artistic depictions of myth) and a recreated tortoise-shell lyre. As at the AMN, important finds have been moved to the middle of the room, such as the Geometric bronze helmet and cuirass found in a tomb at Argos. The second floor contains Roman sculptures, but most are copies of Greek originals, and the guides

\(^9^9\) Iakovidis, 83.
emphasize that few of them are even labeled. The courtyard also contains fantastic examples of mosaics from the post-Roman house at Argos, dated to the fifth century CE.

Considered the most notable of the displays,\textsuperscript{100} the Lerna Room can be found at the basement of the Kallergis mansion, housed in the earlier, original building from 1957.\textsuperscript{101} It contains material excavated by J.L. Caskey from the site of Lerna on the western reaches of the Argolid. These displays are also arranged chronologically, moving from the Neolithic to the Late Helladic, left to right from the entrance. The material culture presented is primarily pottery, with great examples of Early Helladic pottery, but also seals as well. A few of the important finds are distinguished as well. A \textit{kourotrophos} figurine, thought to be one of the oldest figurines from the mainland, is shown in its own case (Figure 6.1). It is variously dated to 4500 BCE and 3000 BCE in the Blue Guide books.\textsuperscript{102} At the back of the room, there is a case with a roof tile from the famous “House of Tiles” and the center of the room features a reconstructed circular clay hearth from the Early Helladic period.

\textsuperscript{100} Court, 63.
\textsuperscript{101} Perhaps there is significance that the “primary” material is located in the earlier, more historically grounded building.
\textsuperscript{102} 4500 BCE in the 1995 edition (Barber 218), 3000 BCE in the 2005 edition (Freeman et al. 220).
The Archaeological Museum of Mycenae (AMM) is the most recently established of the four mentioned in this paper. It was erected and opened for visitors in 2004. The museum is relatively small and located on the road that leads up to the citadel. The building itself is designed to echo the blocky, cyclopean masonry of the Mycenaean walls, and the winding corridors are said to echo the winding pathways within the summit. The museum was erected to store and display objects from the vicinity of the Mycenaean citadel and has the focus of a site museum. The museum is also fairly small and usually cramped with crowds. Reviews mention the difficulty of

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103 A timely source of inspiration and encouragement for the renovators of the AMN.
104 Freeman et al., 217.
reading the information placards, presented in both Greek and English, because of the crowds. 105

The museum displays around 2000-2500 objects at any given time. At the entrance to the museum, there is an elaborate model of the citadel to help visitors orient themselves. There are the standard wall displays on the history of the site, accompanied by mentions of the myth surrounding the site. Interestingly enough, there are also depictions of the site by visitors, 106 which give the impression of encouraged participation on the individual’s part in the educational program. The layout of the museum’s displays is quite revolutionary and is likely possible only because of the “new” status of the building and its role as a site museum. The material culture is arranged in groups from where it was found. The museum opens with a pottery chronology that extends from the end of the Neolithic to Sub-Mycenaean phases. The museum proceeds in a labyrinthine path, hitting upon various areas throughout the citadel and showing the selection of material found in those areas. The displays, grouped by provenance in the site, are then sometimes subdivided by type, material, or chronology in their cases. Terracotta sculptures will often be displayed next to pottery, metalworks, jewelry, and even frescoes. The displays are frequently accompanied by contextualizing wall posters which situate the location of the finds with maps and explain important archaeological observations about the area (Figure 6.2). These techniques were employed to assist the

106 Freeman et al., 217.
visitor in associating material with the actual places on the citadel that they likely just
visited, or would shortly visit.

Figure 6.2. Display cases containing contextual information.
Source: Photo by Christopher Witmore, June 2010.

The path proceeds around to the displays of the Grave Circle materials. These are
organized along the walls and in central display cases of a circular room, thought to echo
the circular form of these important Grave Circles. The materials in this room are
largely reproductions of the actual finds which are housed at the NAM, including the
Mask of Agamemnon (Figure 6.3). Unfortunately, because of the collecting practices of
the NAM, the AMA must fill gaps in the archaeological record with these reproductions.
These are often not marked as reproductions, and so the visitor could frequently walk
away with the impression that they had seen the authentic artifact. This brings up
important issues with the “intended viewer” of the museum. Perhaps the curators of the
AMM expect visitors to know the material is found in the NAM. Perhaps they are more

107 Freeman et al., 218.
concerned with presenting a cohesive, contextual understanding, rather than presenting the true authenticity of the pieces. In no way do these reproductions seem to affect the contextual understanding of the Grave Circles. Reproductions in context seem instead to be a better alternative to leaving the spaces empty or blank. The final room contains the post-Mycenaean finds, dating to the Classical and Hellenistic periods, and a display on the legacy of the Mycenaean civilization. The museum curators attempt to pay homage to the succeeding periods, but focus on the primacy of the site as a Mycenaean citadel.

Figure 6.3. Display cases containing reproductions of Grave Circle material.  
Source: Photo by Christopher Witmore, June 2010.

Neither the AMA nor the AMM seem to make an effort to present the cohesive region of the Bronze Age Argolid, and this is due in large part to the function of their museums. The AMA is a limited regional museum that only exemplifies works from two sites. The AMM is itself a site museum, focusing on the material from a specific excavation of the citadel and immediate, surrounding territory. Each museum approaches
the organization of its displays in a distinctive way. The displays at the AMA are divided by site (Argos and Lerna) and then arranged chronologically. At the AMM, they are able to arrange the displays in a truly archaeologically informative way, based on the location of finds in the citadel. The site representation is decidedly skewed by the functions of the museums as well. The AMA seems to have been erected, originally, for the purpose of a site museum for Argos. It has also acquired the material of Lerna, but remains devoted only to these two individual sites on the western side of the Argolid. The AMM has a distinct purpose as a site museum for Mycenae.

