Greece has entered a fourth year of crisis that has gone beyond both economic and political spheres to plague the very fabric of society. International news reports of riots and protests have exposed a deteriorating situation (Fig. 1). Further, the growing support of fascism that has infested the government and the proliferation of racism are visible in the reports of human rights abuses (see Lawrence 2007; the Cultural Anthropology forum “Beyond the ‘Greek Crisis’” [Papailias 2011]; also consider the “blood strawberries” social media campaign launched after the assault on migrant laborers in Nea Manolada on April 17, 2013). The government, chosen after several elections in 2012, continues to cooperate with the troika of international groups: the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Central Bank. At the mercy of the European community, the country and its people are holding on by a thread, while the fear of a default persists.

Archaeology is just one of many industries suffering from the failure of the welfare state because of its financial dependence on the government. Thus far, the state has chosen to reduce its investment in the management and preservation of archaeological sites and museums. Last year alone, austerity measures have required a 10-percent staff reduction from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which became the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports (hereafter the Ministry) following the June elections. Senior employees with high salaries were forced into retirement and the salaries of archaeologists who remained employed were cut drastically (see Kennedy 2012). The cuts also affected security personnel, which put sites at greater risk of looting (Ekathimerini.com 2012) and museums of robbery. Examples of this include the 2012 robberies of the National Art Gallery in Athens and the Museum for the History of the Olympic games at Olympia.

Within this forum, I clarify the detriments this crisis has on archaeology as an industry in Greece, both to the sites and for the people. As one would expect, the economic crisis has drastic economic effects on society,
of which archaeology is just a minor part. By identifying what Greek archaeology will face in this devastating atmosphere, we can begin to suggest options to improve the situation or at least to buckle down and wait for the worst to pass. We need to be aware of exactly what the ramifications of the crisis are and how to mitigate these effects. This culminates in two main issues:

1. Destruction of sites: specifically looting, damage from riots or other acts of vandalism, exposure to the elements, and the risk of destruction from development without excavation.
2. Unemployment and interruption of work: permits for excavation or access to research collections not issued, impediments to data collection, restrictions placed on scholarship undertaken by state archaeologists forced to maintain bureaucratic duties and inspect construction sites because of ‘redundancies,’ limited operation hours, and a lack of jobs and opportunities.

There are over 19,000 declared archaeological sites and 228 archaeological museums in this struggling country. In 2012, the Ministry decided that some sites and museums open to the public would function on a limited operating schedule. Meanwhile, others were closed. They also dictated that summer contract employees would not be appointed, as was usually the case due to increased summer tourism and traffic. Because the state-organized Ministry of Culture barely has enough funds for guarding
sites and holding rescue excavations, they are less able to undertake research, publication, and community outreach now more than ever (see Sakellariadi 2010 concerning public outreach). Suffering from a severely cut budget, these activities fall lower on the list of priorities and are easily cast aside.

The Association of Greek Archaeologists (AGA), led by President Despina Koutsoumba, focuses on promoting awareness of how the current economic policies are destructive to archaeology and heritage. A recent international campaign started by the AGA on Facebook titled, “I support Greek cultural heritage against IMF/EU [European Union] cuts,” has gained close to 4,000 “Likes” since its creation in December 2012. In February 2013, a petition was prepared for delivery to the president of the Hellenic Republic, the prime minister, the Greek parliament, the Ministry of Culture, the EU parliament, and the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This petition is an appeal to save the Byzantine ruins discovered during rescue excavations for the construction of the metro in Thessaloniki (Association of Greek Archaeologists 2012). The approved plan removes the in situ monuments and artifacts to an ex-army camp that is miles away from their original place of discovery (Fig. 2). The petitioners believe this is not only a subversion of Greek and international law, but it also ruins the authenticity of the artifacts, puts the antiquities in danger, and fails to consider the connection of local residents to their past. Instead, the organizers are appealing for a review of the decision. They are requesting alternative solutions be considered and a public vote be taken. As

FIG. 2  
A monumental gate uncovered during the rescue excavations at Thessaloniki. (Photo courtesy of the Association of Greek Archaeologists.)
of April 2013, the petition has over 12,000 signatures. This international outpouring of support reflects the continued interest in our shared archaeological world heritage. However, the authorities in charge of accomplishing the job may be more focused on completing the project rather than maintaining social directives.

