ATHENS FROM 1456 TO 1920

The Town under Ottoman Rule and the 19th-Century Capital City

To Alex, Io and Nikos

New Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

This Evening, THURSDAY, June 17, 1824.

His Majesty's Servants will perform O'Keefe's Comedy of

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Rover, Mr. ELLISTON,
Harry Thunder, Mr. PENLEY, Banks, Mr. POWELL,
John Dory, Mr. TERRY, Farmer Gammon, Mr. G. SMITH
Ephraim Smooth, (1st time) Mr. BROWNE,
Sim, Mr. KNIGHT,
Lamp, Mr. YARNOLD, Trap, Mr. W. H. WILLIAMS,
Muz, Mr. Harrold, Twitch, Mr. Webster, Landlord, Mr. Howell,
Zachariah, Miss Carr, Waiter, Mr. Randall,
Ruffians, Messrs. Honnor, Povey, Read,
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The principal Characters by
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Mr. YOUNGE, Mr. MERCER, Mr. G. SMITH, Mr. WEBSTER.
Mr. HARROLD, Mr. BLANCHARD, Mr. HOWELL.
Miss S. BOOTH, Miss SMITHSON, Mrs. ORGER.

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And the whole of the CORPS de BALLET.

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EXTERIOR of FISHERMAN's HUT.....(Roberts)
INTERIOR of TURKISH COTTAGE..................*(Andrews)*
Fortifications of Athens, *(Marinari)*
Interior of the PACHA's PALACE,.....(Marinari)
CHAMBER IN DITTO, WITH DISTANT VIEW OF THE
ACROPOLIS,....*(Roberts)*
Exterior of the PACHA's PALACE,
With VIEW of the SEA and DISTANT ISLANDS.
(Marinari.)

☞ ***TICKETS** issued for the 4th of June, will be admitted this Evening, but those sold at the Doors will not be received.*

ATHENS FROM 1456 TO 1920

The Town under Ottoman Rule and the 19th-Century Capital City

Dimitris N. Karidis

Tale of a City
or,
An Essay on Urban History

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Preface

From an urban historian's point of view Athens is a unique town. This is so, not because of her glorious past and its ancient monuments (which, anyway, is true), or, perhaps, because of an amiable contemporary urban environment (which, definitely, is not the case), but by virtue of the fact that, from the time she came under Ottoman rule well into the first century after being nominated capital city of the Greek state, its urban and cultural development has been an invigorating adventure through the meandering routes of history. It is really astonishing how quickly prosperity and decline, development and recession, glory and contempt changed places in the case of Athens. This book intends to explore at least a part of this adventurous, and relatively little known, process of development.

Almost thirty years ago, when I first embarked upon the research of Ottoman urban history in Greece, trying to find my way among books of paralysing dullness, Greek historiography could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered to have even scarcely approached the subject. Towns were, most of the time, absent form the bulk of historical research, whereas villages were given a privileged position, unthoughtfully considered to 'fit' best in a supposed backward-looking Ottoman feudal context. Confusion cast its shadow over an understanding of the process of urban development, whereas a veil of ignorance covered, in particular, the period of the early Ottoman years. As a result, what was written, but for a few exceptions, was marred by an inadequacy of approach. On that occasion I had raised critical and polemical arguments against a specific historian's view that ignored the importance of towns. It should also be reminded that Ottoman archival sources were as yet unknown, or inaccessible, to Greek scholars. One refers mainly to the series of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century tax registers (*tahrir defters*), on which Omer Lutfi Barkan had based his pioneering works on Ottoman demographic history, ever since the 1940s. During the last three decades, amidst growing debates among scholars on the hermeneutic character of 'Defterology', a genre emerged, as Colin Heywood put it, 'a fully-fledged sub-discipline of Ottoman historical studies', a profusion of valuable new approaches came into being, mostly related to the economic and social aspect of development of areas under the Ottomans. The prophecy of Bruce McGowan, who, in the early 1980s, had stated on behalf of these Ottoman sources that 'archival research will provide most of the new facts and most of the surprises in the decades to come', came true. So it is highly unfortunate that Greek scholars were for long unable to take cognizance of that precious archival material. Should that lack of information be attributed to a purposeful reluctance of the Greek national historiography to move even one step further the 'boundaries' set by nineteenth-century ideological constraints? It seems that one must relinquish this option. At least since 1974, modern Greek historiography, represented mainly by a generation of un-prejudiced younger scholars, has given clear signs of its intention to proceed to a fresh re-evaluation of its subject matter, repudiating a series of, mostly nineteenth-century, dangerous clichés, which, having become fossilized, pertained to the panoply of a culture almost defeating common sense.

