

NEW IMAGES OF THE ERECHTHEION BY EUROPEAN TRAVELLERS

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The building known as the Erechtheion was built in the second half of the fifth century BC on the Athenian Akropolis and once housed the oldest and most important cults and relics in Athens, namely those of Athena Polias, Erechtheus, Poseidon and Hephaistos, to name but a few. There are essentially four façades to this complex and multi-level temple, and it is these façades that are illustrated by the many travellers to Greece. The East Façade consists of a hexastyle porch with distinctive Ionic columns with the lotus and palmette necking band (plan 1). The South Façade is primarily a plain wall with the famous Maiden Porch at its west end. The West Façade includes a side view of the Maiden Porch, four engaged columns perched upon a wall pierced by a small door, and the side view of the huge tetrastyle North Porch with its elaborate Ionic columns towering over the ancient city centre. The primary access to the Erechtheion was through the impressive North Door. This temple once had Parian marble figures attached to the grey Eleusinian limestone frieze blocks by clamps. They have all since fallen off the building, many of them having been carted off as manageable souvenirs by the early travelers to Athens.

Having obtained a general acquaintance with this most beautiful of buildings surviving from antiquity, we now turn to the evidence for the state of the building in the 18th and 19th centuries when western travellers began to visit Greece regularly. These travellers often kept detailed journals and, since there were no cameras, spent days – even months and years – carefully sketching the monuments they encountered. Many of these journals were published with engraved versions of their drawings, as there was a real appetite for such literature, especially in Britain. This paper summarises what happened to the Erechtheion from the mid 18th century onwards based on these travellers' descriptions and illustrations, and highlights the new evidence I have found and how it refines our understanding of the changes to the temple.

Paton *et al* conducted the first comprehensive study of the travellers' descriptions and illustrations during the early 20th century by collecting all the known images and descriptions of the Erechtheion up to the First World War (1927: 536-567). In the course of my research for the block-by-block analysis of what happened to the Erechtheion over time and modelled in CAD (Lesk 2004a), I consulted these images in person and searched for previously unexamined images and accounts in the libraries, museums and archives of Western Europe. This article presents and analyses a selection of these discoveries for the first time. Overall, the travellers' descriptions offer a different kind of information. They remark upon the general state of the building - for example, how many maidens were standing at the time in the South Porch - but more interesting is their aesthetic reaction to the building, their opinions on Lord Elgin, and their relationships with other travellers visiting Athens at the same time.

Some time after paganism was finally snuffed out in Athens with the closure of the philosophical schools in 529 AD, the Parthenon and the Erechtheion were converted into Christian basilica churches. At the end of the Fourth Crusade in 1204, the Franks took over Athens and installed themselves on the Akropolis. The Frankish noblemen used the Propylaea as a palace, the Parthenon was converted into a Catholic Cathedral and the Erechtheion was turned into a grand residence, probably for the

Latin bishop. In 1453, the Turks brought an end to the Byzantine Empire by sacking Constantinople. Three years later, Athens surrendered. It is unclear how the Erechtheion was used immediately after the takeover of the Akropolis, but in the later seventeenth century, travellers were told it served as a harem (Spon 1678: 159-160; Wheler 1682: 364-365).

The first scholarly travellers to visit Athens and document her monuments were James Spon and George Wheler in 1676. They identified the Erechtheion based on the second century A.D. traveller Pausanias' description of the temple being "double" (I.26.6). After scrambling around the ancient hovels on the south side of the temple, they beheld the maidens of the South Porch "enclavées dans un mur," (Spon 1678: 160) or "embedded into a wall." (Wheler 1682: 365). In 1749, future librarian to George III, Richard Dalton, was the first draughtsman to illustrate the actual state of the temple relatively accurately, minus its known accretions (Dalton 1752). These famous drawings show that one of the maidens (plan 1: M6) from the South Porch was already missing, probably having been destroyed during the Venetian siege of 1687, which more famously blew up the Parthenon. The west view also shows that the spaces between the columns in the North Porch were filled in. These walls hid a gunpowder magazine within.ⁱ

Not long after Dalton, the intrepid architect-travellers, James Stuart (1762-1789) and Nicholas Revett, raced against the Frenchman Julien-David Le Roy (1758) to publish elevations and architectural details of the Erechtheion. Their books represent the first modern transmission of authentic Greek architecture to the West and became the basis of the Greek Revival movement. William Pars offers one of the earliest glimpses of some of the post-Classical accretions to the building in his watercolour of 1765, an engraving of which was included in Stuart and Revett's *Antiquities of Athens*.ⁱⁱ The most important feature is the crumbling ruin of the "North Addition" attached to the North Wall, which was built when the temple was transformed into a residence during the Frankish Period.

