



Jeanneret in Athens, Sep-
tember 1911, as sketched
by his friend Auguste Klip-
stein (courtesy FLC)

JOURNEY TO THE EAST

Le Corbusier
(Charles-Edouard Jeanneret)

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of class, the crew, reduced to a minimum, mingles with us and listens. Some of them are going to Jerusalem; some are fleeing Lódz and Kiev. There are Persians and Caucasians going to Mecca. Others toward America, escaping Turkish conscription—a crowd of nineteen-year-olds. All of us on this strange boat, including those of us who are going to see the Acropolis, all of us haunted by a dream, a yearning, a madness.

Night falls, black and gentle over our field of vision. Mount Athos has disappeared. But how many stars there are!

THE PARTHENON

I shall give this entire account an ocher cast, for the earth is free of greenery and appears to be of baked clay. Black and gray stones will teeter-totter terrifyingly on immense reaches confined only by craggy rocks or restrained by the rugged mountain slopes. Their harsh forms, softened by neither sea nor time, will penetrate numerous inlets and erode their edges at the outermost bounds of vast red expanses, harsh and barren. Such is the spectacle at each step along the way from Eleusis to Athens.

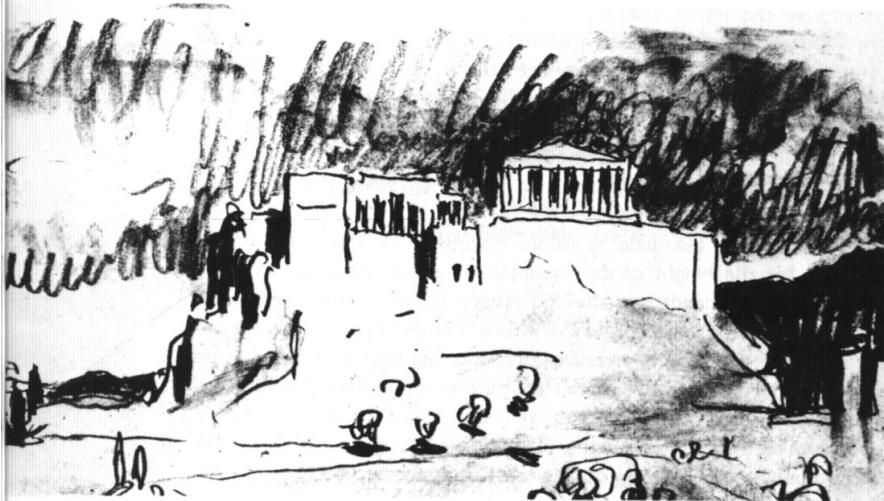
The everpresent sea, pale at noon, blazing at twilight, serves as a measure for the height of the mountains that obstructs the horizon. The compressed landscape thus no longer benefits from the infinite space that softened the imagery of Athos. The Acropolis—this rock—rises alone in the heart of an enclosed frame. Slightly to the left beyond Piraeus, where vapors rise from the sea, one senses that the open sea is just beyond and that flotillas enter there. Hymettus and Pentelicus, two very high mountain ranges, like two wide adjoining screens, are located behind us, orienting our sight in the opposite direction, toward the estuary of stone and sand, the Piraeus. The Acropolis, whose flat summit bears the temples, captivates our attention, like a pearl in its shell. One collects the shell only for its pearl. The temples are the cause of this landscape.

What light!

At noon I saw the mountains shimmering just like hot air over a basin of molten lead.

A shady spot stands out like a hole. Here one sees no half-shadows at all. The uniformly red landscape is reflected by the temples. Their marbles have the luster of new bronze against the azure sky. Close-up, they really seem as reddish brown as terra-cotta. Never in my life

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Temples on the Acropolis
(courtesy Jean Petit)

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The Parthenon, "a sovereign cube facing the sea"
(courtesy FLC)

have I experienced the subtleties of such monochromy. The body, the mind, the heart gasp, suddenly overpowered. Here, the rectitude of the temples, their impeccable structure and the brutality of the site were confirmed. The strong spirit triumphs. Too lucidly the herald blows a brazen trumpet and proffers a jarring blast. The entablature of a cruel rigidity crushes and terrorizes. The feeling of a superhuman fatality seizes you. The Parthenon, a terrible machine, grinds and dominates; seen from as far as a four-hour walk and one hour by boat, alone it is a sovereign cube facing the sea.

After weeks of being crushed by this brutal site, I wished for a storm to come and drown in its floods and swirls the biting bronze of the temple.

When the storm did come, I saw through the large drops of rain the hill becoming suddenly white and the temple sparkling like a diadem against the ink-black Hymettus and the Pentilicus ravaged by downpours!

It has been a hot day. The awning, which is stretched out over the ship's prow where we were sitting, imprisoned the air. We struck up an acquaintance with two Russian mathematicians, women with manish figures, strong features, and big eyes. They like to talk. Hours pass without reading or scribbling. Evening must be approaching because the chef can be seen bringing in dishes of dainty fried octopus—the octopus from Mycenae. We get up and sit on the ropes. We slip down a steel ladder into the kitchen to get some water, which we have to pump by hand, and also to draw an excellent Sicilian wine from a cask. Our gallant cook is from Syracuse; we declare to him:

—*Diavolo, il vino e buono!*

That's about all we know in Italian, but the man is pleased. On the way up, we brush past bulls tied between decks.