In 1985, in collaboration with Dr Machiel Kiel, our study on the *Egriboz Sanjak, 1466–1570*, was published (in Greek), based on this category of archival sources, providing valuable insight into a poorly documented area of Greece during that period. Kiel and I had met for the first time in mid-1980. By that time, I had completed my Ph.D. thesis on the urban structure of Athens under Ottoman rule indicating, for the first time in Greek urban historiography, the importance of (published) Ottoman registers. M. Kiel, on the other side, had already made extensive use of unpublished Ottoman material, focusing, however, almost exclusively on the field of the history of architecture. Thus, our 1985 publication was the first, at least within the borders of Greek historiography, to portray the relationship between urban Ottoman history and unpublished Ottoman archival sources. The next work we concluded in common, once again in the field of urban history, came in 2000, with an urban and regional study of the island of Lesvos and the urban development of its capital town, Mytilene. I dare say that in both studies the importance of towns within the Ottoman feudal system was well documented and the role of even medium-sized urban centres in the development process was established on a sound basis.

Notwithstanding the advancement of Ottoman studies, both in Greek and foreign historiography over recent years, urban studies do not seem to be the favourite research-field of scholars within the realm of these historiographies, since socio-economic and political studies take pride of place. Usually, it is only in the context of demographic studies that an understanding of urban development, either within the macro- or micro-historical level, has been attempted. But even on that occasion, scholarship was mostly reserved for historians (by profession), and not for architectural or urban historians. It is also my belief that modern Greek historiography has not truly overcome the erroneous assumption of the negligible role assigned to urban centres under Ottoman rule, of urban development and feudalism being mutually exclusive, even though, by now, a firm grasp of the overall history of the Ottoman Empire seems to have been established. I must confess that these parameters dictated the incentives for writing the present book.

If the intention, at this juncture, is to give a bird's eye view of the contents of the book in hand and its own rationale, perhaps I should start by saying that I have avoided any *a priori* conceptualisation of Athens on the basis of broad cultural dichotomies. I am referring either to Pierre Pinon's 'Turko-Balkan' and 'Arabo-Ottoman' distinction (on the basis of architectural typologies and urban morphologies), or to the even broader bifurcation of Ottoman civilization implied in the classical approach of Gibb and Bowen, who introduced the antithesis among the Ottoman regions in Anatolia and the Balkans, on one side, and the Arabic speaking provinces on the other. Nor have I attempted to identify similarities to, or variations of a specific model or prototype town. On the contrary, I have preferred to argue in favour of the *singularity* of Athens, as of any other Ottoman and Mediterranean town, in accordance with what Edhem Eldem, Daniel Goffman and Bruce Masters described in *The Ottoman City between East and West*. I have also decided to look for 'the order that a given space – the space of the defence, or the commercial and production activities, and the religious and social convictions of a given culture – has imprinted on all preceding ones', as Roberto Berardi had once rightly remarked. For a town such as Athens, seen against its vast cultural background, either as a town under the Ottomans or as the capital city of Greece, the quest for this order is of primary importance. Then, I should point to the fact that Ottoman Athens and the nineteenth-century capital, a feudal town and a capitalist (or, better, a capitalist-like) city respectively, are set under the same roof – I mean co-examined – in the present volume.