The earliest of the previously unexamined depictions is by the Frenchman, Louis-François Cassas from around 1785 (Figure 1). Cassas was the artist in the entourage of the Comte de Choisseul-Gouffier, the French Ambassador to the Ottoman Porte. This painting is not overly helpful because Monsieur Cassas has taken the liberty to restore parts of the building that logic told him must be there. On the other hand, it does illustrate the remnants of the walls that formerly enclosed the Maiden Porch mentioned by Spon and Wheler in 1676, otherwise omitted in the earlier depictions such as Dalton's mentioned above. The excavations taking place in the foreground disclose the *raison-d'être* of his patron's interest in the Akropolis, namely to "Enlevez tout ce que vous pourrez...tout ce qu'il y a de pillable" (Legrand 1897: 57).ⁱⁱⁱ

William Gell, a British artist and traveller, gives us the best picture of the Erechtheion in 1800-1801, just prior to Lord Elgin's activities on the Akropolis. In his most famous view of the temple from the north, Gell uniquely includes traces of Gothic arches in the walls between the columns of the North Porch. These represent the remnants of windows belonging to the Frankish house (Gell 1800a). Two of Gell's drawings of the Erechtheion have never been published. The first shows a new perspective of the Erechtheion: the interior of the East Porch (Gell 1800b, Figure 2). All six columns are visible and the north anta is intact for the last time. The second shows the interior of the Maiden Porch (Gell 1800c, Figure 3). The Maiden Porch had been excavated in 1789 by the French consul Fauvel and re-excavated most recently by Elgin's agent, Lusieri. Previously travellers remarked on how the podium was

filled with rubbish. Gell's documentary style in his artwork is paralleled in prose in an unpublished diary manuscript at the University of Bristol (Gell 1801). Gell's description of the Erechtheion is very detailed and mentions for the first time the loft in the North Portico where he saw the marble coffers of its ceiling. It was in this loft that hundreds of travellers would carve their marks later in the nineteenth century. Gell is also one of the few travellers who was less than impressed by the maidens, characterising them as not being "of the very first rate workmanship" but grants them as having "a singular effect from without" (Gell 1801: 67).

In 1803, Elgin's agents removed Maiden #3 (plan 1: M3) and replaced it with a pillar of masonry seen in many of the later images and dubbed "*Opus Elgin.*" Elgin also took the northernmost column of the East Porch and various other architectural fragments. A painting by Haygarth, unknown to the authors of *The Erechtheum*, is the first depiction of the East Porch since Elgin took the column (Figure 4). Its removal destabilised the rest of the North Wall, which soon crumbled to the ground.^{iv}

In 1805, following the trend set by Elgin, the Turkish garrison commander removed an architrave block from the West Façade, inscribed it in Arabic and placed in the new fortifications of the Akropolis. A new, though unfinished, drawing by George Basevi (1818b) shows the West Façade lacking its southernmost architrave block (Figure 5).^v In total, there are four unpublished depictions of the Erechtheion by Basevi, a student of the great architect Sir John Soane, the most important showing the Erechtheion from the north (Basevi 1818a, Figure 6). The ground level to the east of the North Porch has risen significantly, and the remnants of the North Addition are still standing fifty-five years after Pars first drew them. This perspective offers new information about the cross-wall of the North Addition, namely an otherwise unknown pointed-arched niche in its west side, flanked by two other niches.

An unpublished collection of Basevi's letters resides in the Library of the Soane Museum in London. These wonderful documents illuminate the competitive atmosphere amongst the young men on the Grand Tour for the best spots from which to draw the monuments on the Akropolis. Basevi wrote the following to his mother in 1818:

I have been very successful in my choice of points of sight ... and they have been copying me, this among artists is not considered a correct thing to do, but I have never noticed it in any other way than by keeping my sketches when finished more to myself, and never asking to see theirs. They have understood me, and have set about point hunting everywhere, which affords Wilson and self great amusement.

Eastlake has carried this copying plan to a great extent, six or eight things he has made *tale quale*. He ought to be ashamed of it, as he is a regular established history painter, and the best of it is instead of being obliged to me for these hints for pictures they are Jealous of me. What a pack of fools all artists are with these mean ideas, they may copy all mine, if they would do it openly. I am not a painter nor wish for a reputation as such. I can never interfere with them nor they with me. So much for this nonsense....^{vi}

Not long after this rivalry, the past-time of painting the Erechtheion ceased completely for a period of about nine years owing to the Greek War of Independence. In 1821-1822, the Greeks besieged the Akropolis. Only one shot is supposed to have hit the Erechtheion, on the south window of the West Façade (Waddington 1825: 57). The Turks appear to have dismantled more of the walls in search of lead for shot.^{vii}

The Greeks allegedly offered to give the lead to the Turks in order to prevent this dismantling.

The Greeks held the Akropolis until 1826 when the Ottoman army returned to besiege Athens. During this siege, Maiden #4 (plan 1: M4) was hit and she toppled out of place. The west pilaster capital of the Maiden Porch was also completely shattered in this attack. As a result, much of the Porch's roof collapsed. The first detailed illustration of the Maiden Porch after this episode is another new depiction, this time by Danish artist and architect, Christian Hansen in 1835 (Figure 7). New masonry pillars have been added as a "quick fix" to support the remainder of the roof and a headless Maiden #4 has been propped up against "*Opus Elgin*."