In Salonika the day before yesterday, at midnight, by a beautiful moonlight, eight hundred of them were loaded on board. Eight hundred bulls from Thessaly. As they arrived, they were shoved in between the stockades. The joints of the crane grated; the powerful hook dropped rapidly down to their heads. Quick, a running noose around the horns, brief command, the hook is taken up again carrying away that enormous mass of meat hung by its horns. A large arc was inscribed; the mechanism released the chain; like a pot, the bull arrived at the end of the hold and fell on its back, rolling its bewildered eyes. It hardly had time to recover when, seized by the ring in its muzzle, it was firmly fastened. In the lair of the hold a hanging lantern barely illuminated the sharp silhouettes of the two bold cowherds.

Once the sky completed its metamorphosis, the last burst of green died away on the water. A star finds some receptive facet of a wave to reflect. The deck has emptied, and there are only three or four of us remaining. With Auguste regularly tamping his pipe, it's a moment of pleasure. A tenderness prevails; the memory of the East that I love so revolves in my mind, intermingled with those golden skies seen in the icons. My eyes are riveted on the same horizon, always similar. All is at rest. There is still a last brief meeting of the ship's officers, followed by the monotonous pace of the lookout high up on the bridge. Through the windows of the bridge, we can glimpse the rudder turned by the effort of two men: the only throbbing heart at this hour when everything else is asleep.

All my nights at sea I spent under the stars, wrapped in a multicolored rug from Rumania purchased at the monastery of Prodromos on Mount Athos. What sweeter litany can there be than that of the bow waves

slapping against a hull vibrating with the ship's engines. Noises of movements to and fro disturb the silence of this night. Before daybreak we shall enter between the shores. With a silent patience, the big boat has steamed without respite for the last two days. The land of Euboea is on the starboard side, a long dark ridge. We converse, Auguste and I, in low voices, and we feel a true excitement to think that by this evening we shall have seen the immortal marbles.

For a long time the prow has pivoted on the hinge of the rudder; land surrounds us everywhere except behind us, where the sea threads its way into it. Here is Attica, and there is the Peloponnesus. Here is a white lighthouse and, very near, a harbor; here are unusually jagged hills, little resembling those of Broussa or the ones behind Scutari. The sea is deserted; at this moment of dawn there are none of the countless longboats laden with carous, tomatoes, and vegetables, which, as in Constantinople, are heading toward the city with the clumsy haste of big beetles. This brown land seems a desert. Very far away in the center of the harbor, at the bosom of some hills forming an arch, a strange rock stands out, flat at the top and secured on its right by a yellow cube. The Parthenon and the Acropolis! But we cannot believe it; we don't give it a thought. We are bewildered; the ship does not enter the harbor but continues on its course.

The symbolic rock disappears, hidden by a promontory. The sea is extremely narrow; we pass around an island. Oh, damn! Ten, twenty ships are anchored there, each flying a yellow flag! The flag of cholera, that of the Kavas; from the Black Sea to Tuzla on the Marmara. That flag we know indeed! The propeller suddenly becomes silent. The anchors drop. We stop. The yellow flag is hoisted. Stupefaction! A great stir, general restlessness. The captain is nervous, becomes violent, shouts, insults:

—The longboats are in the water. Passengers for Athens, come on, get moving!

Chaos. Bundles and boxes, men and women, come clattering down the ladder. Such cries, such insults, such shouting, and in every language. On a small pier toward which the oarsmen steer us is a gentleman with a white cap, servile with the rich, brutal and rude with the poor: a functionary, a penpusher! Wire fences separate the barracks. The quarantine!

A stinking quarantine on a desolate island about the size of a public square. A stupid quarantine, administrated against all the laws of common sense; a hotbed for cholera, this quarantine. Here, the functionaries, over there, the thieves, the dishonest; a disgrace to the Greek government that established it. For four days they held us there, to sleep with strangers, vermin, and earwigs under a burning sky without a single tree to lessen the hardship upon this devil's island. A restaurant—what a pompous title—a swindling place, where those who run it, a deputy, so they say, allow a liter of water to be sold for forty centimes and force you to eat garbage at scandalous prices. Ah, how do the poor manage—those for whom a drachma is a fortune?^a That was on the Island of St. George, in the Bay of Salamis, facing Eleusis. O time, annihilate this vile epoch! This was our first acquaintance with you, epic places, degraded by so-called descendants. Our complaints recorded in the travelers' log book of the island were unanimous. But no, a blind and narrow patriotism scribbled alongside childish and dithyrambic praises signed Papapoulos, Danopoulos, Ni-

a. The drachma was worth one franc. As reference: at the time (in 1911) after five months of travel from Prague to Athens, I spent 800 francs which included my camera supplies.

kolesteos, Phytanopoulos, among others. This was enough to ensure immunity to the administrators of this infamy and, who knows, maybe an honorary recompense.

Fever shook my heart. We had arrived at Athens at eleven in the morning, but I made up a thousand excuses not to climb "up there" right away. Finally, I explained to my good friend Auguste that I would not go up with him. That anxiety gripped me, that I was in a state of extreme excitement, and would he "please" leave me alone. I drank coffee all afternoon absorbed in reading the voluminous five-week-old mail picked up at the post office. Then I walked the streets waiting for the sun to go down, wishing to finish the day "up there" so that, once I came down again, I could only go to bed.