Against the conventional dichotomy juxtaposing a small pre-capitalist urban settlement to a large modern capital-city, I prefer to examine the passage from one stage of development to the other, where ethno-religious, economic and political parameters defined the realm of urban transformations that took place. Indeed, throughout urban history, there have been many towns that marched from feudalism to capitalism, but, it must be acknowledged, it is an almost unique situation for a town of the past to become transformed into a modern city, by overthrowing its political regime, by introducing an altogether different ethno-religious social structure, not least by being nominated capital city of a new-born state. To become aware of the vicissitudes inscribed in this passage from one stage to the other offers a better understanding of the problems associated with the implementation of the first plan prepared for the capital of Greece – an issue examined *in extenso* in Part Two. Yet, much earlier, Athens had gone through another period of evolution. The physiognomy of the town had radically changed in the passage from the small cluster of houses, during the late Frankish period, protected by the Late-Roman fortification wall, to the vast unfortified town, under Ottoman rule, expanding well beyond that wall. Few people are aware that during the apogee of Ottoman power, early in the sixteenth century, Athens was fourth in rank (!) in terms of the size of its population among other Ottoman Balkan towns in the same period – almost 15,000 people. Contrary to what Travlos maintained in the 1960s, and concurred with by most later historians, since 1456 the development of this town had been spectacular. I argue that the fifteenth-century boom had been fuelled, as the result of conditions favouring an advanced town to countryside division of labour, by the abundance of a labour force provided by Albanian peasants that had settled in the area partly

before the arrival of the Ottomans and partly after the conquest, even by the numerous trade relationships between wealthy Athenian merchants and Venice. At a time when the English and the French were not yet 'in' Levantine trade these merchants provided La Serenissima with acorns, a product that was in great demand by her tanneries. One should also consider one additional factor, namely the favourable political-economic conditions established in the wider area after 1456. Indeed, the analysis of the structural characteristics of the early-Ottoman feudal regime provides the context by means of which these favourable conditions of (urban) development are disclosed. The symbiotic relationship established between early-Ottoman feudalism and the development of towns is firmly documented through reliable archival sources throughout the Balkans. The conditions of the appropriation of surpluses and the pattern of division of labour between the town and the countryside were such that they allowed for a rural production far above the level of subsistence, not least for an advanced trade and manufacturing activity. Early-Ottoman Athens shared such characteristics of prosperity. This is part of the story told in Part One of this book.

But my intention is *not* to write the story of Athens. What I mean is that I am strongly in favour of a history of structures, more or less along the Braudelian platform of the 'Annales' school, than in favour of a narration of events (including dates, specific events, names of persons, etc.). In this sense, the fact that during the last quarter of the eighteenth century the *voivod* of Athens pulled down one of the free-standing columns of the temple of Jupiter to build a mosque in the Athens *bazaar* is not of interest to me in this context. What is of interest is the conception itself, established during that period, of the sublime antique Athenian monuments and the way the rhapsodic European Enlightenment had declared its own understanding of the past – what defined the behavioural pattern pertaining either to the 'civilized' European dilettanti, or to a 'boorish' Ottoman official.

On a similar level, the emergence of a huge silk factory (1850–1860), notwithstanding the intriguing details related to the process of construction and the building itself, does concern me inasmuch as its presence in a specific part of the capital introduced a functional, and soon afterwards, social segregation – a pattern of social division of space between a 'clean' eastern and a 'dirty' western part of Athens, along a north–south axis.

Defiance of historical narrative is also present in (if not the result of) the adoption of both a macro- and micro-historical analysis. It is assumed that the attempt to understand urban development on the local level necessitates a macro approach, implying an overview of the conditions of development in a wider geographical context, both at the onset of Ottoman administration and during the early years of capital-city life in a new-born state. To serve the purpose of realignment of the two historical perspectives, two introductory chapters have been included in the present book, one for Ottoman Athens and another for the modern capital.

Let us leave aside such methodological assumptions and return to the early-Ottoman town. Strange though it might appear, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century flourishing town was of a minor administrative significance. At that time only eleven Muslim families lived within its borders, and one could hardly discern any Ottoman character on the spot. Typical Ottoman buildings were either very modest in appearance (mosques, *hamams*) or were altogether absent (*bezestens, khans*, *medreses*), and by no means had any large-scale urban intervention taken place, as, for instance, those introduced in even medium-sized towns in the form of the *külliye* urban complexes that had ushered in an invigorating aspect of public realm. Yet, by the early 1600s Athens' heyday was over, the town having entered into a process of decay. As the power of the Ottoman feudal regime steadily diminished, the land-tenure conditions and the administrative system in Athens underwent a substantial metamorphosis. As the superior political coordination of wealthy Christian and Muslim landowners outmanoeuvred any peasant resistance, conditions resulted in an aggravation of the material living conditions of the productive population, halting any further urban development. Well before the last years of Ottoman rule, Athens had withdrawn into a small provincial town of minor economic importance and its population had decreased by almost 40% in relation to the era of Suleyman.

