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Abstract

How is the contemporary moment of crisis in Greece entangled with antiquity, in its physical form of remnants and sites, as well as in its discursive and visual renderings and evocations? In this article, I explore this archaeo-political dimension, adopting as my interpretative lens the concept of debt, not only as a financial phenomenon but also as moral imperative, as production of individual and collective subjectivities. The contemporary sovereign debt is juxtaposed to the debt owed to the ancestors, a debt that can never be repaid. In exploring this theme, I study a range of phenomena, from performative rituals to cartoons to official and unofficial media interventions. The main case study, however, is the public and media fascination with the recent excavation at Amphipolis in northern Greece, a phenomenon which I interpret as a peculiar occult economy with affinities to national treasure hunting. In the oneiric archaeology of Amphipolis, the ancestors are imagined as coming again to the rescue of their descendants in their hour of need, prolonging thus the eternal ancestral debt. Finally, I argue that both the financial debt and the ancestral debt are associated with the crypto-colonial constitution of Greece since the nineteenth century and that perhaps rupturing the teleology of ancestral indebtedness may in fact initiate the decolonial process for the country as a whole.

Introduction

As if we wanted yet another reminder, the recent avalanche of photographs and videos depicting the deliberate destruction of archaeological objects and sites in the Middle East, as well as the various attempts at virtual or actual reconstruction of these monuments in Western capitals, would not let us forget that antiquities are always entangled with politics, subjected to claims and counterclaims, and often projecting their own agency. Sadly in the case of the ISIS visuals, most commentators, with few exceptions, took them as documentary devices, while they were in fact carefully choreographed spectacles of destruction, ironically, by people who for religious reasons are supposed to despise

images. These spectacles were inscribed in the long history of the entanglement of colonialism and archaeology in the region; they elicited and badly needed our rage; they invited our active participation in this sinister visual economy: our role in the recycling and endless dissemination of such images on social media (Harmanşah 2015; de Cesari 2016). It is increasingly being accepted that the politics around archaeological remnants and archaeology itself is a domain of fundamental importance, not only for scholarship but for broader contemporary society, as well. Far from being an issue that can be managed with cursory forays and occasional comment, however, it demands instead long-term, in-depth, systematic investigation using a range of novel, hybrid, crossdisciplinary methodologies. Moreover, attention will need to be paid not only to the physical remnants themselves and the associated archaeological practices but also to the various, sensorially affective rituals and performances around these remnants, as well as to their discursive and visual evocations and materializations in diverse media.

For better or worse, the contemporary phenomenon which is now known interestingly but problematically as the “Greek Crisis”¹ provides yet another—it seems privileged—arena for the staging of various archaeo-political performances.² Here is one such performance. At the end of September 2015, the Greek Minister of Defense, Panos Kammenos, participated in a ceremony that attracted much public and media attention in the country. It was part of the annual festival organized by the Municipality of Salamis, the *Salamina*, and the purpose was to commemorate the ancient battle of 480 BC. Delegations of friendly and allied countries were represented, and their flags were carried by local women dressed in traditional costumes before a line of replicas of ancient *sarisas* (long spears used in ancient Greek warfare) and shields standing upright on the ground. Speeches were made, red carpets were laid, and wreaths were thrown into the sea (Figures 1, 2).

To commemorate ancient historical events today is not unheard of in Greece or elsewhere. Such commemorations have a long history that goes back to the nineteenth century and the first years of the nation-state; they can take the form of solemn and pious ceremonies or, alternatively, more playful reenactments or often a combination of both. Let us recall that the mayors of Athens and Sparta signed the formal end of the Peloponnesian War in 1996 (Hamilakis 2007, 57). The Salamis ceremony was part of an annual celebratory event hosted by the municipality at least since 2011, but 2015 was the first year that it enjoyed such publicity and such high level governmental representation. In her speech, the mayor announced the bid for Salamis to become the European Capital of Culture for 2020 to coincide with the 2,500 years since the battle.³

A feature of the ceremony in Salamis that attracted the most commentary in the media is what several people of various political persuasions described as its kitsch character, exemplified by the red carpet on the shore on top of



Figure 1. Sarisas, shields, and traditional costumes in Salamis. *Source: in.gr 2015.*



Figure 2. The Greek Minister of Defense Panos Kammenos and the red carpet in Salamis. *Source: in.gr 2015.*

wooden pallets, while the shacks and unimpressive houses of contemporary Salamis could be seen in the background. Yet, as we know, the term kitsch as an attribution of aesthetic taste is a socially constructed category (Bourdieu 1984). In this case, its usage betrays a discontent with official pretensions of glamour in an unglamorous locale, such as the island of Koulouri (the other, common name of Salamis), or even disapproval for such a lowly treatment (wooden pallets . . .) of the glory that was Greece. In other words, the kitsch accusation is inscribed within the national trope that pitches ancient glory against modern decadence, the narrative about unworthy descendants of illustrious ancestors. But there is another criticism that is more pertinent and more interesting. Let us hear the Minister speak:

Γιορτάζουμε σήμερα τη ναυμαχία που έλαβε χώρα το Σεπτέμβριο του 480 π. Χ. στη Σαλαμίνα, όχι μόνο ως ιστορικό γεγονός, αλλά και για να τιμήσουμε την τεράστια προσφορά στην Παγκόσμια Ιστορία της νίκης των ενωμένων Ελληνικών Δυνάμεων κατά του Πέρση εισβολέα. Μιας νίκης που κατά γενική ομολογία υπήρξε καθοριστική για τη διάσωση του Δυτικού Πολιτισμού. . . . Μην ξεχνάμε ότι η Ελλάδα καλείται τώρα να αντιμετωπίσει μία καινούργια απειλή από την Ανατολή, την απειλή του φονταμενταλισμού. . . . Δεν πρέπει να ξεχνάμε ότι ο αγώνας κατά των Περσών ήταν αγώνας για την ελευθερία, ήταν μια νίκη του ελεύθερου πνεύματος κατά της βαρβαρότητας και της υποτέλειας. (Hellenic Republic Ministry of National Defence 2015)

We celebrate today the naval battle which took place in September 480 BC in Salamis, not only as a historical event but also to honor the vast contribution to world history of the united Greek forces against the Persian invader. A victory which, as is generally accepted, was crucial for the rescuing of Western Civilization. . . . Do not forget that Greece is asked today to counter a new threat from the East, the threat of fundamentalism. . . . We should not forget that the fight against Persians was a fight for freedom, it was a victory of free spirit over barbarity and subjugation.⁴

The platitudes about the rescuing of Western civilization constitute a performative citation of the most popular Western accounts of the battle; and yet, uttered at this specific moment and combined with the statement on the “new threat from the East,” they acquire another sinister, disturbing meaning: at a moment when on the shores of Greece and of Southern Europe thousands of war refugees arrive daily, nationalist essentialism, combined with blatant orientalism, can prove particularly dangerous. After all, it was the same politician who was reported by the London *Times* as saying in April 2015: “If Greece is expelled or forced out of the Eurozone, waves of immigrants without papers, including radical elements, will stream from Turkey and head towards the heart of the West” (Carassava and Aldrick 2015). The comingling of aquatic and medical-bodily metaphors here are familiar not only from discourses of extremist politicians in contemporary Europe and elsewhere but also from



Figure 3. Refugees' tents in the shadow of banners commemorating the "Battle of Salamis."
 Source: Photo by the author, 2016.

totalitarian essentialism going back to the interwar period in Europe. Ironically, given the Minister's statement about the "invasion from the East" and the "waves of immigrants," in early 2016 in Piraeus it was under the huge banners depicting the Battle of Salamis and promoting the Salamis European Capital bid that the war refugees from Syria pitched their tents as part of a makeshift camp (Figure 3).

And another layer of irony: the actual archaeological site where the dead from the Salamis battle are buried is today surrounded by industrial developments and landfills, part of it has been already destroyed, and the land still belongs to a private company, despite the official orders of compulsory expropriation dating to the early 1990s (Stefanou 2008). Moreover, only a few days after this ceremony, the Association of Greek Archaeologists protested that the land that local and national politicians proclaimed as sacred was in danger of being sold off as part of the privatization of the port of Piraeus (Syllogos Ellinon Archaeologon 2015), a development which seems to have been averted, at least temporarily.

