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## FATE OF PARTHENON'S SCULPTURES

## СУДЬБА СКУЛЬПТУР ПАРФЕНОНА

*Статья посвящена культурному наследию Древней Греции, в частности судьбе скульптур Парфенона. Она рассказывает о деятельности английского посла в Турции лорде Эджине и его помощника Филитта Ханта, которые получили доступ в Парфенон в 1800, о тех варварских методах, с помощью которых была собрана коллекция лорда Эджина.*

It was the time when the Greeks were almost forgotten, when the soil they considered their own suddenly disappeared under such an impermeable curtain as that devided modern Europe in the years of "Cold War". The Hellins again attracted attention to themselves only with a new tide of interest to historical knowledge, although this interest is not always useful for history or for the monuments remained.

Impassioned interest for Greece and for all Hellenic generated a certain kind of hunt for treasures. The travellers coming here often tried to take with them any souvenirs from the classic past, though they cannot be regarded as pioneers. The Romans that conquered Ellas in II B. C. at first considered Greek works of art as quite legal war trophies. Numerous ships loaded with art treasures raised sails directing for Italy, where sculptors successfully mastered technology of copying of Greek works. Now we recall Horatius: conquered Greece charmed its brutal conqueror [6, p. 69].

The Greek idea soon dominated in Roman education as well as Greek lexics in Latin! In 395 B. C. the Roman Empire desintegrated into 2 parts – Eastern and Western [11, p. 115]. Greece was joined to the Eastern Byzantine part. By that time the antique culture was dying and the last blow was delivered by fast spreading of Christianity. New religion having become official, banned worship of the Hellenic Gods.

The Greek temples were closed. Greece became deeply dormant. Ellas gradually turned into the outskirts of the Empire. Its abandoned temples became ramshackle and destructed. Educated people in Konstantinopolis kept on studying classic works of the antique Greeks, but in Europe the recollections of them being gradually erased. And when at the dawn of the Renaissance people got again interested in the world of antiquity and classic art, Ellas turned into a miserable shadow of its glorious past. Its magnificent temples and civil constructions of the past were almost entirely devastated, its landscape looked like a desert covered with stones.

A newly cropped interest to Greece was not accounted for attention to that country as it is, but for its classic heritage. Invention of printing ensured new possibilities for the dissemination of knowledge, and typographies printed great works of Ellas writers of the "Golden Age".

Soon after the fall of Konstantinopolis (1453), the Osmans also seized frank lands of Continental Greece. Athens also fell under the rule of the Turks, and in 1460 moslem rulers added a minaret to Parthenon having turned that ancient temple of Athena Palias into a mosque [9, p. 243]. The Osman's attempts to expand newly owned lands and oust the Venetians from the Greek islands brought these states to war incessant for the following two centuries. The Turks overwhelmed, and the islands seized by them were also cut off from the West for 150 years. But isolation of Greece from the West didn't influence undying interest for the classic culture. The fashion for antiquity only enhanced: all who possessed power and money rivalled in creation of the best collections. Soon every ruler on the European Continent pretending to have a good taste had to possess at least several classic sculptures. The monarchs were pleased with copies when they lacked the originals [6, p. 25].

In the 17 century the relationships between the Ottoman Empire and the European states eased to a certain extent. Some European travellers could visit Greece again. Most of them ventured these journeys exclusively in search of works of art. In 1674 Marquis de Nointel, a French ambassador, was directed to Levant in order to establish relationships between France and the Ottoman Empire (with artist J. Carey). Due to his official status he got an opportunity for sightseeing of Athens and the Acropolis. The diplomat was lucky, for 13 years later the flame of feud between the Ottoman Empire and Venice flashed out again and at the peak of hostilities a shell hit Parthenon where the Turks stockpiled armaments [10, p. 148]. It exploded due to detonation and the sculptures of Phidias were blown out to fractures thus having irrevocably been lost. Those sculptures remained preserved in thoroughly made pencil drawings of Carey.

In England the further growth of interest to Greece owned to "Society of Art Lovers" founded in 1733, its members being noble and distinguished Englishmen. They bought out antique art works in Italy and equipped expeditions for exploration and acquisition of the items of antiquity [12, p. 129]. James Stuart, a painter, and Nicolas Revett, an architect, spent in Athens almost 2 years (March, 17 1751 - May, 13, 1753) excavating and studying antique constructions [7, p. 374]. "Athenian Antiquities" (4 – volume account of the work made) was published in a restricted number, but it greatly influenced the thoughts. From the times of the Renaissance numerous architects endeavoured to surpass their antique predecessors, but the samples serving for rivalry were the Roman constructions for the most part. Diminished copies of Hellenic temples were erected in gardens surrounding the mansions of the nobility, the European cities were decorated with churches and mundane public buildings with porticos after the colonnade of Parthenon.