Nevertheless, it was during those late-Ottoman gloomy years of dearth and decimation that Athens became renowned throughout the countries of European Enlightenment, becoming once more the cultural beacon for those who had eyes to see and minds to think. At that time, whoever might have been hypnotized by the myth of Athens, by its artistic and cultural treasures, never omitted the opportunity to include this town in his travelling itinerary. In the 1750s Athens became the birthplace of those exquisite drawings illustrating *The Antiquities of Athens,* or of the legendary edition on *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce*. Concomitantly, the fact that some European visitors, mostly British and French, ardently embarked upon the lucrative activity of smuggling those same antique relics, is a sociological issue to be further analysed by readers in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European culture and society. It was also during that same depressed period of economic and social disintegration that the process of a gradual Islamic appearance was common in the town: new mosques with their spearheaded minarets, one *medrese*, several *hamams*, *sandirvans*, a typically-Ottoman open bazaar area – everything was there to be seen. It might be considered a paradox, but it was then, in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, that Athens became a fortified town once more!

The re-birth of that provincial town, in 1834, under the guise of the capital city of Greece, was followed by a newly inspired and well-documented city plan, which, as I argue in the penultimate chapter, most probably induced the involvement of the famous Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel in its elaboration. But within a few months the first plan was rejected. The outcome was a second plan, ill-defined and hastily prepared, which failed to provide the city with a much-needed at the time master plan. Judging by the facts, it appears that, in the aftermath of the abandonment of the original plan, comprehensive planning and centralized control of public works, as they had been essayed in central and western European cities in the second half of the nineteenth century, were to become incompatible with a 'build-as-you-please' practice foisted on the capital city ever since. Under such conditions, Athens was doomed to lag well behind other European modern-integrated cities. What were the reasons for this? Scholars, usually conventional historians, tend to look for an answer within a wider explanatory framework, focusing, among others, on a social structure dominated by the presence of a *comprador* bourgeoisie, and on conditions of capital accumulation and industrial development largely determined by the leading European powers – on factors that were, undoubtedly, the drivers of the type of urbanisation that this city was to experience throughout the nineteenth century. But in the case of architectural and urban historians the answer, most often, boils down to providing an exegesis for the rejection of the Kleanthes-Schaubert original planning proposal – the rejection itself standing as the 'original sin'. In this direction the plausible explanation focuses on the assumption that the specific urban restructuring affected vested land-ownership interests, triggering off a strong dissent on the part of a great many Athenian holders of real-estate.

But this is one line of thinking. I argue that, eventually, other factors might have determined the difficulty of having, as early as 1834, an officially approved master plan to guide future urban development. The emphasis, I believe, should irrevocably fall on the shift from the small town under Ottoman rule to the modern capital city of the Greek state. Architectural historians such as Bastea and Papageorgiou seem to have overlooked that the shift from one stage to the other was by no means an 'automatic' or unrestricted process. The new plan reflected a 'moment of transition' between an *ancien régime* and an altogether new economic, administrative-political, and social order. As I argue, at least on the sociological level, we have to discuss a key factor that becomes the urban historian's first imperative. On one side, this shift implied the quick transformation of a *community* to a *society*, the abandonment of a value-system of an all-powerful public realm in favour of a system based on the assumption that it was individualism that would provide the most effective incentives to social welfare. The fact that the strong economic and cultural bonds, which had for so many years enveloped and held together the small Athenian community, had to give way, within a very short period, to the notion of a state demanding altogether new conditions of social and

political understanding, should be, as I argue, taken seriously into account. The realm of the man-in-the-street, where private interests had ever merged for public good, could change character within a very short period. *Belonging* to a community, understood in terms of sharing common cultural characteristics, such as religion, language, customs, etc., – all cornerstones of strong solidarity – is quite different from *being a member* of a society, understood as an institution, as an 'externality', demanding obedience, whereupon each individual is a statistical element fixed within categories, amounts and mobile flows. Indeed, if this were so, how easy was it for Athens to cross the 'line' in 1834?