The temple suffered further damage during the conflict: The north and south columns of the West Façade fell down and the majority of the South Wall was dismantled, almost certainly raided for its metal clamps - this time by the Greeks (Paton *et al* 1927: 557). Most tragically, the west half of the North Porch collapsed when the northwest column capital was fired upon by the Turks early in 1827, killing eleven family members of the Greek commander, Gouras, who had been hiding in the loft above the vault of the powder magazine. Luckily, architecturally at least, the magazine itself did not explode.^{viii} The earliest depiction of the collapsed North Porch (and the destroyed North and South Walls) is a new drawing by Francis Arundale, made in 1834, which I found during a visit to the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum (Figure 8). It shows how the three western columns, western entablature and northern entablature have been toppled to the ground. The three western monolithic ceiling beams and the four corresponding rows of coffers have collapsed, some of which came to rest on the roof of the vault.

After the War of Independence, a visit to the remainder of the loft where Gouras' family had perished became a regular part of a visit to the Erechtheion. Travellers signed their names on the inside of the remaining portions of the North Porch, but very few travellers brought their art supplies (Lesk 2004b). In 1811, Charles Cockerell painted the loft and depicted it as a dark, airless garret, accessible only by a ladder in the northwest corner. In Copenhagen I found a much livelier and detailed depiction of the loft by Hansen made in 1835-6 (Figure 9). A man in a fez, most likely one of Hansen's Danish friends dressed up as a native, leans on a fallen coffer block resting on the roof of the vault and gazes at the view between the columns, now freed of the masonry between them.

The Akropolis was officially handed over by the Turks to Christopher Neezer, a Bavarian officer, in April 1833. Upon surveying his new domain, he said: "I entered the Acropolis and saw heaps of tumbled marbles. In the midst of the chaotic mass of column capitals, fragments of columns, marbles large and small, were bullets, cannon balls, human skulls and bones, many of which were near the slender Caryatids of the Erechtheion." (Papageorgiou-Venetas 1994: 225). There still is a cannonball among the long grass just west of the Maiden Porch.

The Greeks soon had dominion over their ruins and teams of eminent scholars, archaeologists and architects from Greece, Denmark, Switzerland, Italy and Prussia set about the clearing of the post-Antique accretions on the Akropolis. A previously unknown oil painting by Martinus Rørbye from 1836 shows the Maiden Porch just prior to the first official exploration of the Erechtheion (Figure 10).

Between 1837 and 1840, the new man in charge of the Akropolis, Kyriakos Pittakis, began putting the Erechtheion back together again. Pittakis received a great deal of criticism for being crude and unmethodological (Papageorgiou-Venetas 1994: 230). A new depiction by Johann Frey (1843) from the Museum of the City of Athens

shows the random nature of the re-erection of the South Wall (Figure 11). Another new depiction, this time from 1847 by the English architect and founder of the British School at Athens, Francis Penrose, shows the re-erected western columns of the newly cleared North Porch carried out by the nascent Greek Archaeological Society (Figure 12). They could proceed no further with its restoration due to lack of funds. Pittakis re-erected Maiden #4. Her capital was missing, so the roof above her head was not replaced at this time. The southern column of the West Façade was also re-erected.

The Maiden Porch soon received further attention from the French architect Alexis Paccard who repaired the porch between 1846 and 1847 (Guillaume 1870). Two new depictions, by Cook and Martineau, show the Maiden Porch immediately after its restoration in 1850 (Figure 13Figure 14). Maidens #1 through #5 are in place, but the roof is still missing. “Opus Elgin” has been replaced by a terracotta cast. In other renditions of the South Porch after this time, artists actually represent the difference in colour of the Elgin replacement (Werner 1877). Maiden #4 received a replacement capital, and the architraves, podium and crepidoma were repaired with new blocks and replaced. Italian sculptor Andreoli restored the missing parts of Maiden #6.

A series of previously unexamined Danish paintings shows the state of the Erechtheion just before and after the great storm of 1852 which toppled the recently restored West Façade. The first is by Laurits Winstrup (1851), painted just prior to the storm (Figure 15). The second is by Harald Stilling (1853), and is the earliest to show the effects of the storm (Figure 16). All the columns of the West Façade have fallen into the temple except for the lonely stub of the northernmost one.

The 1850s were a time of the first scientific investigations into the building. An elevation by Winstrup (1851) is an early example of this kind of study pioneered by the great French architect Jacques Tétaz (Figure 17). The interior of the temple was fully excavated during the 1850s and 1860s and the crepidoma cleared all the way around as you can see in the last of the new depictions of the Erechtheion to be presented, one of several by the English architect, Spiers (Figure 18).

By the middle of the 19th century, photography was developing quickly and the Akropolis served as one of the earliest subjects for this nascent art form. As a result, the need for travellers to capture their visions of monuments on paper by prolonged gaze slowly began to diminish. The paintings and scientific elevations continued to be important, however, because the quality of the early photographs was low and did not show the details of the architecture. Balanos led the next large-scale reconstruction effort on the Erechtheion at the turn of the twentieth century. The North Wall, West Façade and entablature of the East Porch were repaired at this time with questionable accuracy. Seventy years passed before an attempt was made by the Committee for the Preservation of the Akropolis Monuments to rectify these problems and protect the monument from further damage. The Erechtheion continues to change today: The Akropolis Restoration Service is currently rebuilding the sanctuary of Pandrosus adjacent to the temple’s West Façade.