There is a lot more that can be said about this ceremony. It is only one of a series of vignettes which I will be discussing here in an attempt to trace the entanglements of antiquity, and of antiquities, with the contemporary moment, entanglements that are to be found on multiple sites and increasingly globalized and interconnected fora or, to use Appadurai's term, "global ethnoscapes" (1996; Hamilakis 2000a). A plethora of social actors are implicated in these

vignettes, depicting official/top-down, and unofficial/bottom-up interventions, some staged in Greece and some elsewhere. The most extensive case study, however, will be the excavation of Amphipolis in northern Greece, analyzed here as a social drama which evoked huge public fascination in Greece and abroad.

This contemporary moment, of course, has become a moment of crisis for Greece, at least since 2009, and, as Daniel Knight (2013) has noted, the phrase “Greek crisis” now constitutes a global trope of moralizing discourses, a phenomenon which will become clearer below. In this article, I will be focusing both on the archaeological, broadly defined, as a way of imagining and living through the present and on ancient material objects, artifacts, and sites in their physical setting and in their various visual and discursive renderings and iterations.⁵ As such, I will be conjuring up the tangible, the sensorial, and the affective, as well as the temporal in its various guises: the articulation of the ancient with other times, attending thus to polychrony but also to multi-temporality, that is, to the diverse conceptions of time beyond chronometry and modernist linearity (Hamilakis 2013a). One of my main aims here will be not only to demonstrate the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon at hand but also to trace the historical depth of certain performative practices and to address the social embeddedness of seemingly financial and broadly economic phenomena.⁶

Interestingly, in the various speeches delivered at Salamis both this year and in previous years, a theme that comes through very clearly is that of debt—one that is owed to the ancient dead not only by contemporary Greeks but also by Westerners as a whole. After all, it was their sacrifice that is claimed to have rescued Western civilization from oriental barbarity. It is this multifarious concept of debt, and of indebtedness, as both a process and a condition, which will become central in my exploration and argument here, oscillating back and forth between notions of financial *and* moral debt, between modern creditors and ancient ancestors.

How can a debt be repaid?

Or, more precisely, how can the debt to the ancestors be repaid? Here is the answer offered by the sector of Greek society that is attracted to neo-Nazi ideologies and practices. Annually, Golden Dawn gathers for a pilgrimage at the site of another famous battle against the oriental Other, a battle that may not have been victorious like Salamis but still deserves honor and recognition, especially since it is about death and sacrifice (Figure 4). It is the site of Thermopylae in central Greece and, more specifically, the site of the modern monument erected in the broader landscape of Thermopylae in 1955 with the financial assistance of Greek Americans (Hamilakis 2007, 169–170). On 26 July 2008 at the party’s annual pilgrimage, the second-in-command of the



Figure 4. The Golden Dawn at Thermopylae during their 2013 gathering. *Source:* Photo from *newsbomb.gr* 2013; reproduced with permission.

organization, Ilias Kasidiaris, proclaimed: “We look forward to the moment of great counterattack, walking in the footsteps of the ancient *krypteia*, which involved silent strikes in the darkness and quietness of the night against the city’s internal enemies.”⁷

The *krypteia* was the ancient Spartan rite of passage that supposedly involved young Spartan men’s going out at night armed with nothing but a knife and killing helots, although ancient sources are far from clear on the nature and the specifics of this practice (Hodkinson and Powell 2006). The perceived militarism of ancient Spartan society has an obvious appeal for the Golden Dawn, as it did for the Third Reich (Hodkinson and Macgregor Morris 2012; Roche 2013) and for the Greek dictator Ioannis Metaxas, one of the heroes of Golden Dawn. It was during Metaxas’s regime that in 1939 the site of Thermopylae was excavated. The dictator visited the dig, and the first report on it was published in his ideological mouthpiece, *Neon Kratos* (New State) (Hamilakis 2007, 169–170). The debt to the ancestors is repaid here by selecting an ancient practice, itself a matter of discussion and debate amongst historians, and interpreting it as a call to supposedly continue the work of the ancestors—in this case, by persecuting migrants but also compatriots who are deemed unworthy of their national destiny and of their ancestors.

Other evocations of classical antiquity abound in the public discourse during the years of the crisis, and they come from many and diverse social actors, as we have seen already. Recall the indiscriminate rounding up of migrants (based on racial profiling) conducted by the police in 2012 in the operation code-named by the government Ξένιος Ζευς (*Xenios Zeus*, Hospitable Zeus) (Hamilakis 2012); or the attempts by left-wing intellectuals to link the anti-austerity «κίνημα των πλατειών» (square movement) to the ancient polis and to the classical Agora (Douzinas 2011);⁸ or the evocation of Solon's sixth-century BC Athenian practice of σεισάχθεια (*seisachtheia*, debt forgiveness) by anti-austerity protestors and movements;⁹ or the citation, again by left-wing as well as other commentators, of the Melian massacre¹⁰ to draw parallels with the punitive policies of the contemporary creditors (Apostolopoulos 2015; Naxakis 2015); or the recurrent evocations of classical antiquity by the current Prime Minister, Alexis Tsipras, who has repeatedly called for the “return of democracy to the place where it was born” (Avgi 2015). And the same prime minister stated, using metaphorical language, that during the summer 2015 negotiations with the creditors, he was asked to “sell the Acropolis,” and he could not possibly do that.¹¹

But such evocations of classical antiquity in its mythological and, more commonly, its material manifestations are even more frequent in the international public and media discourses on Greece and its current predicament. Newspaper and other news media stories, editorial cartoons, magazine covers, are full of literary and iconographic references citing antiquity and antiquities. To take editorial cartoons alone, there are now several hundred of them produced in the past six years, depicting the Greek crisis through ancient mythological and iconographic themes.¹² Based on the examination of many of them, primarily from Western European and North American newspapers and cartoonists (with the occasional exception from elsewhere, such as Italy or South America), the themes seem to be the familiar ones: the notions of tragedy, of the Trojan Horse, of the Labors of Hercules, of Sisyphus, and so on (Talalay 2013). The materiality of antiquity through its iconographic rendering here is crucial for any intended messages to be conveyed. Statues, ancient temples (with the Parthenon and the Acropolis being the most prominent), columns, and vases are everywhere in these renderings, evoking physicality, tactility, sensorial proximity, and a historical connection to place.

In a 2010 cartoon by the *Guardian* cartoonist Kipper Williams (Figure 5), the Parthenon is for sale by former Prime Minister Giorgos Papandreou (the person who is considered responsible by a majority of Greeks for inviting the international creditors and International Monetary Fund [IMF] to Greece). The cartoon evokes thus the anxiety over the sale—symbolic or actual—even of the “inalienable positions” of classical antiquity (Weiner 1992), which, as we



Figure 5. "Parthenon for Sale."
Source: Williams 2010; courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6. Aphrodite of Melos and the recovery bike. Source: Esquivel 2012; courtesy of the artist.

saw, resurfaced later in 2015 during Tsipras's negotiations. The Venus de Milo/Aphrodite of Melos, one of the most celebrated icons of ancient art, often stands metonymically for Greece. In one cartoon published in 2012 by the Costa Rican cartoonist Arcadio Esquivel, she cannot drive the recovery bike with her mutilated arms (Figure 6). In another, which appeared in the left-leaning



Figure 7. Caryatids collapsing. Source: Simanca 2015; reproduced with permission.



Figure 8. Greek Ruins. Source: Morin 2015; courtesy of the artist.

Italian *Il Fatto Quotidiano* on 1 March 2016 in the midst of yet another crisis, this one associated with the war refugees from Syria, she grows arms to embrace migrants. Personified statues abound in the Modern Greek national imagination, but it seems that they hold special emotive appeal amongst other social actors, too, especially in moments of crisis. At the same time, another



Figure 9. Dancing amongst the ruins. *Source:* Catalino 2015; courtesy of the artist.

national trope, that of mutilation and fragmentation (of statues and temples, of bodies, of the nation), is echoed in these cartoons, revealing perhaps a broader, even global fascination with the remnants and traces of violence. Both themes of personification and of mutilation and fragmentation are encountered in another cartoon, a Brazilian one, depicting the Caryatids kneeling under the unbearable weight of the IMF (Figure 7).