To see the Acropolis is a dream one treasures^b without even dreaming to realize it. I don't really know why this hill harbors the essence of artistic thought. I can appreciate the perfection of these temples and realize that nowhere else are they so extraordinary; and a long time ago I accepted the fact that this place should be like a repository of a sacred standard, the basis for all measurement in art. Why this architecture and no other? I can well accept that according to logic, everything here is resolved in accordance with an unsurpassable formula, but why is it that the taste—or rather the heart that guides people and dictates their beliefs despite their tendency to ignore it at times—why is it still drawn to the Acropolis, to the foot of the temples? This is in my case an inexplicable problem.¹ For how much have I been

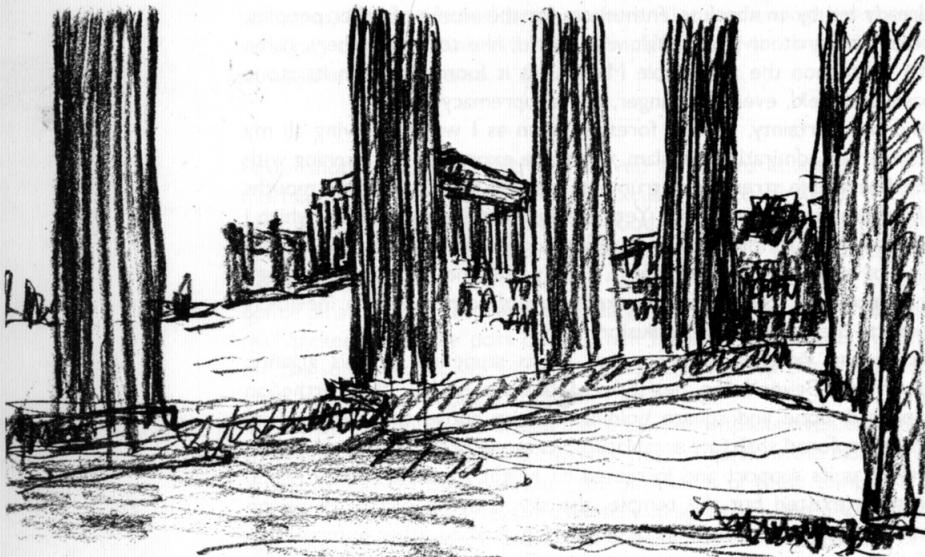
b. We are in 1911.

already led by an absolute enthusiasm for the works of other peoples, other times, other places! Yet why must I, like so many others, name the Parthenon the undeniable Master,² as it looms up from its stone base, and yield, even with anger, to its supremacy?

And this certainty, already foreseen even as I was bestowing all my unreserved admiration on Islam, was to be expressed this evening with the formidable strength of trumpets blasting from a hundred mouths like the noise of a waterfall. Yet recalling that Stamboul, from which I had expected so much, had not yielded up its secret until after twenty days of longing and working at it, I had within me, as I passed through the Propylaea, the deliberate skepticism of someone who inevitably expects the most bitter disillusion.

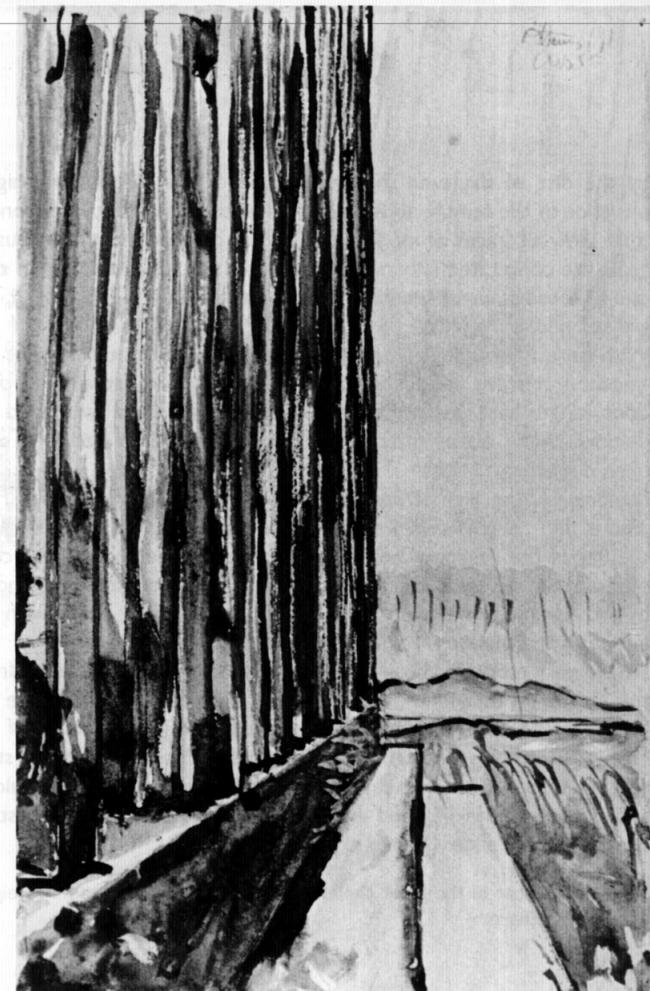
As by the violence of a combat, I was stupefied by this gigantic apparition. Beyond the peristyle of the sacred hill, the Parthenon appeared alone and square holding high up above the thrust of its bronze-colored shafts its entablature, its stone brow. The steps below served as its support and increased its height by their twenty risers. Nothing existed but the temple, the sky, and the surface of paving stones damaged by centuries of plundering. And no other external sign of life was evident here, except, far off in the distance, Pentelicus, creditor of these stones, bearing in its side a marble wound, and Hymettus, colored the most opulent purple.