Each museum handles the issue of “big finds” differently. AMA follows the same path as the AMN by moving important finds to the middle of the gallery. It also, however, isolates important finds in their own cases, such as the kourotrophos figurine in the Lerna Room. The AMM has a significant complication in that many of the “big finds” from its site have permanent residences in other museums, like the NAM and AMN. To counter this problem, the curators had reproductions of seminal pieces made, so that the context would not be diminished by the gaps of such important pieces.

Each museum takes different approaches to the accommodations of the visitors, especially the international or uninformed tourist. The AMA seems a bit exclusive in its displays. The museum is small, and the information and placards are written primarily in Greek with almost no English translations. The museum does provide a model and pictures of the architectural remains at the site of ancient Argos, but this is rather minimal. At the AMM, contextualization is taken to the extreme and is even incorporated in the architecture of the museum. The building echoes the citadel itself,
and displays are meant to evoke the locations of the site they are depicting, especially in the Grave Circle section. All the texts are provided in Greek and English, and wall information frequently provides maps, history, myth, and interpretation.

How then can the Bronze Age Argolid be interpreted from these museums? The AMA can hardly be said to give any sort of comprehensive understanding of the region or time period. The vast majority of the material is pottery and tomb materials. The finds of Lerna give excellent context for the Early and Middle Bronze Age, but do not give an accurate picture of the height of Mycenaean civilization during the Late Helladic period. Instead of a regional museum, the AMA functions more as a two-fold site museum for Argos and Lerna, but limited in its scope for both. The AMM has no intention of presenting the conceptualized form of the Late Bronze Age. But it is in a dangerous position in that most visitors could interpret it this way. Mycenae is the type-site of the culture, and often the only Bronze Age Mycenaean site that a visitor will experience. While the museum excels in site-specificity with its displays, the contextual material and the monolithic nature of Mycenae can often be seen to stand in for all Mycenaean civilization and citadels. This, of course, does not pay the appropriate attention to the variety of culture and experience in the archaeology of the Mycenaean. The AMM could benefit from an explicit statement on the role of Mycenae in the region and the variety of Mycenaean remains found all over Greece, and indeed, all over the Argolid.
CHAPTER VII

FINDINGS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The variety of display at these four museums offers a significantly different contextual understanding of the Bronze Age Argolid and Mycenaean society. The tradition of museum display and the excavations at Mycenae have hampered the picture that the NAM is able to present of the Mycenaeans. Visitors experience a culture, almost entirely segregated from the rest of the Greek artistic and cultural timeline, which is heavily focused on the Middle and early Late Helladic elite grave goods of Mycenae. This interpretation is unfaithful to the diversity of material, wealth, site location and hierarchy of the Mycenaean world in the Argolid. The new museological approaches of the AMN allow for a more cohesive representation of the material, timelines, and sites. Sites are represented and contextualized, but the arrangement is chronologically based, giving a more cohesive understanding of the rise and fall of the region during the Mycenaean times. The Sub-Mycenaean transition phase in the second floor is able to connect directly the Bronze Age to the later historical periods, showing continuity in inhabitation and culture throughout the periods of inhabitation in the Argolid.

The “regional” AMA museum can hardly be said to function as such. As a duo-site museum for Argos and Lerna, it does not seem to intend to give a picture of the region as a whole. The limited amount of material culture hampers even the presentations of these sites. The majority of the big finds have been moved to the NAM, and the AMA is left to create a cohesive picture with what remains. The museum provides an important understanding of the Early and Middle Bronze Age at Lerna, and the Mycenaean period at Argos, but the lack of educational materials and the restricted
use of only Greek on the whole make this museum less than ideal for providing a cohesive regional picture to tourists and visitors. The AMM is not intending to give a comprehensive picture of the region, as its function is as a site museum. The innovative display styles and architecture perform the important task of connecting the finds to the locations in which they were found. The curators have substituted reproductions for the “big items” shipped to the NAM, perhaps valuing context over authenticity. The museum, understandably, gives a sharp picture of Late Bronze Age Mycenae, but could more readily embrace the opportunity to explain the region more thoroughly and step outside its simple, limiting role as a site museum.

Why then are these contradictory narratives and displays important? These museums, in a way, are embracing a multiplicity of narratives. The danger is that many of them are marketing these narratives as cohesive pictures of the region, or even of Mycenaean culture itself. These displays play a very fundamental role in forming public understanding and narratives on a regional and national level. The displays all treat the region of the Bronze Age Argolid in very distinct ways, making statements through their culture about what is and is not. These displays also play a role in broader national narratives. The attempt or avoidance to include the Bronze Age Argolid as a further extension of Greek culture and occupation into the past can feed into the national narratives that Greek museums are presenting. It is easy to ignore these large undercurrents by dismissing them as part of the tradition arising from the foundation of the museum structure in Greece. This particular study could be enhanced with future visitor surveys and curator interviews, like those conducted by Mouliou and
Kalisspoulou. This could give a more direct understanding of the narratives that are presented and taken away, and how regionalism and nationalism is thought to play into those narratives from both the perspective of the institution and the visitor. With New Museum Theory (as defined in chapter 2) as a guide, these museums could bring these theoretical underpinnings to the fore and present the information in new ways that allow visitors to make their own understandings with the material provided to them. Gazi states that the objects of the national museums of Greece “are displayed as icons to be adored for their aesthetic merits and no attempt is made at elucidating the social milieu that gave birth to them.” If the NAM could break from its shrine status, and embrace more new museum theory like the AMN and AMM, it could allow for a revolution for not only the museum structure of Greece, but also for the way in which the material culture of the ancients could be presented, interpreted, and integrated into larger networks of understanding.

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108 Gazi, 392.
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