Interestingly, in these depictions, the themes of ruins and of ruination emerge as dominant (for example, Figure 8): Greece, viewed as an eternal country of ruins, experiences new ruination. It is well known that the trope of ruins has been an extremely evocative one in the Western imagination, at least since the seventeenth century, associated with melancholic meditations on death and decay and on the regenerative power of nature. But the iconographic blending and comingling of ancient and modern remnants here produces other, sinister effects: by being closely associated with the ruins of the current crisis, classical ruins are negatively valued (Talalay 2013). They lose the connotations of the admirable, glorious feats which still survive, albeit in a fragmentary status, and acquire instead the connotations of fallen grandeur, of complete and irreversible loss, and perhaps also of negligence on the part of their present-day stewards. Moreover, this multitemporal juxtaposition of ancient and modern ruins produces a sense of allochronization or what Fabian (1983) has called the denial of coevalness: Greece is seen as a nation apart, as if the current crisis



Figure 10. “Defying the Gods.” *Source:* Horsey 2015; courtesy of the artist.

is not a global phenomenon of the present era but something produced in and perpetuated by Greece alone.

A further, highly gendered trope is that of the unworthy descendant or the chance inhabitant of the ancient land, embodied by the figure of fat, lazy, hedonistic Mediterranean male, either dancing, Zorba-like amongst the eternal ruins (Figure 9) or lying on the top of them, indifferent to the ruinous state of the country (Figure 10). Interestingly, in this latter case, it is the creditors who have become the Olympian Gods and are about to vent all their indignation at him, enacting perhaps a symbolic appropriation of the ancient Greek heritage or reaffirming a centuries-old mentality amongst sections of the Western European elites that they are the true descendants and rightful owners of the classical legacy.

Ruins often retain and harbor ghosts, as Ann Stoler (2013, 25) has noted in her recent meditation on ruins and ruination: they evoke unfinished histories. The multitemporal intermingling of ancient and contemporary ruins inevitably recalls the unfinished histories of the constitution of the entity of Greece in modernity and its identification with the classical moment—and, by implication, of the shackles of debt and of indebtedness, variously conceived.

Indeed, a central theme in many, if not most, of these primarily Western European and American cartoon depictions is again that of debt. But here things get more complicated. In these clearly stereotypical visual discourses, Greece means primarily the glory that was Greece: the country of ancient

times that offered, indeed donated to Western civilization the West's cultural and ideological foundations. It is thus a land to which the West was and is indebted. The very fact that these discourses are expressed in the mythological and iconographic language of antiquity, a code which can be deciphered by the West as a whole or at least its elites, is another indication of such indebtedness.

But now things have been reversed: it is Greece which is in huge debt to the Western creditors, while its modern inhabitants are depicted in these cartoons as oblivious or indifferent to their obligations to the creditors. Could it be, then, that by reversing the asymmetry of debt/credit, the debt of Western creditors to Greece can now be cancelled out?

And here is the central theme of my argument in this article. The entanglement of antiquity and of antiquities with the phenomena of the crisis can be best understood if viewed within the power-laden dialectics of debt. I see indebtedness not as purely an economic condition but as a moral imperative, as the production of personal and national subjectivity. Indebtedness is thus an embodied, biopolitical phenomenon, played out in the terrain of memory and temporality. My thesis is inspired by the work of Maurizio Lazzarato on the *Making of the Indebted Man* (2012; see also 2015) and by his own theoretical foundations, including Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morality* ([1887] 2006) and the Deleuzian take on it (Deleuze and Guattari [1972] 1983, 197–198; Deleuze [1962] 2006).

Lazzarato's analysis, combining Nietzsche and Deleuze, as well as Marx, does not limit itself to contemporary neoliberal capitalism but aims at understanding the philosophical-political constitution of indebtedness in the past and in the present. As he notes, "the paradigm of the social lies not in exchange (economic and/or symbolic) but in credit. There is no equality (of exchange) underlying social relations, but rather an asymmetry of debt/credit, which precedes, historically and theoretically, that of production and wage labour" (Lazzarato 2012, 11).

I have found Lazzarato's thesis on the production of subjectivity though indebtedness particularly inspiring and productive. But I would claim that in understanding the archaeo-political dimension of contemporary indebtedness, at least as far as the Greek context is concerned, one needs to rely more on the Nietzschean take on the matter. Nietzsche introduced the mnemonic and temporal dimension in the analysis of debt (Lazzarato 2012, 44–47), stating that it is the debt to the ancestors that produces a teleological temporality, and a "debt of existence," a debt/guilt which will become an "infinite debt" (Deleuze and Guattari [1972] 1983, 197). The ancestors thus became the "gods," the ultimate ancestors, to whom the debt can never be repaid (Nietzsche [1887] 2006, 60–61).¹³

Furthermore, an examination of the archaeo-politics of the crisis reveals that we cannot really understand their contemporary shape and nature if we

ignore the historical depth of what has been described as the crypto-colonial constitution of Greece (Herzfeld 2002). In this process, relative political independence was acquired in exchange for massive economic dependence, whereas the dominant tropes of national culture adopted by the ruling elites and the emerging middle classes mimicked those of the West. It is this crypto-colonial relationship which leads to the reproduction of the contemporary orientalist and occidentalist stereotypes and to phenomena of internal orientalism and self-colonization.¹⁴ Most examples and phenomena I have been outlining here point to the salient links between the crypto-colonial entanglements as were initially set out in the nineteenth century and the contemporary crypto-colonial effects, both in relation to the debt crisis itself and its archaeo-political overtones. Most social actors on the left and on the right operate, by choice or necessity, within this asymmetrical crypto-colonial terrain, navigating through the dialectics of debt and credit, and occasionally resorting to discourses of inalienability: the Acropolis is not for sale.

A mound filled with treasures: The Amphipolis saga

I will now examine in detail another story which can help us understand better the phenomenon of the archaeo-political constitution of indebtedness, exposing at the same time some other interesting facets. It is the ongoing saga of the excavation at Kasta Hill in Amphipolis in northern Greece. Rather than focusing on the strictly scholarly debates (which I will leave to the specialists on the material culture of Macedonia), I will be discussing here primarily the public dimensions of the story and the interest it raised amongst non-archaeologists, from the various politicians to the many thousands, if not the millions, of lay citizens who were (and some still are) captivated by it. I am discussing thus Amphipolis as a social phenomenon and as an important case study on the ethnography and the politics of archaeology, on its entanglement with contemporary social concerns in the Greek crisis-scape and beyond.

I would like to start with a passage from an inconspicuous Greek blog entry published at the end of October 2014. This text appeared at a moment when it was thought that the excavation would not reveal anything as significant as was originally hoped: the untold of treasures and the bodies of mythical personalities.

They are burying Amphipolis, fellow Greeks! They do not want us to learn what is hidden inside the monument. They do not want us to know where we came from, and by extension, how far we can reach. They are not going to allow us to claim our inheritance, and our self-knowledge and self-understanding as people!!! It is CERTAIN that in there, a large part of the history of our Macedonia, but also of Greece overall, has been deposited, which, however, some are hell-bent to make disappear. They do not want “nationalist” outbursts, this will destroy their plans.

And further down:

They bury Amphipolis with all these dishonest dealings, which only an anti-Hellenic state mechanism could come up with, a mechanism which wants the Greeks to be slaves, without identity, history, and a future. . . . The monument is there, extremely old, awaiting to introduce itself to us, and for us to discover it. It waits for us to discover it, because, as we said, the earth now, all over the planet, through many different ways, vomits Greece. But the ones who have capitulated and the *yousoufakia*¹⁵ do not like this. And the same goes for the supervisors who were appointed by the bankers.

The monument has not been looted, as far as its evidential elements is concerned. They have not stolen its identity, even if looters of every era have entered it, taking every sort of antiquities. This act of looting does not make the monument useless, trash; quite the opposite. The monument is there, and awaits to reveal to us many secrets from its history, which we either ignore, or which the authorities want us to ignore. (*filonoi.gr* 2014)¹⁶

It is well known that in Greece (as in many other countries) archaeology is not just a scholarly pursuit. It is not just an academic discipline, nor is it simply a bureaucratic state apparatus, which very often torments people with its demands and its imposition of certain regulations on building and planning activity, as well as on agricultural practices. It is all that and much more. It is a national discipline, an arena in which national imagination is being produced and reproduced daily (Hamilakis 2007; Damaskos and Plantzos 2008). It is a domain in which all members of the national body feel that they have the right, indeed the sacred obligation to participate: a sacred mission, which is too important to be left to a few academics or civil servants. It is also a space within which non-archaeological concerns of all kinds—from the economy to the functioning of the state to notions of morality and respectability—are debated and contested.