Ellas had to pay a high price for a new recognition. Competition between the European states that brought them to the battlefield caused a fierce rivalry for possession of antique works of art. At first museums were founded in every large European state to display their intricacy in the rivalry of such a kind, and a real pursuit for ancient treasures was set up with the purpose to intercept them till they get into the collections of the rivals [8; p. 89]. The

Greeks themselves remained the subjects of the Ottoman Empire and were not able to counteract the proceedings, and their ancient fell into an unlimited disposal of the French, German, English, and other Europeans thinking that they were saving the past from oblivion.

In 1799 Thomas Bruce, Lord Elgin, was appointed ambassador to Turkey. Architect Thomas Harrison offered him to arrange the production of prints from the sculptures and chapters of Parthenon and they were to ship them to England for the needs of education. This request stuck Bruce to the idea to collect the Greek antiquities.

At first Elgin tried to organize the collection and study of the antiquities on the official basis but was encountered a flat refusal from the part of the English Premier Pitt, who was reluctant to fund such undertakings. Then Lord Elgin on his own earnings hired a group of experts in Italy that was engaged in drawing of the monuments and printing. The temple Parthenon was conceived as a symbol of Athens that won a victory in the wars with the Persian Empire and founded an alliance of democratic polyses of Ellas [5, p. 329]. Nonetheless significance in the history of arts have the sculptures of Parthenon, the creation of them being carried out under the surveillance of the greatest sculptor of Antiquity Phidias [12, p. 123]. The statue of Athena made of ivory and gold served as a centre of the entire complex being positioned in the deep of the temple's cella. The sculptural decoration consisted of two pedimental compositions, 92 metopes and a frieze with the length of 160 m, comprising more than 550 figures. A considerable part of the works were executed by other workmen, but the entire composition was saturated with Phidias's spirit of creation.

In 1800 the confidants of Lord Elgin got an access to Parthenon, the Acropolis being a Turkish fortress then, and besides an official firman (sultan's permission) they had to bribe Turkish functionaries who directly controlled the access of foreigners to the Acropolis. At first they were allowed to make drawings of the figures for 5 guineas per day [2, p. 181]. It lasted this way since August 1800 till April 1801.

The expulsion of the French from Egypt had strongly enhanced the influence of the British Ambassador in Istanbul. Elgin took advantage of this situation and wrung out a new firman from the Sultan where it was pointed out that "nobody could interfere with the British Ambassador, his secretary and artists if they want to take some stones with scriptures and figures on them" [6, p. 90-91]. For more than 100 years there is a heated discussion whether that formulation from a disappeared long ago Turkish original-was a sufficient basis for further Elgin's activities. It's only known that the Grand Turkish Visier in Athens never objected to free treatment of that clause offered by Elgin's chaplain Phillipp Hunt, who was assigned with the whole surveillance over the works. The Visier was consoled by fine glasses and pistols, so that he simply didn't notice as Hunt's crew shipped numerous sculptures of Parthenon.

But Edward Doduall, an English traveller, witnessed dismantlement of architectural elements, so called metopes and triglyphs, with the sense of "ineffable shame". "I watched several metopes from the South-Eastern part of the temple lowered down, – he writes. – They served as locks between triglyphs, and to take them away a splendid cornice that spanned them was brought down. The south-eastern corner of the pediment was treated the same way" [9, p. 20].

Hunt's men took away 56 sections of friezes and about a dozen of statues from two pediments. They also collected scattered bas-reliefs from a small temple of Athena Nike: it decorated the entrance to the Acropolis till 1687 and was dismantled to clean the place for a Turkish fort. Hunt's workers even brought down one of the six caryatids that maintained the roof of Erechtheion (an asymmetric temple with four halls connected with each other and situated to the north of Parthenon) and replaced them with unseemly brick support.

Sept. 16, 1802 a brig "Mentor" with a load of 17 carefully packed cases which belonged to Thomas Bruce left the Athens' Harbour. "Mentor's" captain counted to reach the Cape Tenar and pass it by, but at noon the wind abruptly changed its direction and became stronger. The ship stopped to wait for the end of the storm. By the night it found itself 40 miles south-west and at dawn the rocky coasts of Antikifera Island came into vision. The situation grew dangerous. To crown it, a leakage was found in the hold, with water level raising uninterruptedly. The sailors failed to keep it low by constant pumping, however hard they tried [4, p. 35]. Sharp bending impeded manoeuvring, and the ship became more and more inoperable. To save the vessel the captain tried to enter the Harbour of St. Nicolas. Terrifying rocks at it's entrance and a poorly steered ship made these attempts extremely dangerous. "Mentor" managed to enter the other harbour, but the wind was too heavy and to remain there was even more dangerous than in the open sea. High seas hurled the ship onto the coastal rocks. Heaving been hit against the rocks the vessel got stuck between them. The bent being too heavy, water washed over the deck. The crew and the passengers moved to the shore.