Having climbed steps that were too high, not cut to human scale, I entered the temple on the axis, between the fourth and the fifth fluted shafts. And turning back all at once from this spot once reserved for the gods and the priest, I took in at a glance the entire blazing sea and the already obscure mountains of the Peloponnesus, soon to be bitten



*The Parthenon seen from
the Propylaea (courtesy
FLC)*

parthenon seen from the propylaea. the sketch shows the propylaea's portico of columns in the foreground, leading to the parthenon and its surrounding structures in the background. the style is a loose, expressive sketch.



*The st
Parthe
One of
exhibit
"Lange
Munic
(1912)
and Pa
Autôm*

by the disc of the sun. The steep slope of the hill and the higher elevation of the temple above the stone slabs of the Propylaea conceal from view all traces of modern life, and all of a sudden, two thousand years are obliterated, a harsh poetry seizes you. Dropping down onto one of those steps of time, head sunk in the hollow of your hand, you are stunned and shaken.

With its last rays the setting sun will strike this front of metopes and smooth architrave, and passing between the columns, crossing the open door at the back part of the portico, it would have awakened the shadow, hiding deep within the roofless cella, had it not long since been dispersed.

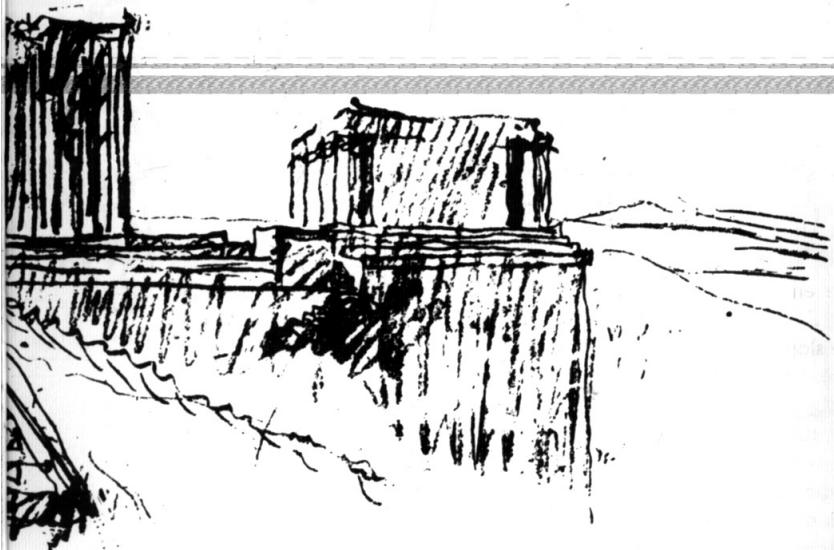
Standing on the highest step of the north side of the temple, right where the columns end, I observe that the horizontal is in line with the bay of the Aegina. Above my left shoulder the illusory wall composed of the repeated sharp fluting of the shafts soars to a tremendous height, assuming the appearance of a gigantic armor plate with the guttae of the mutules looking like its rivets.

At the very moment the sun touches the earth, a shrill whistle drives the visitor away, and the four or five^c people who have made the pilgrimage to Athens cross again over the white threshold of the Propylaea and pass through the three portals. Pausing before the stairwell and impressed by this abyss of darkness, they hunch their shoulders as they sense, sparkling and elusive above the sea, a spectral past, an ineluctable presence.

c. It was the year of the great cholera epidemic in the East, and no foreigner dared to go there.



*The outer side of the Propylaea, the monumental entrance of the Acropolis
(courtesy FLC)*

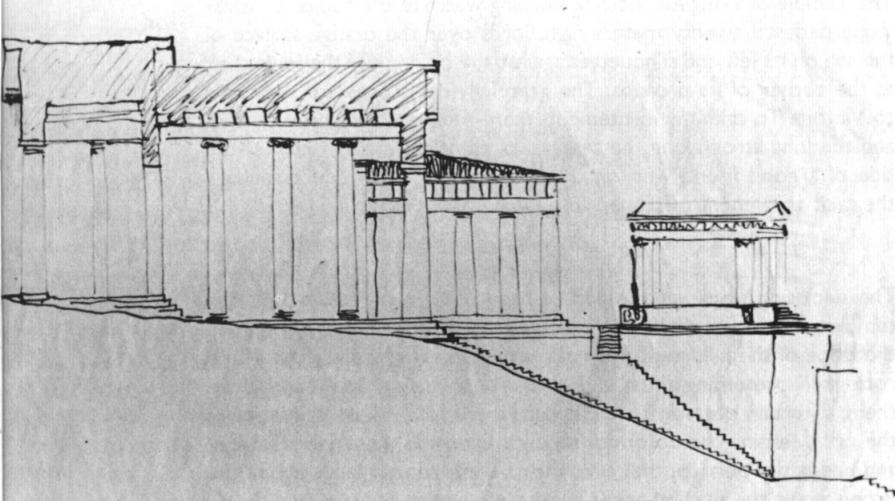


The Temple of Athena
Nike (Wingless Victory)
"keeping watch at the
top of an ashlar stone
pedestal twenty meters
high" (courtesy FLC)