I am grateful to the Kress Foundation for funding my travels in search of new images of the Erechtheion in institutions across Western Europe, and the Semple Classics Fund and University Research Council of the University of Cincinnati for supporting my research in Greece and the UK. I would also like to thank the Soane Museum, the British Museum, the Museum of the City of Athens, the British School at Athens, and the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, for their generous help and permission to use the images in this article.

CAPTIONS FOR FIGURES

Figure 1: L.-F. Cassas, *The Erechtheion from the Southwest*. 1786. By courtesy of the Benaki Museum.

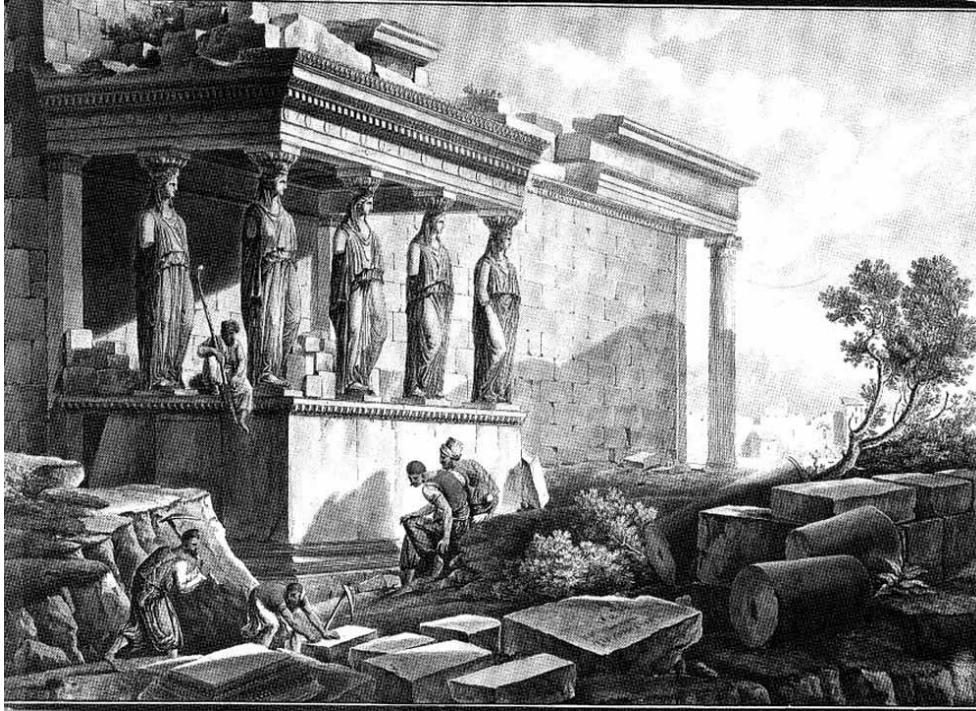


Figure 2: W. Gell, *Inside the East Portico*. 1800. Photo by author.

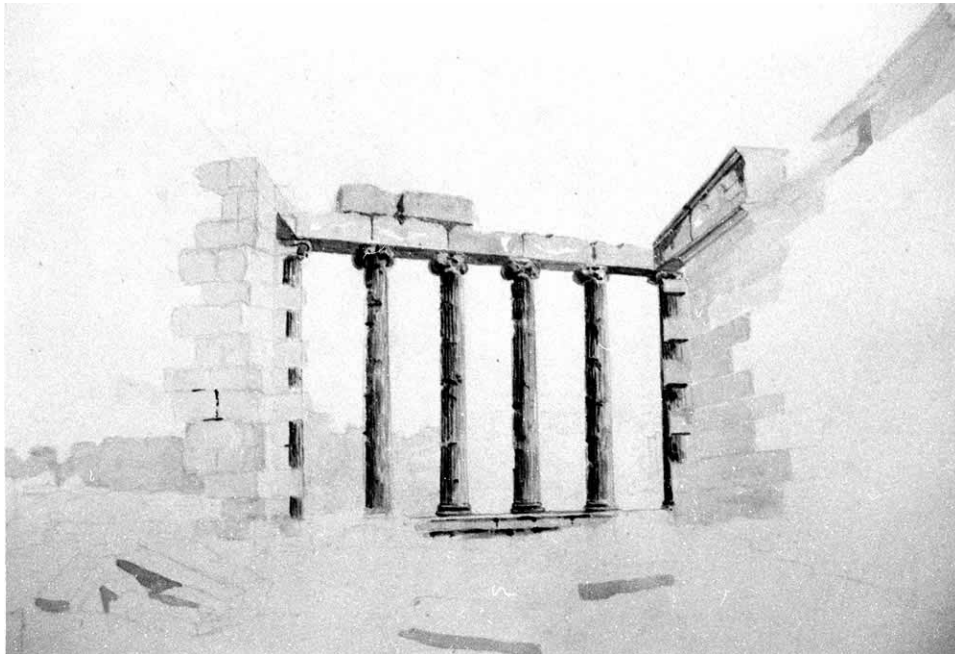


Figure 3: W. Gell, *Interior of the Porch of the Maidens*. 1800. Photo by author.