As such, very often we are accustomed to see archaeological stories appearing in the media, both the conventional ones and the new social media. Yet what has been happening with the excavations at Amphipolis is unique, both for Greece and internationally. I am talking about the incredible number of stories that appeared in the media for four years through the end of 2015 and have continued to appear since, though with less intensity; the decision of many outlets to make this the topic their central story for weeks, displacing wars and political crises and other events, betraying an unprecedented public interest in the matter which has lasted for nearly four years; the number of nonspecialists who took a keen interest in it and actively intervened and contributed to this frenzy by creating online discussion groups, writing comments on blogs, publishing their own interpretations, and taking the time and the effort to produce various 3D and other reconstructions of the monument. One of the several Facebook groups has by itself between 47,000 and 49,000 members from

Greece but also many other countries, whereas the related YouTube videos count hundreds of thousands of views. As for the passion aroused over the matter, the passage above speaks for itself.

We are thus dealing with an archaeological phenomenon, not simply an archaeological story. Or better, we are dealing with a social and public phenomenon enacted on an archaeological stage. And the starting question then is: what gave this phenomenon its immense popular appeal and social import—an appeal that seems to have surpassed the one generated by the Vergina discoveries by Manolis Andronikos, also in Macedonia, in the 1970s, a moment that is frequently invoked in the current discoveries?

The passage above is worth serious reflection and analysis, with its intentional or unintentional ironies and its rhetorical objectification of history as a hidden artifact, deposited, concealed, or rather deliberately hoarded inside the tomb. The Amphipolis site has been described as a burial monument, and ironically it is the act of burying that the author of the passage invokes here. In this case, however, it is not the ancients who were burying their dead but the moderns and, more specifically, the political and academic establishment which is burying—according to the author at least—a unique monument and the truths that it harbors. It is the establishment here that battles with the nation and the national truths, an establishment which is at the same time political, economic, academic, and bureaucratic. Note that the banking establishment is featured here and that various historical moments looming large in the national narrative are invoked—most notably the Ottoman past—in a dialectic between subjugation and independence. Finally, note how the monument itself acquires agency: it becomes a person who struggles to be heard.

In another unofficial and privately circulating document, a brochure produced at the end of September 2014 by a retired architect, who handed it to me in person at an archaeological conference in Athens in January 2015, we detect both a similar distrust towards the political and archaeological establishment, as well as the use of the Amphipolis case as a springboard upon which a broader discourse can be articulated and projected. Note below the juxtaposition between Amphipolis as an emerging symbolic center for Hellenism and the “anti-polis” of Athens as a disgraced national center, primarily because it serves as the capital of a state which is seen as unworthy of the national heritage it has been entrusted with. Furthermore, such a statement continues a theme that has been developing since the Vergina discoveries in the 1970s: the shift of emphasis in the national archaeo-political discourse from the south to the north, from the fifth-century Athens to the fourth-century Macedonia, as well as from the ancient democracy of the polis to the perceived militarism of Ancient Macedonians.



Figure 11. An aerial view of the mound of Kasta at Amphipolis, during the recent excavations. *Source:* Tsakiroglou 2014.

Who are these people who have forced the Prime Minister to characterize the tumulus of Amphipolis “the largest in the Balkans,” as if there was a similar civilization in the Balkans, and why did he not say, the “largest in the world”? Who are these who want to demote Greek civilization today, and especially the history of Greek people? . . . The sphinxes [found at the entrance of the tomb] are engraved in coins since 530 BC; they may stand thus for the protection of the site which is related to treasure. . . . If we compare the feats at Amphipolis which were created 2,500 years ago with the present day ones of the anti-polis of Athens, then we can understand the sort of national leaders, their skills, and their advisors—bureaucrats who have governed this place, since the time of its liberation (Makridis 2014).

Here, the architect who is the author of this brochure (and who makes in it several technical observations on the discovery, accompanied by detailed photographic documentation) implies that the “anti-polis” of Athens and the national state it represents have failed to repay their debt to the ancestors by creating feats worthy of the ones to be seen at Amphipolis. He also draws a direct link with the anticipated treasure hidden in the tomb, the revelation of which cannot be trusted to the establishment of the country. He nevertheless urges people to be ready for the «Ανάσταση του Γένους» (resurrection of the nation).

It is worth remembering that Amphipolis is not a newly discovered monument. The ancient city, renowned since antiquity, has been explored by antiquarians and scholars since the nineteenth century. The mound of

Kasta at Amphipolis (Figure 11) was well known to local people for centuries and to archaeologists at least since the 1960s. The Ephor of the area, Dimitris Lazaridis, who had been excavating the cemeteries of the city since the mid-1950s, began conducting excavations on the mound itself in 1964. He revealed part of the circular perimeter wall surrounding the natural hill, a wall that was made of limestone and covered with marble. He returned there in 1971 and, after estimating, more or less correctly, the wall's circumference, concentrated his effort on the top of the hill, where he unearthed a series of Iron Age burials. His find indicated the importance of this locality well before the fourth century BC, the time on which the current discussion has concentrated. His investigations in the area were interrupted by his death in 1985, but subsequent Ephors continued the work. For nearly three decades, their finds at Amphipolis occasionally captured the public imagination and were reported even in the international press. It is the new phase of excavations with Katerina Peristeri as director, however, which has become a media and public phenomenon, especially since 2013 and mostly during and after the 2014 excavation season.¹⁷ Amongst the most impressive finds unearthed during this phase of research were two sphinxes, two female statues—the so-called caryatids—and a mosaic. But it was the huge perimeter wall of the mound, which measures 497 meters in circumference, one of monument's most impressive features, that has given rise to the wildest fantasies, especially since the public was led to believe, at least at the early stages of these new excavations, that this wall enclosed a wholly artificial mound, something that we now know is not the case.

The new excavations were taking place in a very different social climate from that of the early excavations of Lazaridis and from the 1970s excavations at Vergina by Manolis Andronikos—a moment very often invoked by the current Amphipolis dig, as mentioned above. For a start, in the 1990s Macedonia became again a loaded and contested national territory, and since that decade the perceived threats from the north have repeatedly been made a matter of national concern. Archaeological finds in this territory, especially finds of the Classical and Hellenistic periods, are thus directly and immediately implicated in this national issue and the associated dispute and concerns (Hamilakis 2007). Furthermore, if national subjects generally feel the need, indeed the obligation to intervene in archaeological matters, today such interventions are much more frequent and prominent and much easier to achieve, mostly because of the opportunities offered by the new media technologies: new archaeological finds and stories can be immediately circulated worldwide, and every citizen with online access can potentially become an archaeological commentator or even an alternative archaeologist (Hamilakis 2000a). And finally, and perhaps most importantly, this excavation has been happening in the midst of the worst economic and social crisis the country has experienced since World War II.

And yet, despite deep austerity cuts, which have taken on the proportions of a humanitarian crisis, the dig has been lavishly funded by the state and by private donors, receiving more than half a million euros from state funds alone in the three years from 2013 to 2015 (Kotti 2015). This amount is unprecedented for an excavation justified as a rescue operation.¹⁸ It must also be noted that, especially since August 2014, excavation work has been conducted out of bounds, under police protection, and without the right of access even to other archaeologists, let alone to the general public.