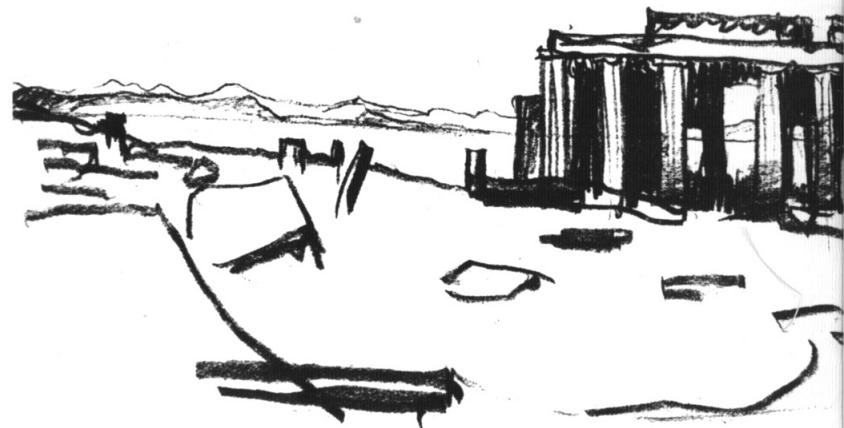
The Temple of Wingless Victory, keeping watch at the top of an ashlar stone pedestal twenty meters high, lords over the orange surface of the sea on its left and silhouettes against the blazing sky. the ionic shaft at the corner of its pronaos. The gracefully cut stones are dedicated to Victory. To calm my excitement, there remains a delightful twilight and the long stroll along the avenues of the clear and gay city, at the side of a good friend who on this first evening will respect willingly the tacit agreement of silence and encroaching peace.

The enclosing slopes at the top of the hill bind, by their steps, the temples and thrust their diversely spaced columns to the sky. Down the slope of the hill, steps leading to the Parthenon are cut out of the rock itself, presenting a first barrier. But huge marble steps hang above them, a certain obstacle to the approach of man. Priests came out of the cella, sensing the bosom of mountains behind them and sideways, and under the portico, they would cast a horizontal glance above the Propylaea at the sea and at the distant mountains it washes.

In the middle of the estuary at the bottom of which stands a temple, the sun charts its course until dusk, and in the sultry heat of the evening its disc touches the ground on the very axis of the temple. The crown of stone that marks the bounds of the plateau has that ability to dispel any inkling of life. Bewildered, the active mind grasps and plunges into a past that should not be reconstructed. But it would also be beautiful if, outside reality—these temples, this sea, these mountains, all this stone and water—could become for one hour only the heroic vision of a creative mind. What a thing!



*The flight of stairs cut into
the slope of the hill leading
to the Propylaea and Par-
thenon (courtesy FLC)*

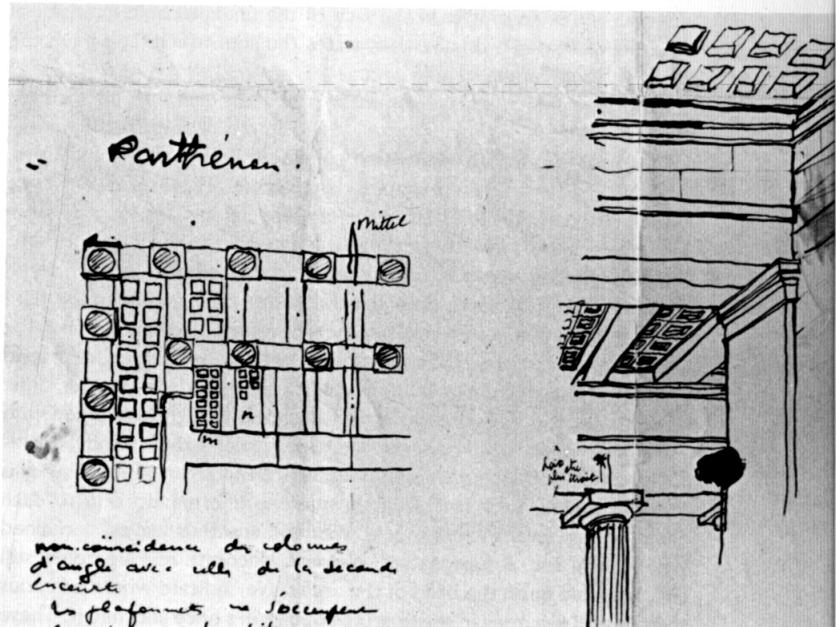


*The inner side of the
Propylaea seen from the
Parthenon (courtesy FLC)*

Physically, the impression is that of a most profound inspiration that expands your chest. It is like an ecstasy that pushes you onto the bare rock devoid of its old slab paving and, out of joy and admiration, throws you from the Temple of Minerva to the Temple of Erechtheum, and from there to the Propylaea. From beneath this portico, the Parthenon can be seen on its domineering block, casting in the distance its horizontal architrave and facing this concerted landscape with its front like a shield. The friezes still remaining above the cella show agile horsemen racing. I see them with my myopic eyes, way up there, as clearly as if I were touching them, because the depth of their reliefs is so well proportioned to the wall that supports them.