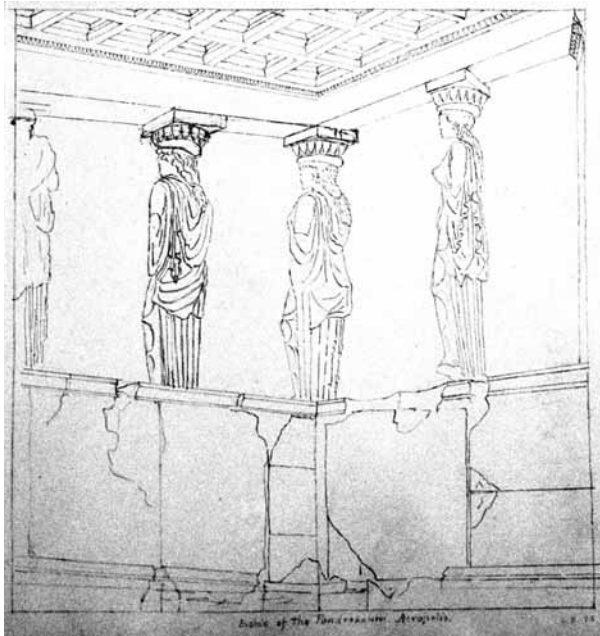


Figure 4: W. Haygarth, *Erechtheum from the North*. 1810-1811. By courtesy of the Gennadius Library.



Figure 5: G. Basevi, *West Façade of the Erechtheion*. 1818. By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum.

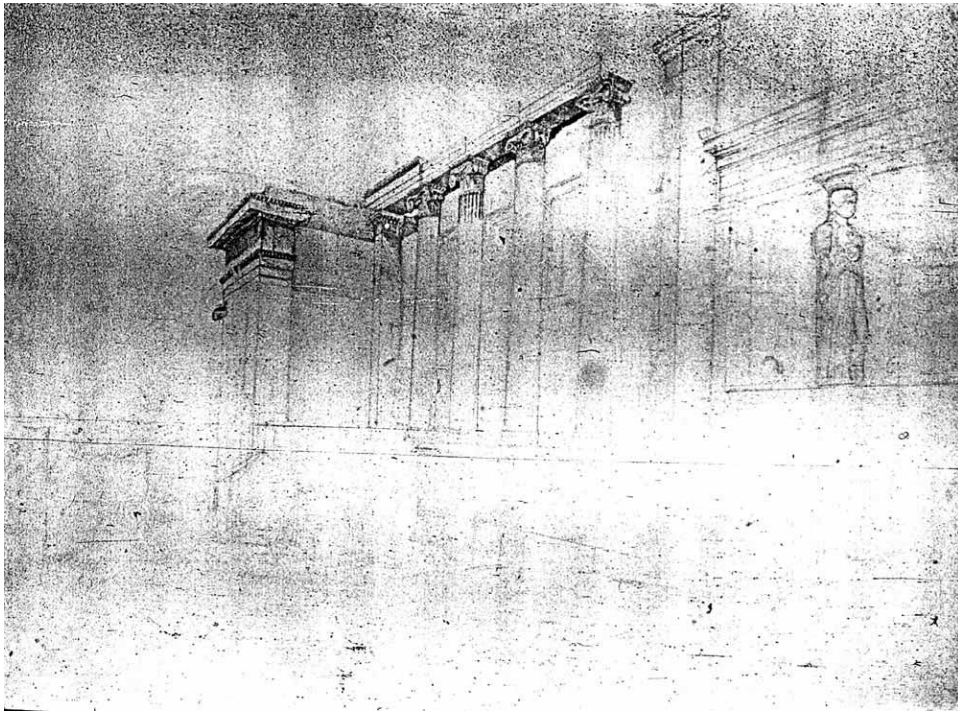


Figure 6: G. Basevi, *Erechtheion from the North*. 1818. By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum.