On the other side, ever since this town became a free city, the pendulum of its history swung dramatically between tradition and modernity, between an oriental and a western *mode de vie.* It is intriguing to note that, time and again during the euphoric nineteenth century, this city fought with its own past, if only because Athens engaged modernity on its own terms. The nineteenth-century dominant ideology in this country seems to have been the archetypal example of a desperate attempt to emphasize the ancient classical heritage of Greece at the expense of its Byzantine and post-Byzantine heritage. It was considered that those who tried to determine what exactly were the origins of the newly-born state engaged in a politically dangerous and socially antipathetic cultural analysis. The 'flag of the Great Idea' brandished a specific role of language and religion as the cornerstones of Hellenism. In fact the situation indicated a strong ambivalence as to what an 'oriental' or 'western' way of life might look like. Confusion was aroused only because both these two cultural domains were either misunderstood or purposefully ill defined: western-oriented approaches, in particular, that were considered to be a panacea invalidating and supplanting specific forms of past cultural expressions. Put in another way, it is as if the spirit of the age, the *zeitgeist*, were not properly understood against the spirit of the place, the *genius loci*. 'Oriental/traditional' soon became synonymous with a backward approach – 'western/modern' synonymous with a progressive attitude. In any case, the problem arising out of the interplay of the previous antithetical issues, of 'tradition' and 'modernism', was not resolved until after the Smyrna catastrophe, in 1922, when Greece faced the awful problem of assimilating refugees and Athens was compelled to settle 'within its walls' hundreds of thousands of newcomers. Those people represented an advanced cultural tradition, whose broad lineaments were established on a close encounter between the Oriental and the Western world. The outcome was that the nineteenth-century and artificially created cultural background of the Athenian 'brave new city', which for its own reasons of 'national pride', or whatever, had turned its back upon every single aspect of anything that lay in between antiquity and the modern era and would now be seriously affected by the re-emergence of the 'past'.

On its own terms the issue affected the early nineteenth-century urban development. This is so because within the previous ideological-political context the outcome of urban development in Athens should be judged not by any non-alignment of Athenian urbanism with a modern European-type city model, but it should be examined against *its role within the process of constant reproduction itself of that ill-conceived ideology.* The whole series of 'anomalies', misunderstandings, discontinuities, etc., indicate a quasi-colonial character of urban development having been implemented in this city. All in all, by the 1900s a twofold character of urban development in nineteenth-century Athens was clear: deliberate acts of planning, implying decisions being taken by a the central authority on one hand, and incongruous 'accidents' as a result of isolated individual practice on the other. In the turning point from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, a period characterized by economic instability, political agitation and social upheavals, Athens had acquired its own social division of space, very much like any other centrally planned city in Europe. The rigid geometrical pattern, an intrinsic part of the 1834 plan of the capital city (or the remains of that plan), externalised that division in a most rudimentary form – an eastern and a western part divided by a north to south axis: *Athenas* Street. By 1920, which is the end of the period of urban development examined in this book, the population in Athens hardly exceeded 350,000 people.

Athenian urban development, between roughly 1830 and 1920, as examined through the prism of economic,

political and social analyses in the penultimate chapter, allows plenty of room for a survey of its physical aspects, especially from 1910 and 1920. This comes in the last chapter. In this context I thought it appropriate to focus on the *Plan Préliminaire pour le Développement et l'Extension de la Ville*, prepared for Athens by the charismatic and leading British landscape-architect of the 1920s, Thomas Hayton Mawson – 'of London and Lancaster' as he liked to style himself. Although the latter's participation in the planning team for the re-design of Thessaloniki following the great fire in 1917 is well documented, the opposite is true as regards his involvement in the planning history of the capital of Greece. To my knowledge, this book is the first time that Mawson's *Plan*, conceived as a 'grand' synthesis, fuelled by this architect's strong desire to endow the most renowned capital city with what he considered to be the best planning principles of the time, is thoroughly analysed and evaluated.