The eight columns obey a unanimous law, soaring from the ground, not at all appearing to have been placed section by section by man, but instead giving the impression that they rise from the innermost depths of the earth; and the violent upsurge of their fluted surface brings to a height which the eye cannot estimate the smooth band of the architrave that rests on its abacus. The austere aggregate of metopes and triglyphs under the riveting of guttae carries the eye to the left corner of the temple, up to the farthest column of the opposite side, enabling the beholder to seize at a glance a single block, a gigantic prism of marble cut from bottom to top with the rectitude of clear mathematics and the precision that a machinist brings to his labor. Yet the western pediment with its peak projecting in the middle of the space—in harmony with the mountains, the sea, and the sky—strengthens the facade and its unmovable orientation.

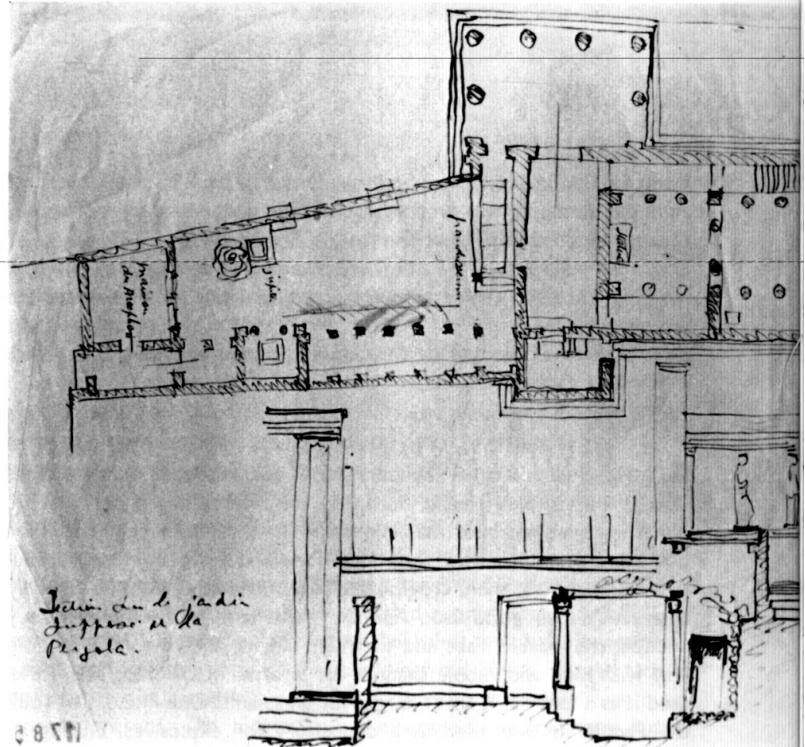
I had thought it possible to compare this marble to new bronze, hoping that, in addition to the color so described, this word would suggest the pronounced luster of this substantial mass fixed in place with the



Details of the Parthenon's
ceiling and columns (cour-
tesy FLC)

inexorability of an oracle. In the face of the unexplainable intensity of this ruin, increasingly an abyss separates the soul which feels from the mind which measures.

A hundred paces away, welcomed by this inconquerable titan, smiles the lively temple with four faces—the Temple of the Erechtheum—*atop a base of smooth walls with animated, fleshy marble blossoms. Ionic is its order—Persepolitan, its architraves.* They say it was once inlaid with gold, precious stones, ivory, and ebony; the Asia of sanctuaries by some bewitching spell had cast these steely glances into confusion, taking advantage of the fact that the temple had once dared to smile. But thank God, time got the better of it, and from the hill I salute the reconquered monochrome. Facing the Parthenon which has already been described, one must point out the posture of six draped women who support the stone entablature where, for the first time, dentils appeared in Attica. Strangely stern and thoughtful women who smile and appear stiff, and yet seem to quiver—they stand here as perhaps the most concrete sign of opulence and prominence. Thus this cheerful temple with four faces presents a different portion to each patch of sky. Friezes with water lilies and acanthus leaves, combined with a palm leaf, a supernatural element, decorate it. Plug holes, still clearly visible upon the band of the architrave, indicate where a famous sequence of victories in the postures of dancers once adorned it. These marbles chiseled with high reliefs lie in some museum, but I don't remember which one. As for the north facade, which overhangs the enormous cliff of the hill bound off here by vertical walls of Piraeus stone interspersed with the drums of ancient columns, I don't know of a term that could express the ingenuous elegy of this tetrastyle

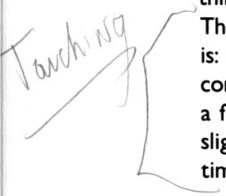


Plan and section of the Erechtheum showing the caryatid porch (courtesy FLC)

portico.³ But having rested, I still prefer to go back to the Propylaea, amid the debris strewn on the ground, and, under that aegis of stones recently reassembled, to scrutinize the Parthenon.