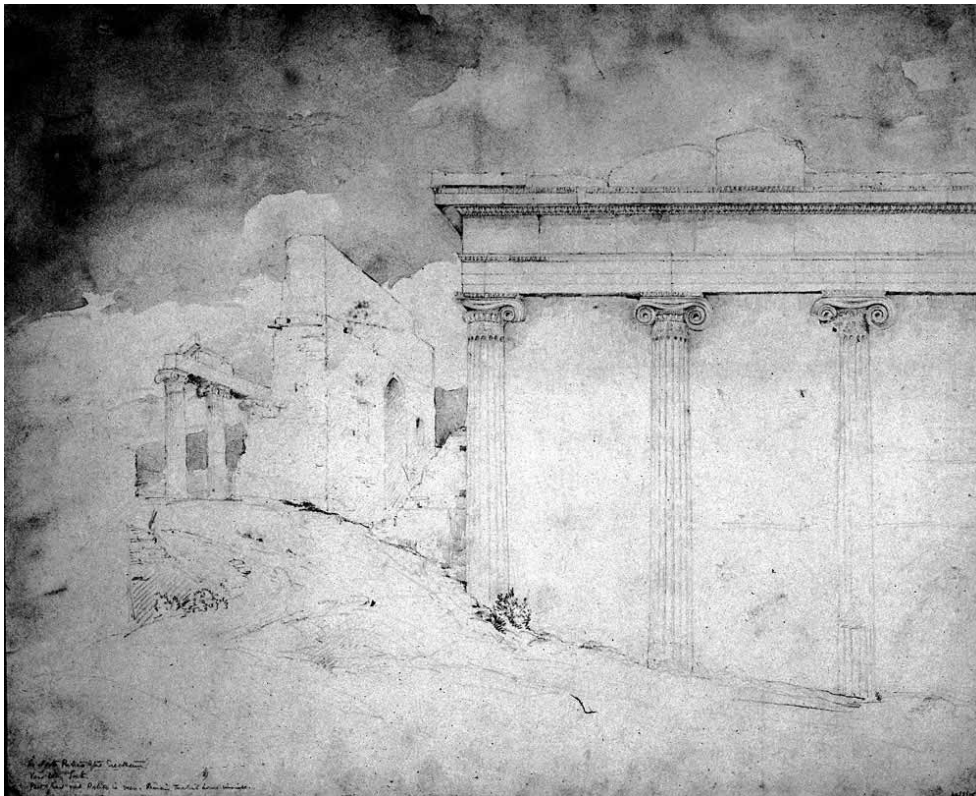


Figure 7: C. Hansen, *The Maiden Porch from the Southeast*. 1835. Photo by author.



Figure 8: F. Arundale, *View of the Temple of Erechtheus at Athens*. 1834. Photo by author.

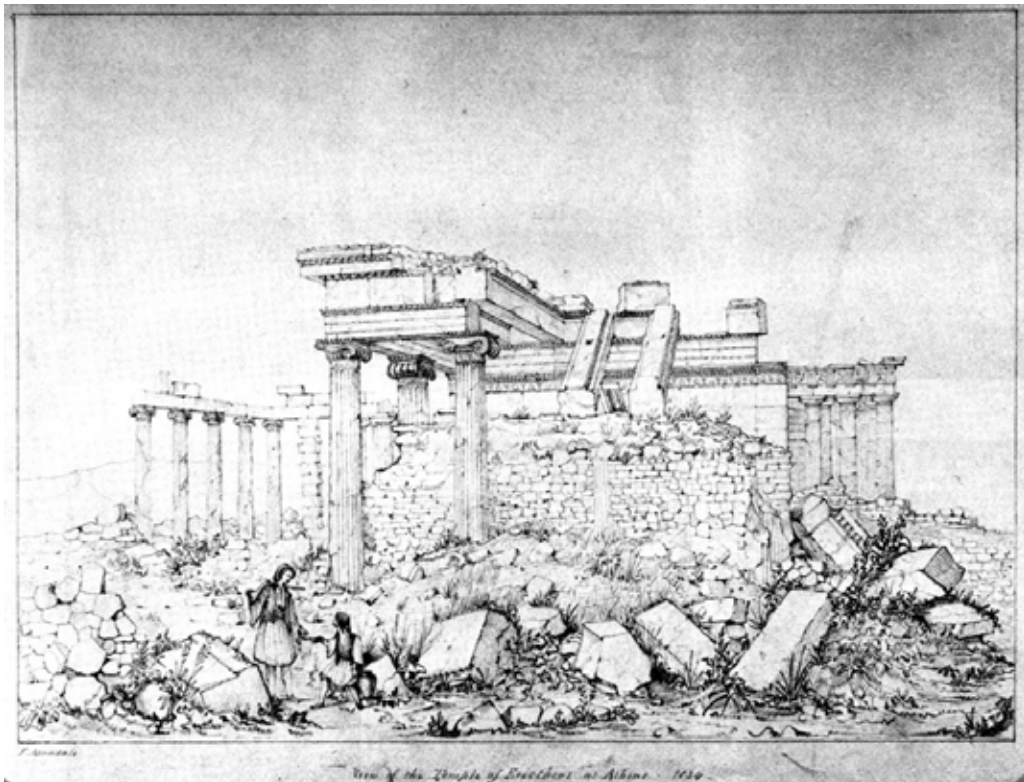


Figure 9: C. Hansen, *Inside the North Portico of the Erechtheion*. 1835. Photo by author.