The whole bow with the load were covered with water. Under the direction of Elgin several ships were chartered and divers were employed. For 7 thousand piastres the divers agreed to raise heavy cases from the deep. Within October they managed to pick up to the surface only six of them. Notwithstanding unfavourable weather conditions the search never ceased, and by March 1803 the remaining eleven cases had been lifted [11, c. 83].

Lord Elgin himself reached his motherland with adventures. In 1803 he was called off his post and left for England via France. However in May 1803 a war resumed between England and France, Lord Elgin having been arrested in Paris. He remained in custody till 1806 [1, p. 65]. The part of the freight brought out from Greece was found, the other part having been sequestered by the French in the Italian ports, the third – by the Turks in Athens. Later lord Elgin succeeded in gathering the collection and delivering it to London.

Thomas Bruce arranged a public exhibition of the sculptures brought to Park Lane and even hired a professional boxer to pose by the antique monuments: the Lord was of the opinion that "nothing substantiates the masterpiece of a sculptor as an athlete alive doing exercises on the background of the works similar in composition". It cannot be said that all visitors accepted the exhibition unconditionally favourably. One of the

critics an influential member of the "Society of Art Lovers" had been increasingly critical of the statues and dismissed them as ordinary Roman copies. "Dear Lord Elgin, – he wrote. – You tried all in vain and overestimated your marble. It's not that of Greek. The works are of the Roman period" [6, p. 30].

But the artists, however were, far more impressed. Antonio Kanova, a well-known Italian sculptor, invited by the Lord to restore the damaged sculptures, unexpectedly denied the Lord's proposition considering it as a sacrilege even to touch these magnificent works of art. Artist Gydon said that he saw by his own eyes "the conjunction of the Nature and the Ideal". One of the famous French archaeologists d'Capsy noted "I have seen nothing more alive of that kind than that horse head. It's not a statue any more: this muzzle is neighing, the marble is living, you think it is moving". Gjite, having seen only the pictures of these sculptures, felt himself happy that he had lived up to that day [7, p. 43]. There is a particular opinion of English painter B. R. Hadon, a friend of poet John Kitts: "I have been drawing these figures for ten, for ten and fifteen hours running, often up till midnight having a candle in one hand and working with the other, wrote Hadon in his diary – Oh, it was a wonderful time. I was seized by the feeling of magnitude, delight, and unexpressible purity of the designs! I got up at the break of the day and opened my eyes with the only desire: to make sure of the inspiration that possessed me all over; I jumped out of my bed as if possessed and spent the morning, the day and the night as if in a wonderful dream, in a state of ineffable inspiration [6, p. 21].

Many adepts of antiquity were deeply indignant by those barbarian methods of Lord Elgin when gathering the collection. There was a saying circulating at that time: "That was not made by the Goths was made by the Scots" [4, p. 32].

Later Lord Byron, who left for Greece in 1820-s with hundreds of other Europeans in order to take part in a successful 8-years war of Ellas for independence, stigmatized Lord Elgin as a miserable thief and subjected him to slashing criticism for the latter "dared to rob that bleeding land of its last values". Byron condemned the former British Ambassador comparing him with a leader of Westgoths Alarich, the conqueror of Rome, but a barbarian won his trophies in fighting at least.

Worried with criticism of that kind the English Government, as Elgin suggested, would come out in its capacity of a buyer of those invaluable marble masterpieces, at first refused to obtain them at the price declared [10, p. 244]. The negotiations between the Government and Bruce concerning the sale of the collection dragged on long. Its success was stipulated by the rumours, that the Director of the Paris Museum, who arrived to England to watch Elgin's marbles, made him an offer to sell the sculptures to Louvre. The issue concerning the acquisition of the collection was debated in the House of Commons with a special committee set up. The Committee examined the ways of foundation of this collection and its value. A matter of price was not decided in favour of the owner: the Committee voiced its opinion that the sum of 35 000 pounds would be quite sufficient (175 000 dollars) [6, p. 154]. Taking into account the interests on credits and road expenditures all this cost to Lord Elgin 72 000 pounds [6, p. 155]. On the 7-th of June, 1815 the debates resumed in the House of Commons. After a heated argument the offer of the Committee was confirmed with 82 ballots pro and 30 ballots con [11, p. 95]. The British Museum in London obtained that collection where it has been held till nowadays in spite of the Greeks' demands to return their national property. The English insist that to return the statues means to create a precedent with such an outcome that all museums in the world would be devastated. This matter remains undecided yet.

After the liberation of Athens of the Turks, protection, restoration and preservation of the historical monuments became a task of top priority of a newly formed state.

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