Days and weeks passed in this dream and nightmare, from a bright morning, through intoxicating noon, until evening, when the sudden whistle of the guards would tear us away from all this, and cast us out beyond the wall pierced by three huge portals which, as I have said, overlook a growing darkness.

Touching



It's good that we other builders know and meditate on this place. Today, the temples of the Acropolis are twenty-five hundred years old. They have not been maintained for the last fifteen centuries. Not only have storms loosed their usual downpours, but, more harmful than earthquakes, men, troglodytes, have inhabited the hill certainly amazed by their good luck. And they have torn away whatever they needed, the marble slabs and the huge blocks, and have built any old way with mud and rubble shanties for swarms of children. The Turks used it as a fortress. What a target for an assault! One fine day in 1687 the Parthenon was used as a depository for explosives. During an attack an artillery shell hit the roof and ignited the gunpowder. Everything blew up.

The Parthenon has remained, torn apart but not jostled, and here it is: if you look for the joints between the twenty sections of drums comprising the fluted columns, you won't find them, even by running a fingernail over these areas, which can only be differentiated by the slight irregularities in the patina that each marble has collected over time;⁴ your nail feels nothing. Properly speaking, the joint doesn't exist,

and the sinewy rib of the fluting continues as though cut from a single stone!

Get down flat on your stomach in front of a shaft of the Propylaea and examine its foundation. First of all, you are upon paved ground whose horizontality is as absolute as a hypothesis. Made of huge slabs, the alabaster mass is set also upon an artificial ground, a deep foundation, or, better, a daring hoist. The base of the shaft, carved with twenty-four flutes, is as untarnished as the admiration you derive from it. The slab, chiseled all around like a bowl, reveals a difference in level of two or maybe three millimeters. This subtle detail executed two thousand years ago—a halo marking the base—is still perceptible, and as fresh and flawless as if the sculptor had only yesterday carried away the hammer and chisel that shaped this marble.

The wall with three portals, the center one opening widest so that the chariots could pass through during the Panathenaic festivals, has a marble surface of thousands of quarried stones fitted together so exactly that it induces a caress, and the hand, spread wide, wants to penetrate the mirage of its thousand-year-old layers. The surface as polished as a mirror plays with the contrasting veins that each quarrystone presents. Oh, but let us not examine these fragments hurled from the explosion! Like me, you will be defeated by this incomparable art and overwhelmed by shame. . . thinking about what we do, we others in the twentieth century.

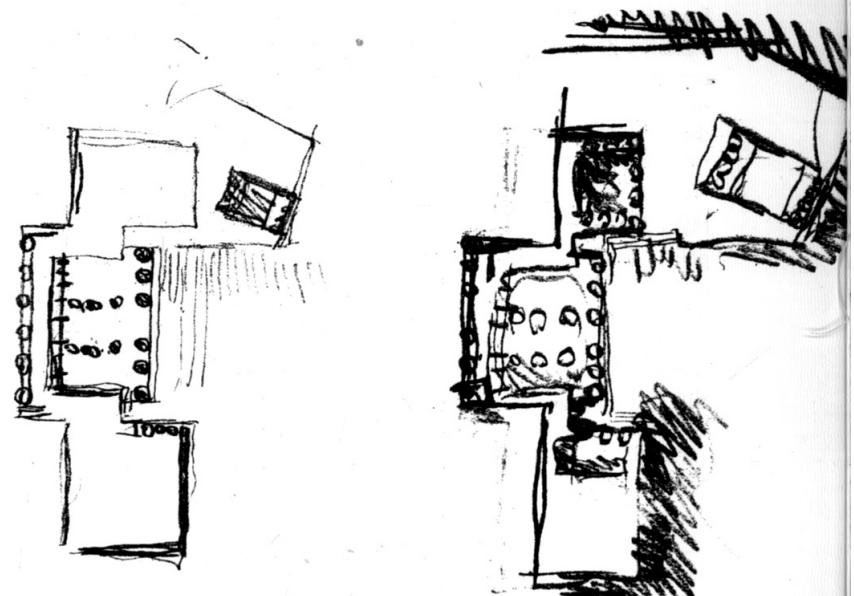
To the left of the Parthenon entire columns are lying thrown down to the ground, like a man who receives gunpowder right in the face. Their drums are spread out like the links of a broken chain. If one has not seen them, one cannot imagine what these columns are like, and one does not grant them the grandeur that Ictinos vested in them.

Their diameter exceeds the heights of a man, the colossal scale used for an acropolis in a deserted landscape beyond any scale common to man. Incidentally, it is inconceivable that this scale would be also the one used by certain runts in our central Europe, the bastards of Vignola! Under the uniform architrave, an eloquently plastic mass that transfers the entire load of the entablature to the shaft, the barely curved echinus of the capitals is connected by three annulets whose total dimension is reduced to the size of a thumb. Each of these annulets (you see on the ground that overthrown capital) has dimensions measured in millimeters in relation to the fillets and flutings, which the slightest alteration would utterly destroy. Thus, having perceived these unprecedented truths among the ruins (useful evidence), it is a beautiful thing to examine them under the shadow of the cornices^d and to verify their indispensable function.