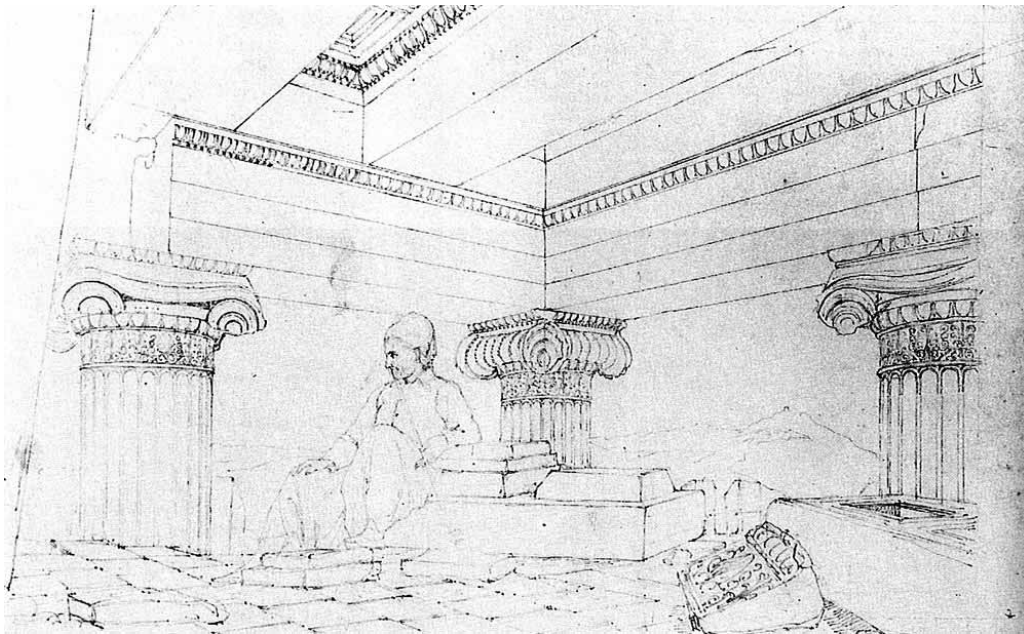


Figure 10: M. Rørbye, *Parti af Erechteion*. 1836. Photo by author.

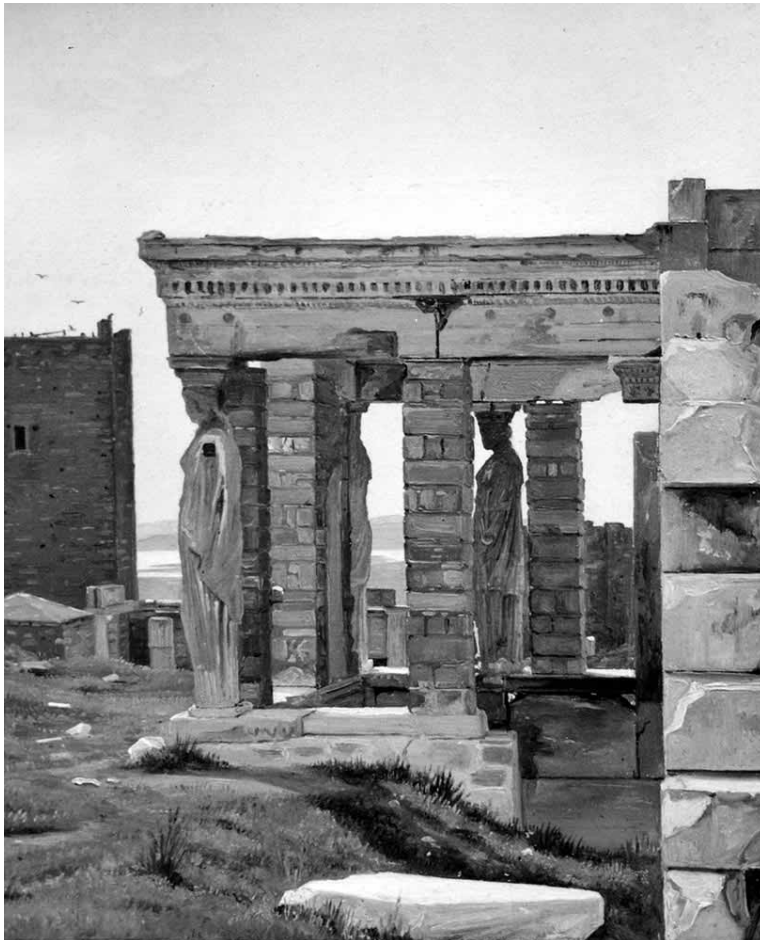


Figure 11: J. J. Frey, *View of the Erechtheion and the Parthenon*. 1843. By courtesy of the Museum of the City of Athens.



Figure 12: F. C. Penrose, *Portico of Minerva Polias*. 1847. By courtesy of the British School at Athens.



Figure 13: H. Cook (1819-1980), *The Erechtheion*. 1846. By courtesy of the Museum of the City of Athens.



Figure 14: E. H. Martineau, *Athens, Acropolis, The Erechtheum*. 1850. By Courtesy of RIBA Library Drawings Collection.