Readers will agree that what should matter most in a book such as this would not be to enumerate the events and protagonists featuring in that long period of urban development, but, rather, to detect the *modus operandi* of that historical process, to provide hermeneutic means for unveiling the conditions that determine the shift from one phase to the other. An urban historian is aware that the city offers a privileged scale for dissecting the social body, but, on the other hand, he or she is also aware that an approach on the urban level entails a certain difficulty. At first, it is a matter of understanding, on the macro-historical level, the wider context within which urban development takes place. Subsequently it is a matter of explaining *inertia*, by which spatial configuration is characterised as regards changes on the economic, social and political level. The notion of inertia in urban analysis demands the determination of specific sub-periods of urban development that may not coincide with those determined on other levels of analysis: economic, social, or political. Just as the plan of a city may not change for years following a political event of major importance, so might streets survive on the city map, even if pavement life along those streets has been much reduced or has changed character. But this is my job! As an architect and an urban historian, I have to be aware of such a 'problem' and tackle it appropriately. It is for the reader to judge whether this has been successfully elaborated or not.

As for the sources consulted in this present study, the majority come under the category of *archival* sources, some published here for the first time. These sources are divided into two groups. The first refers to the previously mentioned Ottoman registers, concluded mainly during the 'classical' period of the Ottoman Empire, offering reliable information on demographic issues as well as on local production and taxation – such issues being the cornerstone of urban development. These sources were not immediately accessible. The second group originates from the vast area of French and British Archives in Paris, Marseilles and London, including trade statistics, consular reports, architectural drawings, etc., all concluded during the post-classical period of the Ottoman Empire. I was directly involved in the study of this group of archival sources. Over a span of almost ten years I worked in such inspiring places as the evocative Manuscript Department of the British Library (not on Euston Road!) and the inverted ziggurat that is the modern Public Record Office at Kew, both in London, the 'atmospheric' and imposing environment of the 'Archives Nationales' in Paris, the small and sympathetic reading room of the 'Chambre du Commerce et d'Industrie de Marseilles', together with the friendly reading rooms of the 'Archives Départementales-de-Bouche-du-Rhone', both in Marseilles. Apparently, the two groups of sources, Ottoman and English/French, are complementary with regard to the whole historical period concerned. Putting an emphasis on archival sources should not imply that I have underestimated European visitors' travelogues, in particular those primary sources of peripatetic literature that have constituted a useful empirical basis of research.

*

All good Prefaces end by enumerating those who, in one way or another, should be thanked for their involvement in the writing of the book. I will not deviate

from the rule, even if the list is rather short and for which I feel reluctant to apologise. It definitely includes my very good friend and companion in historical research Machiel Kiel, who, very much like a Benedictine Monk, tirelessly, time and again went through Ottoman palaeography in search of the Truth; the historian Nikolai Todorov, former ambassador of the former 'People's Republic of Bulgaria' in Greece, who, some thirty years ago, shared with me important remarks on issues of methodological approach, even offering me his own book on the *Balkan Town*, at that time still unknown in Greece; Prof. Gönul Tankut, a colleague on the other side of the Aegean, with whom views were exchanged following her seminal text on Nauplion, on the occasion of my visit at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, where I was honoured to be asked to plant a tree to foster Hellenic-Turkish friendship; London-based architect Nikos Karydis, lecturer at the University of Kent, an ardent historian and confirmed classicist, who first came up with a critical question as regards the first plan of the capital city of Greece, to be answered, I hope, in the present book; the architect and landscape-urbanist, Io Karydi, whose useful remarks on the contents of the present book usually surfaced at exactly the moment I thought everything had been properly put down – although they were not; *Ingegniere* Massimo Giudicci, a brilliant, broad-minded manager, whom it is my intention to put on the list not in gratitude for supporting the publishing of a book on Mytilene, which fostered the study of Ottoman archival sources, but, rather, because I have been the beneficiary of his conscientious openness towards scholars of history; and finally, the 'anonymous' (following his own demand), and for years friend of mine, whose large collection of rare books and drawings on Athens were kindly put at my disposal. At the end of the list come all those whom I have forgotten to mention; I hope they will content themselves with a copy of this present volume. Finally, contrary to common practice, there is no one to whom I might be 'beholden' or 'indebted' in writing this book, no one without whose presence 'this book might never have been written'. Usually, in the case of male authors, such acknowledgements are addressed to their wives. There is no such need for me – it was well taken care of in my previous book.

It goes without saying that I lay sole claim to any errors or misinterpretations in the present volume.

D. N. K.
Autumn 2012, Athens