Painstaking hours spent in the revealing light of the Acropolis. Perilous hours, provoking heartrending doubt in the strength of our strength, in the art of our art. It is obvious that an overwhelming Hellenism is precisely what is being described here, and the names of Ictinos, Callicrates, and Phidias are associated with the annulets of the echinus as they are with the supreme mathematics of the temple.⁵

Those who, while practicing the art of architecture, find themselves at a moment in their career somewhat empty-headed, their confidence

d. More than twenty meters high. (At the beginning of the first journey to the East, I wasn't yet accustomed to taking exact measurement of objects that attracted my attention. In any case an awareness of dimensions struck me soon after. From that time came what I called "the man with upraised arms," the key to all architecture.)



Plan of the Propylaea with
Temple of Athena Nike
(Wingless Victory) in the
upper right (courtesy FLC)

depleted by doubt before that task of giving a living form to inert matter, will understand the melancholy of my soliloquies amid ruins—and my chilling dialogues with silent stones. Very often, I left the Acropolis burdened by a heavy premonition, not daring to imagine that one day I would have to create.

Many an evening from a side of Lycabettus that overlooks the Acropolis, I could see beyond the modern city lighting up, the disabled hull⁶ and its marble vigil—the Parthenon—dominating it, as if it were taking it toward the Piraeus, to the sea that had been the sacred route by which so many conquered treasures came to be laid out beneath the porticoes of the temples. Like a rocky hull, a giant tragic carcass in the dying light above all this red earth. A fading light upon the aridity of the red earth coagulates black blood about the Acropolis and its temple—the impassive pilot that maintains the course with all the movement of its outstretched sides. A serpentine light ignites an open boulevard winding around the giant tragic carcass and runs on the right toward public squares animated by modern life. Here is truly a most infernal sight: a faltering sky extinguishing itself in the sea. The Peloponnesian mountains await the shadow to disappear, and as the night is clinging to all that is steadfast, the entire landscape suspends itself to the horizontal line of the sea. The dark knot that binds the sky to the darkened earth is that black pilot of marble. Its columns, springing out of the shadow, carry the obscure front, but flashes of light spurt out between them like the flames that would leap out of the portholes of a blazing ship.

Today, I crossed again an immense landscape covered with rubble. I must have drunk much too much resin wine^e to hold at bay the cholera of 1911 that was sweeping all the East. In the torpor of the land, a bay came into view, formerly dedicated to the mysteries: Eleusis! My imagination recreates to these ancient relics the eternal dialogue between architraved marbles and the horizons of the sea. Outsider, the visitor looks on. The sky is black. As if from the hollow of a huge overturned crucible, floods of bronze pour into the gulfs and the bays, and a few islands float on the sea like slag. A small train took me across some cultivated land. Soon we were at the top of a hill. Flocks of clouds weigh down like heavy balloons over the semicircular bay; three pine trees twisted in a desert of sand. The far-off mountains, with jagged edges tearing the pink fan of the last rays, were helping the green of the night to penetrate with its bitter vapors the quivering mass of the sky.

I caught a chill that completely sobered me up. I had been alone for many days now, and for seven months I have been traveling across Europe, from Berlin to here. My illness made me weak. I would spend every evening in a noisy café where the shrill sounds of violins would tear at my heart. Here it comes again, this music of stylish cafés and houses of ill-repute, the ineluctable signs of European progress.⁷ Again today I imbibed too much resin wine. In the streets I saw dead bodies being carried away, faces exposed, green and covered with flies; and black robed Orthodox priests.⁸

e. Resin wine in the East is an ancestor of absinthe, a drink prohibited in France since the day the First World War was declared.

Every hour it grows more deadly up there. The first shock was the strongest. Admiration, adoration, and then annihilation. But it disappears and escapes me; I slip in front of the columns and the cruel entablature; I don't like going there any more. When I see it from afar it is like a corpse. The feeling of compassion is over. It is a prophetic art from which one cannot escape. As insentient as an immense and unalterable truth.

But when I come upon a drawing of Stamboul in my sketch book, it warms my heart!

Today, my message is more dignified. Flipping through thousands of photographs arranged in folders at the Archeological Institute, I saw a picture of the three pyramids. The magnitude of the wind that shapes dunes has swept from my mind the anguish of the Oedipus. The extreme commotion of these many weeks is dissipating: I have easy things, known architectures, and I dream of a spot in Italy, of a Carthusian monastery.⁹

My mind is made up; I shall not tackle a new culture. The gesture of the pyramids is too large, and I'm too weary. The next stop will be the Cape of Calabria, and not Cyprus. I shall see neither the Mosque of Omar nor the pyramids.

And yet I write with eyes that have seen the Acropolis, and I will leave with joy.

Oh!

Light!

Marbles!

Monochromy!



Cleobis and Biton,
sixth century B.C.,
at the Museum of
in 1911 (courtesy F.

Pediments all abolished but not the one on the Parthenon, the contemplator of the sea, a block from another world. It takes a man and places him above the world. Acropolis that fulfills, that exalts!¹⁰ The joy of remembering seizes me, and it is uplifting to carry away the sight of such things as a new part of my being, hereafter inseparable.



Views of the landscape between Patras and Mili longhi, Greece (court FLC)