Already in the autumn of 2012, the excavators went public with some rather grand pronouncements. Emphasizing the dimensions of the perimeter wall and implying that the mound was entirely artificial, they spoke of a “unique” monument (Savvidis 2012). Moreover, they implied and at times even stated very clearly that “important personalities” were buried in it.¹⁹ They also made a direct comparison with Vergina with the statement that such an impressive perimeter wall does not exist even at that iconic site (Savvidis 2012). This initial round of announcements in 2012 and 2013 unleashed the first wave of media and public frenzy and created a huge anticipation of what treasures such an enormous, unique monument could hide and whether the dead person buried in it was indeed the most famous one ever to have emerged from Macedonia. The word “treasure” was repeated time and again in official archaeological and political, as well as public and unofficial pronouncements and statements on this monument. And the link with Vergina was repeated throughout. Moreover, if, as I have claimed elsewhere (2007), Andronikos, the national archaeologist *par excellence*, acted as a great shaman of the nation who descended into the underworld to commune with the dead and bring forth to the living their secrets, the excavators of Amphipolis seemed to want not simply to cite this key moment in national memory but also to repeat it with another descent into the underworld (Hamilakis 2013b). And it seems that they were in a great hurry to reenact that moment: following their presentation at the 2013 Thessaloniki meeting on the Archaeological Activity in Macedonia and Thrace, it was reported by several media outlets (and was also evident in the photographs released) that the excavation was proceeding very fast, using mechanical diggers. The unprecedented public and media response took the Ministry of Culture by surprise. In August 2013, its leadership (or at least some parts of it) was compelled to produce a statement making clear that, at least at the current stage, “any identification with historical personalities lacks scientific documentation, and it is thus very risky” (*ethnos.gr* 2013). Yet, clearly, this statement was not enough.

With the end of the 2013 excavation season, things went quiet, but not for long. Already in early 2013, the excavators had announced that the lion of Amphipolis, a five-meter statue dating to the fourth century BC, found in fragments at the beginning of the twentieth century during the Balkan Wars



Figure 12. The Prime Minister and the Sphinxes: Antonis Samaras at Amphipolis. *Source: Parapolitika.gr* 2014.

and restored in 1937 (Broneer 1941), was originally placed on the top of the Kasta hill, that is, the top of the Amphipolis mound. Despite scholarly doubts,²⁰ this announcement added to the grandiose image of the monument and fueled further public and media expectations.

But it was in the summer of 2014 that the frenzy attained colossal proportions and became a global media phenomenon. It was the prime ministerial visit by Antonis Samaras which acted as a catalyst. This was not just any prime minister but someone known for his hardline views on foreign policy, whose political career and fate were closely linked to Macedonia and to the dispute over the name of the Former Yugoslav Republic north of the border. In 1992, he lost his job as foreign minister because of his hard line over the issue. When he visited the site in August 2014, he was not simply given the customary guided tour by the excavators. He did not simply make the usual comments that politicians do on these occasions, expressing their support for the work of the archaeologists. He rather stood in front of the entrance of the monument, and in the shadow of the sphinxes he gave a detailed description of the monument down to the centimeter, adopting, in a sense, the persona of the politician-archaeologist (Figure 12). And he concluded by saying that “it is certain that we are in front of a very important find” (*naftemboriki.gr* 2014). But he made it clear that he was not referring to what had been found to date but

what would be found in the near future, pointing to the things hidden beyond the walled entrance of the monument and alluding again to the famous dead. “Be patient for a few days,” he advised the national body. In doing so, however, he did not simply fuel further public anticipation but also imposed a timeframe for archaeological research, putting pressure on the team to find an answer “in a few days.” He also dictated the priorities of research, declaring that the next question to be answered was: who is the dead person buried there?²¹ After this visit, what happened was unprecedented: the excavators accelerated their rhythm of work to catch up with the prime ministerial prophecy. Journalists from all over the world flocked to Amphipolis, and for months this was the main story in the news, at least in Greece. The impressive finds of ancient art that followed may not have answered the question about the glorious dead, but at least they gave some material substance to the rhetoric about treasures. Meanwhile, the timetable kept being pushed back, while the internet and print media stories kept multiplying.

Sometime in November 2014, as no dead person had been found, things went sour. It had become evident by then, contrary to the earlier statements by the director of the excavation, that the monument had been looted in the past, long before it was ever excavated. In addition, several voices in the scholarly community disputed openly the dating of it and cast doubts on the excavators’ interpretation of the finds. At that moment, and upon finding a wall, the excavators seemed to imply that they were reaching a dead end. Given the huge anticipation which had been produced over the previous months and years, this was met with enormous popular disappointment. «Η ανασκαφή στην Αμφίπολη— και στο τέλος ντουβάρη» (The Amphipolis excavation and at the end, up against a wall), proclaimed one title (Gerolymatos 2014); «Μας δουλεύουν ψιλό γαζί με την Αμφίπολη» (They are pulling a fast one with Amphipolis), stated another (Independent Observer 2014); «Το απόλυτο τίποτα έχει ο τάφος της Αμφίπολης» (The absolute nothing in the Amphipolis tomb), shouted a third (Vlachos 2014). After all the anticipation and all the pronouncements about important secrets and treasures to be unveiled, all that remained was “the absolute nothing,” the absolute disappointment. The news that the excavation was about to end, that there was no further chamber to be unveiled, was received with dismay. Despite the archaeologically important discoveries, despite the unique finds, this was perceived as failure in the public’s imagination. As we saw at the beginning of this section, however, some accused archaeologists of hiding things, of being afraid to face the national truths, the earth-shattering secrets that were about to be uncovered. Others still continued to believe, against all odds, that the excavation had just started, that there were many more burial chambers in the mound, many hidden niches, underground passages, and galleries.

Indeed, the idea of hidden, underground galleries was a theme that surfaced time and again—along with the popular perceptions of an apocryphal

geometry and Amphipolis's supposedly deliberate positioning at the apex of sacred triangles. Thus «Αμφίπολη και ο μυστηριώδης υπόγειος κόσμος της» (Amphipolis and its mysterious subterranean world) was the title of one blog entry, which read:

We suspect that there is a subterranean world, since the oracles and initiatory places are portals to the underworld. The well-known descent to Hadis, where Persephone and Pluto went. . . . Many people believe in the theory of hollow earth, and that there are living civilizations which inhabit the inner parts of our planet, and which are also technologically advanced. . . . Why should we, therefore, doubt that under the mound of Amphipolis, a subterranean world begins, which reaches very far? (Filosofia kai erevna epi pantos tou epistētou 2014).²²

But I would like to suggest that what caused, more than anything else, such traumatic reactions at that moment when the excavation's end was implied was the absence of a body, of a human skeleton. Any skeleton, any body would have sufficed. The bones would have been venerated appropriately, would have been bestowed with honors and titles, and even worshiped with rituals fit for a king. Unlike Vergina, there were no holy relics in this case and thus no pilgrimages to follow. And this was hurtful.

Then, a few days later, bodies were found, and not one but many: five to be precise. While the excavators initially talked of *a* skeleton, fueling further the rumors and anticipation that it could be a famous historical personality, something that several had suspected soon transpired, especially after the specialists' report: there was not one, undisturbed inhumation burial, but rather the comingled and disturbed, disarticulated skeletal remnants of several individuals, some human, some animal. One woman, two men, one infant, and another cremated individual were recognized amongst the human remains. The Ministry of Culture publicized this report only six days before the general election of January 2015 (Sykka 2015). And while the osteoarchaeologists who examined the material refrained from speculating on the identity of the buried persons and did not comment on any genetic or other link among the skeletons, anonymous "scholars of the Ministry of Culture" stated, without citing any specific evidence, that "the most likely scenario . . . points to Olympias," the mother of Alexander the Great (*newsbomb.gr* 2015). With this statement, the dream was kept alive, the national hopes were perpetuated a bit longer, at least until the elections. Yet such links could not be even entertained, as no osteoarchaeological or conventional archaeological evidence was produced to support them. As this skeletal material did not fulfil the high hopes and expectations, the excavators decided to dismiss them out of hand. In an interview that she gave at the end of February 2015, the director of the excavation stated: "We have to focus on the monument itself, and not on the bones, which for me, do not mean much. You cannot date the dead. For me the skeletons have no meaning. They are a distraction to the research" (Peristeri 2015).



Figure 13. Gender Trouble at Amphipolis: the son asks the father: “Father, what does it mean that Alexander the Great and Hephaestion were *syntrofoi*?” And the father (about to have a stroke): “I want to tell you one thing, my child: Alexander the Great was not a communist!” The cartoon plays on the double meaning of the word *syntrofoi* in Greek, denoting both the comrade and the partner. *Source*: Dermentzoglou 2015; courtesy of the artist.