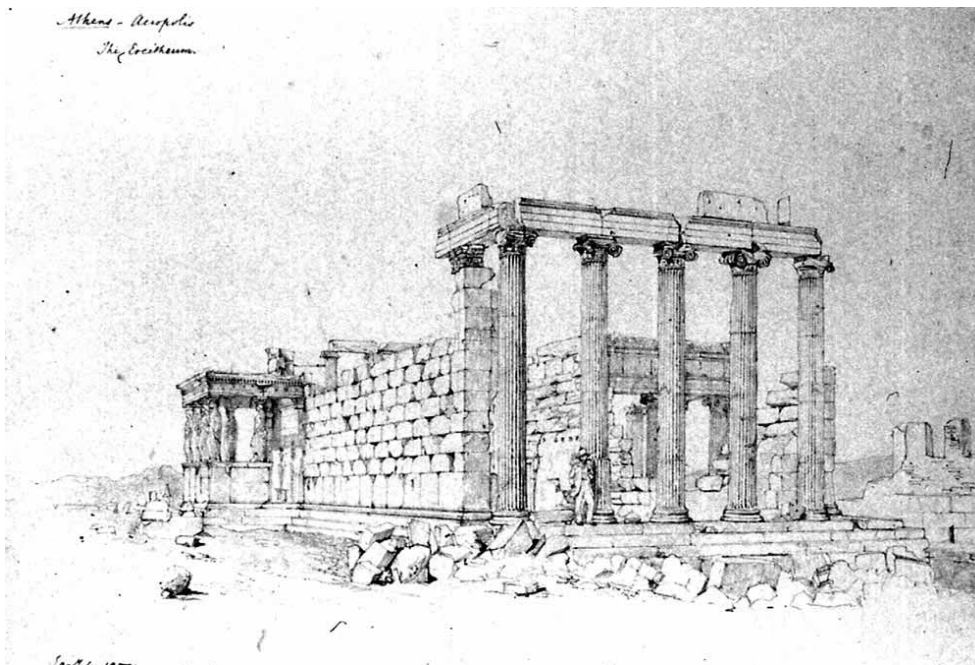


Figure 15: L. A. Winstrup, *The Erechtheion from the West*. 1851. Photo by author.



Figure 16: H. C. Stilling, *Erechtheion from the West*. 1853. Photo by author.



Figure 17: L. A. Winstrup, *The Interior of the North Wall of the Erechtheion*. 1851. Photo by author.

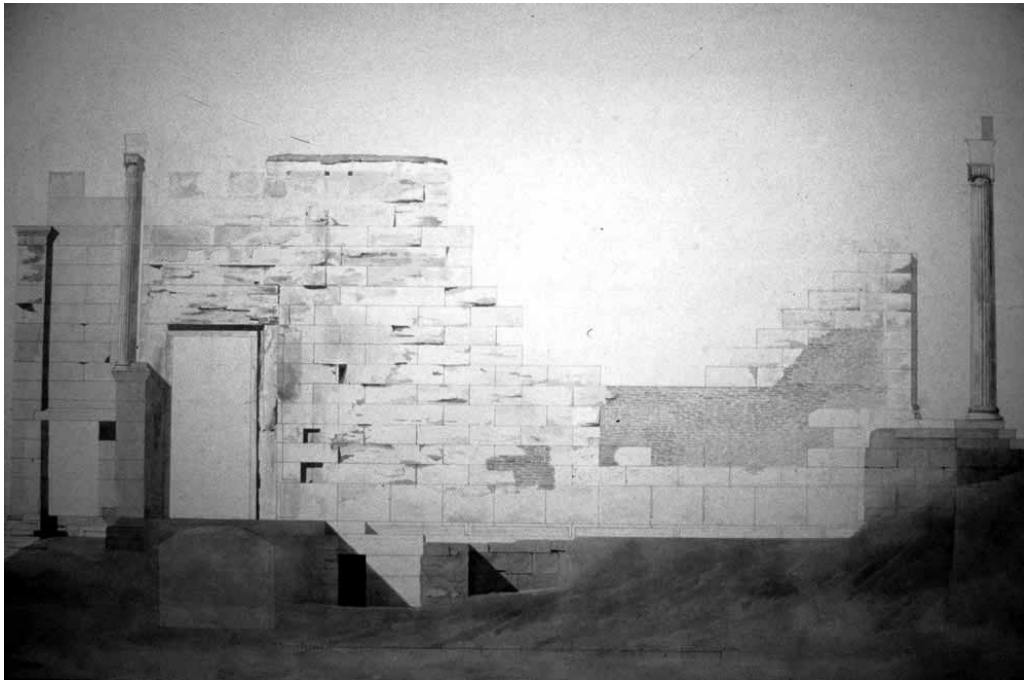


Figure 18: R. P. Spiers, *The Erechtheion from the Northeast*. 1866. Photo by author.



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ENDNOTES

i There is a long history of storing gunpowder in the masterpieces of the Akropolis with tragic results. A gunpowder magazine blew up the Propylaea in 1640 killing the family of the Disdar, the Venetians bombed the stockpiles in the Parthenon in 1687. And in 1827, the Turks fired on the North Porch of the Erechtheion.

ii Pars. 1765. The Erechtheum from the Northeast. Reproduced as an engraving in Stuart and Revett 1789.

iii “Remove everything you can...everything there is that is pillageable.”

iv Hobhouse (1813) reports that some of this destruction, particularly to the South Wall, can also be attributed to the search for lead during the short war between the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain in 1807-1809. The dome in the background is the mosque inside the Parthenon.

v Hobhouse. 1809. *The Akropolis viewed from the Propylaea*, and not Pomardi, 1804-1805. *West End of the Pandrosion*, is the earliest to show the missing architrave block, contrary to Paton *et al* 1927: 553, note 6. The other depictions of the West Façade in Dodwell show the architrave as still in place.

vi Excerpted from G. Basevi to his Mother, 10 August 1818. Published by courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum. Eastlake's painting is from the exact same view as Basevi's unfinished southwest perspective. C. L. Eastlake, 1818. *The Erechtheum* can be found in F.-M. Tsigakou 1981, pl. XIX.

vii A letter from Gropius to Blaquièrè dating to 25 April 1824 refers to this dismantlement, E. Blaquièrè 1825: 157.

viii The Greeks had been planning to move the magazine to a new location for several years. See Paton *et al* 1927: 558-559, for a thorough consideration of whether the magazine had indeed been moved prior to the destruction of the North Porch.