The most recent episodes of the saga were played out in the autumn of 2015 and the spring of 2016, when the excavators announced that based on inscriptions found close to the current location of the Lion of Amphipolis and some reliefs found close to the Kasta Hill the monument was built for Hephaestion, the general, close friend, and (according to some ancient and modern sources) possibly the lover of Alexander the Great. Furthermore, it was announced that it was Alexander himself who gave the orders for the monument’s construction. The hypothesis was questioned by prominent archaeologists as lacking empirical support (*tvxs.gr* 2015), and it certainly caused much confusion in the public sphere, as it tested the tolerance of large sectors of Greek society on matters of sexual freedom (Figure 13), whereas an online magazine wondered, semiseriously, whether the next “Gay Pride” event should be held at Amphipolis (Polymenis 2015). At the 2016 Thessaloniki meeting on the Archaeological Activity in Macedonia and Thrace, the excavators and their collaborators insisted on the Hephaestion link, presenting at the same time fragments from a relief found around 120 meters away from the mound, in which they claim to have identified a portrait of Alexander the Great. Both in the meeting and elsewhere, these hypotheses were hotly disputed by other archaeologists,²³ and while the media and public interest have certainly subsided, the commercial implications of the saga became evident: in late 2015, the designer Reiner Knizia launched a board game on Amphipolis, which became immediately available in Greece.

Amphipolis: An occult economy in action?

Why did the Amphipolis saga become such a prominent social and media phenomenon? And how does it relate to my inquiry into the dialectics of indebtedness in the context of the crisis? I suggest that if we are to understand the case, we need to situate it within the broader popular discourses on treasure-hunting, discourses that incorporate archaeology but cover more than archaeology and predate the establishment of the professional archaeological apparatus. Furthermore, I suggest that this social drama was structured around the dialectic of concealment and disclosure, of visibility and invisibility, of material things and substances which are hidden, mostly underground or in dark caves, and which hold special promise: a promise of enrichment, of immense and untold wealth, a hope for salvation. Many treasure-hunting discourses and events have been recorded by anthropologists and folklorists in Greece and elsewhere (on Greece, see Politis [1904] 2012, and from an anthropological point of view, Stewart 2012). David Sutton (2014b) has also pointed to the homological connection between conventionally understood concealed treasures and other underground or underwater substances and resources, from metals to natural gas. Despite their differences, all these concealed treasures have been seen to harbor the promise of salvation, and they all become the focus of anguish, tension, and dispute. In their more conventional guises, promised treasures reveal themselves to the chosen few through dreams or visions or through a series of signs. These signs will need to be read and deciphered properly, however, to lead the chosen people to discovery. A specific protocol needs to be followed, which often includes a vow of secrecy (Stewart 2012). If this is violated, the treasure may turn to coal, to dust, to “absolute nothing,” as one of the headlines on the Amphipolis declared (Vlachos 2014).

These stories are not unique to Greece. In other contexts, related stories about an unexpected arrival, finding, or discovery, a revelation that can bring material wealth, are common especially in moments of severe social, economic, and political crisis, not unlike perhaps the one that Greece is currently experiencing. In Oceanic contexts, such rituals and stories are known as cargo cults, but recent anthropological writings (for example, Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2001) speak of a broader global phenomenon, which they term the “occult economy,” that characterizes twenty-first-century neoliberal capitalism: an economy outside conventional structures, which relies on the promise of instant enrichment through alternative means, such as magic, visionary skills and intuition, dreaming, and ancestral inheritance, variously conceived.

It is tempting and perhaps fruitful to see the Amphipolis phenomenon as another case of an occult economy (Sutton 2014b; Vournelis 2016), especially since local stories on hidden treasures in the area were abundant (Athens News Agency-Macedonian Press Agency 2014). Moreover, from early on, archaeologists and others spoke of a unique monument, which must contain the body of a



Figure 14. The Mermaid in the Tomb; the caption reads: “A Skeleton Found at Amphipolis Causes Optimism Amongst Archaeologists.” *Source:* Hantzopoulos 2014; courtesy of the artist.

very important individual—and along with it, unimaginable hidden treasures. The proximity to the Pangaion Hills, with their gold and silver mines, which were exploited in antiquity, was also frequently invoked in public discourses. At the same time, the references to the supposed great secret that was guarded by the sphinx statues of the entrance were everywhere, as were the comments on the secrecy shown by the archaeologists. Furthermore, from the beginning, the connection with Alexander the Great and his family was there, overtly or covertly, an invocation which immediately brings to mind the mythical, oriental loot that the famous Macedonian must have brought back to his homeland. Indeed, especially after the 2014 prime ministerial visit to the site which fueled further the media frenzy, it was common to read statements such as the one by the president of the local community, which echoed the feelings of many people, if not the majority of people in Greece at the time: “If it’s how they say it is [that is, about the important buried individual], then the whole area will be saved, the region of Serres, Macedonia, and the whole of Greece will be saved” (*newsbomb.gr* 2014).

But the invocation of the phenomenon of occult economies is useful only up to a point. I suggest that the Amphipolis story is more complicated and thus much more interesting than that. What makes this case so special is the entanglement of the premodern, imaginary substratum of visionary

treasure-hunting with national destiny; with the nationally and emotionally loaded Macedonian earth; with the extremely powerful myth-history of Alexander;²⁴ with the associated national imaginings of ancestors who conquered the world, who civilized the barbarians, who accumulated the mythical riches of the orient, and who can perhaps be “resurrected,” come again to the rescue of their descendants, in their darkest hour, in their time of need. It is this implicit connection with history-as-myth that the cartoonist Dimitris Hantzopoulos satirically evoked (Figure 14) by depicting a skeleton supposedly found at Amphipolis as that of the mermaid, the sister of Alexander, appearing in countless Greek folktales, in art, and in songs, asking sailors of the whereabouts of her brother.

Here, it was the earth itself which offered with generosity its produce, which gave birth to these unique treasures. This is what the Prime Minister stated during his visit, as he was standing in front of the two sphinxes which were guarding, as he said, the entrance of the tomb: “The land of our Macedonia continues to surprise us, to move us and to touch us, revealing from her inner organs [σπλάχνα]²⁵ unique treasures, which all together compose and weave this unique mosaic of our Greek history, for which all Greeks are proud” (Lambrakis Press Group 2014a). On that same day, the Minister for Culture stated to a newspaper reporter: “we were waiting 2,314 years [for this tomb], can we not wait for two–three more weeks?” alluding to the date of the death of Alexander the Great (Pollatos 2014). Here, we do not have merely an oneiric²⁶ national archaeology of concealed treasures but also a national and religious teleology within the mythical time of national destiny; a teleology that starts with Philip and Alexander and leads to the present, and perhaps to the then PM.

Note that the earth itself in these pronouncements is personified and gendered and willingly gives birth to unique treasures, while birth and motherhood are exalted—all common tropes in many national and other essentialist, genealogical narratives (Yuval-Davis 1997; Nagel 1998). In other instances, the Minister of Culture stated that “very soon the tomb will talk” (*capital.gr* 2014) or that “the time has come for the tomb to talk” (*difernews.gr* 2014). Thus it was not archaeologists who would interpret the material traces but the tomb itself which would tell its story with an authentic voice—and the national body as a whole that had to be alert and listen. As in other cases discussed elsewhere (for example, the Parthenon Marbles in Hamilakis 2007), the ancient monument is not an object but a subject, not a feat of the ancestors but a social agent of its own: the ancestors themselves, who want to intervene in the contemporary national discourse.

If Amphipolis is thus another case of an occult economy in action, then it is a very special one. The Greek economy and society may be suffering at present in the hands of speculators, at the mercy of the global financial capital,

but to this economy of financial markets the collective national body juxtaposes an alternative economy: an oneiric, moral, and cultural economy, which may be about treasure-hunting but which at the same time is seeking roots and unearthing cultural masterpieces. This moral economy, like the financial economy, is not indifferent to material wealth (as shown by its treasure-hunting affinities); but it sees the treasures of Amphipolis as collective property, as national loot. This national economy of hope (Crapanzano 2003) will pay dividends to the true believers in the dogmas of national destiny. The ancestral earth itself will reward them, not only by offering its well-concealed treasures but also by speaking to them through the tomb, reciting no doubt the national truths which will silence the enemies, especially the ones north of the border. Indeed, it was reproduced in several blogs that the national truths that the tomb would utter at any moment now were going to be so powerful, their voice so deafening, that they would cause the state of FYR of Macedonia to crumble into pieces and like the walls of Jericho to disappear.

In this oneiric archaeology, many and diverse social actors are implicated, from the Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture to professional archaeologists, including the excavators of the tomb, to the thousands of lay members of the public who participated actively in this social drama. It also operates through a complicated temporality; it works via a teleological frame but also invokes various times and recalls and cites important temporal landmarks and major moments in national archaeology, with the Vergina discoveries being the most prominent. It conjures up these diverse moments simultaneously, placing them side by side, enacting thus a polychronic temporality (Hamilakis 2013a). In other words, it employs what Sutton (1998) calls “analogic thinking” as a mode of historicization, and Knight (2015) terms “cultural proximity.”

The oneiric archaeology of Amphipolis was partly fueled by the calculated strategy on the part of the excavators to tease the public imagination by excavating out of bounds and under police protection and partly by regulating the interplay between visibility and invisibility, between sensorial proximity and sensorial distance. The press and the public relations of the excavation were tightly controlled, mostly by the designated press officer, who is also a professor of journalism. Daily press releases were produced, giving thus the illusionary impression that the public could follow developments as they were unfolding, whereas in fact only very selectively were visually impressive finds released to the press, while no information was provided on the research questions, the methodology, or the scientific rationale of the various archaeological hypotheses. The dialectic between sensorial proximity and sensorial distance is, of course, at the center of the management of material heritage in modernity as a whole (Hamilakis 2013a); but in the case of Amphipolis, we saw an extremely elaborate and tightly manipulated version of that dialectic.

This oneiric archaeology did not go unchallenged. In addition to the many academic and scholarly objections to the official archaeological pronouncements, as well as some critical commentary on the public dimensions of the story, satire provided a fertile ground for critique: on the top of the many editorial cartoons (see, for example, Figures 13 and 14), several memes could be found online, mocking this national economy of hope and its political instrumentalization. Furthermore, performative citation of other times and events, especially of Vergina, certainly operated as ritualized national memory but could be also seen as perhaps producing certain, unintended, subversive effects (Butler 1993): Amphipolis as the queer version of Vergina. While the second had become a monumentalized site linked to patriarchal Philip II (Hamilakis 2007), the first is shaping up to be a hotly debated locale, increasingly linked to the mother of Alexander, and even his male lover. Could it be that the context of the crisis offers an opening for such queering of the classical heritage?

Debts which can never be repaid—and how to cancel them: Conclusions

The oneiric archaeology of Amphipolis relates directly to the dialectics of debt and its moral imperatives. Contemporary Greeks are indebted to their ancestors. Indeed, this is the only moral debt that many are willing to recognize. In this hour of need, the very same ancestors and the earth itself as a personified ur-ancestor are imagined again to come to their rescue, prolonging further this eternal debt and indeed this relationship of indebtedness. Like the debt to Nietzsche's God, which according to him was the deified ancestors, such a debt to these ancestors can never be repaid. At the same time, the continuous evocation of Alexander acts as a reminder to Western elites and their financial structures that they, too, should be indebted to his legacy as the colonizer and conqueror of the Orient, as well as one who prioritized a long-term, civilizing mission, not short-term financial or political gain: not oil, as the rendering of Oliver Stone's film, *Alexander* (2004), was attempting to show (Cartledge and Greenland 2010).

In bringing this rather extensive survey to a close, it may be worth stressing one or two short points. It seems that the arena of archaeo-politics offers to various social actors the opportunity to intervene in the contemporary global debates on debt, but on different terms from the ones imposed by global, financial capitalism. While many Western renderings cite and reinvent crypto-colonial stereotypes, several others in Greece posit instead a moral understanding of the concept of debt, a cultural economy of ancestral and genealogical ties, of inalienable possessions, and even of occult economies, where the earth itself comes to the rescue by offering its well-hidden treasures. But while such an arena may offer the illusion of short-term tactical gains and maneuvers, it further perpetuates the colonial entanglement between Greece and various

Western powers and elites; it reproduces the crypto-colonial discourse of eternal debt, of teleological time, and of a future without a foreseeable rupture.

At this very moment, it seems that the prospect of Greek society emancipating itself from the shackles of financial debt is more remote than ever. Can the study of archaeo-politics help in any way? The crypto-colonial condition in Greece can be seen as a triple colonization: of the ideal, with the imposition of the classical both as a foundational heritage of Western modernity and as a ticket for Greece's entry into that modernity; of time, with the establishment of a progressive teleology and the rendering of ancestral memory as eternal debt; and of space, with the monumentalization of a territory and its transformation into an asset for exploitation. The phenomena I have analyzed in this article are primarily to do with the first two. It seems that a starting point for the decolonial process may involve, perhaps, daring to rupture the temporality of ancestral debt and imagine an open past which can lead to an open future; this may in fact be the first step for a broader and lasting emancipation.

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NOTES

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¹I will avoid using the term "Greek crisis" as a descriptive denominator here, an appellation that territorializes a global phenomenon, conveying at the same time connotations of exceptionalism, as well as attributing responsibility and blame to the country as a whole, furthering thus national, essentialist stereotyping (Kouki and Liakos 2015; Herzfeld 2016). The term, however, needs to be tackled head-on, precisely because of its powerful effects.

²A separate, but related global phenomenon is the emergence of a "crisis literature," as it is called by many sources. The avalanche of academic writing on the topic increases exponentially by the day. In its socially and politically engaged, thorough, and in-depth iterations, this literature can prove particularly important and effective in helping us understand the contemporary

phenomenon and in even encouraging us to engage in political action. Moreover, in using the lens of the crisis, we can bring into sharp focus deep-seated phenomena and underlying processes that have escaped serious attention for too long, including class and other social inequalities or colonial and crypto-colonial effects (Herzfeld 2016). From the literature on Greece and the crisis, I have found particularly enlightening studies that have gone beyond the macroeconomic and macropolitical dimensions to show the experiential effects of the phenomenon, its cultural-political undertones, and its temporal connotations. Examples here include: Talalay 2013; Theodosopoulos 2013; Rakopoulos 2014; Sutton 2014b; Tzirtzilakis 2014; Argenti and Knight 2015; Hanink 2015; Knight 2015; Knight and Stewart 2016; Rozakou 2016; the special issue of the *Visual Anthropology Review* (Vol. 32 [1]) on the visual aspects of the crisis, edited by Kostis Kalantzis in 2016; and the two forums on the website of the journal *Cultural Anthropology*, one curated by Penelope Papailias (2011) and the other by James Faubion, Eugenia Georges, and Gonda Van Steen (2016). The blogosphere is also full of interesting commentary on the matter; for example, see the reflections of Vassilis Lambropoulos (2014–2016) on the poetry of the crisis on his blog, *Piano, Poetry, Pantelis, Politics: Music, Literature, Friends, Resistance*. Essentialism is at times hard to avoid (for instance, “Greece” as an abstract and coherent entity), even in the more sophisticated attempts, whereas reflexivity and sensorial attention are often in short supply.

³See the Demos Salaminas (2011–2015) website page on the celebrations of the Salaminia, particularly the 2015 celebration.

⁴I have used my own translation of the passage because the official translation posted on the Ministry’s website is not an accurate rendering of the Greek text. For example, the phrase «Μην ξεχνάμε ότι η Ελλάδα καλείται τώρα να αντιμετωπίσει μία καινούργια απειλή από την Ανατολή, την απειλή του φονταμενταλισμού» (Do not forget that Greece is asked today to counter a new threat from the East, the threat of fundamentalism) has been omitted from the official English translation, whereas «βαρβαρότητα» has been translated as “atrociousness.” All translations in this paper are my own unless stated otherwise.

⁵The severe negative impact of the contemporary economic and political situation on the majority of archaeological sites and monuments and on archaeological research deserves a separate study.

⁶In evoking the notion of embeddedness, I am reaching back to the thought of social scientists and historians who refused to conceive of the economy as a separate and autonomous institution. Iconic figures here include Karl Polanyi (1944) and what became known as the substantivist school, or the social historian E.P. Thompson, with his concept of “moral economy,” the bottom-up notion of fairness projected by peasants and urban crowds against regulations from above (1971), and the anthropologist James Scott, who popularized the concept as a “weapon of the weak” (1977).

⁷See Psarras 2012 for this and several other archaeo-political references by Golden Dawn.

⁸On the Square Movement, see amongst others: Dalakoglou 2012; Douzinas 2012; Theodosopoulos 2013.

⁹See, for example, the blog of the movement carrying the same name, Seisachtheia (2013–2016).

¹⁰The murdering of all men of military age from the island of Melos, carried out by the Athenians in 416 BC, was narrated by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War* (5.84–116).

¹¹See, for example, the online article of *Imeresia*, dated 6 September 2015, with the title «Τσίπρας: Έίπα στον Σόιμπλε, θέλετε να πουλήσω την Ακρόπολη; Και έφυγα τρεις φορές. Με έφερε πίσω ο Ολάντ’» (Tsipras: “I said to Schäuble, you want me to sell the Acropolis? And I left three times. It was Holland who brought me back”; *imeresia.gr* 2016). The anxiety that, if things continue like this, Greece may even have to sell the Acropolis is often expressed in various public discourses.

¹² Editorial cartoons require their own special and lengthy treatment, given their effectiveness in communicating messages through a distinctive visual vocabulary which affords diverse readings. They can prove particularly rich as a source, given the principle that in order for them to be successful they should rely mostly on prevalent popular stereotypes, contributing at the same time to the further reinforcement and popularization of such stereotypes. As such, they allow a glimpse into dominant public perceptions, although their current circulation and dissemination through social media and other internet platforms make the investigation of their public consumption and role extremely difficult. I have dealt with editorial cartoons depicting themes from Greek antiquity in Hamilakis 2000b, and Lauren Talalay has explored the same theme with regards to the contemporary crisis (2013).

¹³ The anthropological and philosophical discussion on debt and the condition of indebtedness is extensive. David Graeber's long-term survey (2011) is short on philosophical reflection but clearly shaped by "moral economy" principles and their historical and anthropological grounding. He treats debt, however, primarily as a matter of exchange and money rather than a way of producing subjectivity (see also Lazzarato 2015, 84; Hart 2016). Peebles (2010) offers a good anthropological survey, whereas Bartsidis 2015 and Emmanouilidis 2015, who are Nietzschean and Deleuzian in their arguments, examine the case of Greece. Ethnographies of Greece have offered rich and insightful commentary on obligation, debt, and credit, highlighting the widespread aversion against indebtedness (Hirschon 2008; Rozakou 2016) or the socially embedded nature of market transactions, which are governed by moral codes (Sutton 2014a, 31–41).

¹⁴ The term crypto-colony (and crypto-colonialism) to describe Greece has not been universally accepted, and others would prefer alternative, perhaps less loaded terms, such as "mediated sovereignty" (Tom Gallant, pers. comm.). But even before Herzfeld's 2002 paper, scholars in history (for example, Fleming 1999) or comparative literature (for instance, Gourgouris 1996; Calotychos 2003) would talk about the need to discuss Greece within the framework of colonial and postcolonial studies, introducing at the same time terms such as "surrogate colonialism" (Fleming 1999, 151–152) or "self-colonisation" (Calotychos 2003, 47–53). In my own work (2007, 2008, 2011), I have claimed that the study of the constitution of national archaeology and its workings demonstrate that the colonial effects that accompanied the formation of Modern Greece are concretely and materially felt, even today. Furthermore, and in tandem with recent calls, especially by scholars from South America (Mignolo 2011), I have stressed the need for an ongoing, decolonial process for archaeology and more broadly, which goes beyond postcolonialism. Since 2009, the colonial nature of the relationship between Greece and Western powers has been debated in public, as well as in academia. Indeed, the expression «αποικία χρέους» (debt colony) is often used by various political commentators to describe the current predicament of Greece, and this was also the title of a book by Nikos Kotzias (2013), who has been the Foreign Minister of the country since 2015. But it is often forgotten that such a financial colonial entanglement was in place since the foundation of the state, although its specific shape and the various agents involved vary significantly. See, for example, Gekas 2013, and especially the section entitled "Greece: a debt colony since 1832." Scholars and others now call for a renewed, historically informed debate on the colonial constitution of Greece, using a comparative framework which would include other "crypto-colonies," "debt colonies," or even colonies proper (Papailias 2016).

¹⁵ This is a derogatory term often used in contemporary Greek public discourse to denote a submissive person and one who is completely subjugated (including in sexual terms) to the authority of an official or a person in power. The reference here to the Ottoman heritage and to young boys at the service of Ottoman officials is clear. (Note also the diminutive form.)

¹⁶ Note that the text of *filonoi.gr* 2014 has been reproduced in several other blogs. Judging by its contents, the blog is clearly conspiratorial, with extreme right-wing tendencies.

¹⁷ For the early excavations up to 2002 and the relevant archaeological bibliography, see Koukoulis-Chrysanthaki 2002.

¹⁸The new phase of excavation (post-2012) cited concerns over looting and so justified itself as a rescue operation. Under these terms, there was no legal obligation on the part of the excavators to submit to the Central Archaeological Council (KAS) a detailed proposal on research aims and methods, as happens with all systematic research excavations in Greece.

¹⁹See, for example, an interview of the director of the excavation, Katerina Peristeri, for *Kathimerini*, on 7 February 2013: “The dimensions of the peribolos wall indicate that it is something unique, dated to the last quarter of the fourth century BC, a period after the death of Alexander the Great, while at the same time they reveal that it [the peribolos] hides the tomb or the tombs of important personalities of the era, amongst them the wife of Alexander the Great, Roxani, and his son, Alexander the Fourth” (Athens News Agency-Macedonian Press Agency 2013).

²⁰See, for example, the views of the geoarchaeologist member of the team, Evangelos Kambouroglou, which were formally announced at the March 2015 Thessaloniki meeting on the Archaeological Activity in Macedonia and Thrace and were reported in *Myrtsioti* 2015.

²¹There are hundreds of stories on this visit in the media. The quotations are taken from *naftemboriki.gr* 2014. See also *ekathimerini.com* 2014.

²²These ideas are linked to well-known, worldwide apocryphal hypotheses of the so-called hollow earth in circulation since antiquity.

²³Outside the lecture hall in which the October 2015 meeting was held, students of history and archaeology had placed purple posters entitled “The corpse of Amphipolis stinks of nationalism” (Polymenis 2015). Throughout this period, several archaeologists had publicly expressed their serious doubts of the empirical validity of the claims of the Amphipolis team (for example, Adam-Veleni 2015), while some saw the phenomenon as a symptom of wider national stereotypes on ancient glory and biological continuity (for instance, Plantzos 2014). The Athens University Professor Olga Palagia questioned in many media appearances the dating of the monument (favoring a later date) and was thus targeted by several media outlets as doubting the Hellenicity of the monument. As a reaction, a petition was signed by 140 archaeologists and historians, protesting her right to question the excavators’ interpretation.

²⁴A day after I had completed a first draft of this article, I found myself in Vancouver, Canada, for an academic meeting. The Indian-Sikh taxi driver who ferried me from the airport to the city exclaimed, upon hearing that I am from Greece, “Iskandar!” He was keen to know how big his “house” is, and it soon became obvious to me that he considered Alexander to be still alive. On the legacy of Alexander in colonial India, see Vasunia 2013, and in relation to the conflict over Macedonia, Danforth 2003.

²⁵The word σπλάχνα has been extensively used in the public discourses over Amphipoli; see, for example: «Δύο πανέμορφες καρνάτιδες έκρυβε στα σπλάχνα της η Αμφίπολη» (Amfipoli hid in its σπλάχνα, two stunningly beautiful caryatids; Lambrakis Press Group 2014b); «Σκανάρισμα στα ‘σπλάχνα’ του Λόφου της Αμφίπολης» (Scanning the «σπλάχνα» of the Amfipolis hill; *amfipoli-news.com* 2016); «Μπαίνουμε ‘στα σπλάχνα’ του τάφου» (We are entering the «σπλάχνα» of the tomb; *iefimerida.gr* 2014). The mound here is a human body which hides or preserves and nurtures in its inner organs, not only treasures but also secrets and truths.

²⁶By using the term “oneiric” here, I invoke the dream work of national imagination (Gourgouris 1996), the role of dreaming as way of producing a sense of history (Stewart 2012), and the entanglement of archaeology with dreaming, especially within the national discourse; see, for example, the case of Manolis Andronikos (Hamilakis 2007).

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