The decisions of the Ministry affect the security of heritage as well as the livelihood of guards, tour guides, archaeologists, and others. Further, the situation of closed and limited sites is debilitating to visitors, especially those from abroad. This atmosphere of crisis has wreaked havoc on the tourism industry, fueled by political upheaval and the fear of default. Mirroring this trend, visits to the state’s archaeological heritage sites is also stunted, leading to reduced revenue. A new campaign has since been launched by the Greek National Tourism Organization under the slogan “Greece: All Time Classic” (see Poutetsi 2012). Greek heritage is commoditized in this effort to bolster the flow of foreign monies into the country.

While foreign tourist numbers decline, foreign archaeological institutes and projects are forced to struggle alongside those organized by the state. The Italian Archaeological School in Athens has been struggling against budget cuts and is again faced with the possibility of closure (for a petition to save the school, see Foresta 2012). Meanwhile, a number of archaeological projects were impeded by the problems of management at the Ministry where access to sites and museums was not granted because of the lack of personnel. The Greek law, Protection of Antiquities (3028/2002), restricts foreign work and requires that such projects remain under supervision of Ministry officials, specifically those of the Archaeological Service. Because of the lack of funding for hiring archaeologists to monitor these projects, some were cancelled. Koutsoumba claims that the government only funds new research projects that have foreign partners because of contracts that oblige them to do so (Phillips 2012). However, this is not always the case.

An example of this drawn from a discussion last summer on an Aegean Bronze Age listserv reveals solidarity, but also limitations placed upon assistance. Foreign archaeologists began to inquire about how to aid their Greek counterparts during this time of crisis. Suggestions included monitoring regions where they work to document possible looting, educating students about the effects of the crisis, reaching out to respective institutes and schools to offer help, and advertising the campaigns of the AGA (see Plantzos 2013 regarding another of the AGA’s campaigns). Further suggestions included asking the Ministry for a prioritized list of necessary excavations and surveys that need assistance or even revoking the restrictions placed on excavations organized by foreign schools. A Ministry official who responded to this inquiry immediately rejected the latter proposals. Instead, financial aid was requested for projects and to help establish more infrastructure (i.e. building museums, storage rooms, or buying property for future excavations) (Archives of the Aegeanet 2012). As all archaeologists know, funding is hard to come by and even foreign archaeologists struggle to finance projects.

A great deal of financial support for Greek archaeological and conservation projects, and the building and renovating of cultural institutions comes from the European Commission. These funds can be used to build museums, but there are stipulations that the money cannot be used to maintain their functioning costs, or to finance archaeological excavations or research outright unless the expenses can be billed as educational activities or for tourism. This has produced an unbelievable phenomenon that continues to be perpetuated by the system; that is, the recent completion or ongoing construction of new facilities that cannot be maintained. Such obliviousness goes beyond questioning the very reason to build museums even though there is no public demand for them (see Sykka 2008). Unfortunately for museums, expenses related to maintenance cannot be covered by a state straddling the possibility of bankruptcy.

The Byzantine Museum of Didymoteicho and the Polygyros Archaeological Museum are examples of this problem. At Didymoteicho in northeast Thrace, the museum was completed in 2009, built on a plot provided by the city after approval in 1994. It has yet to be opened or even filled with exhibitions, but stands vacant (Kontrarou-Passia 2010). A contract for the building of vitrines was recently endorsed, but work proceeds slowly. Meanwhile, in May 2012 work began at the Archaeological Museum at Polygyros (Fig. 3). The project, funded by the National
Strategic Reference Framework 2007–2013, includes an anti-seismic retrofit to the old building and an expansion of space for storage, exhibitions, and workrooms. While the EU money provided covers the building’s renovation, there is no money designated for the creation of exhibitions, the hiring of staff, or for the continued maintenance of the building and grounds. The museum is scheduled for completion in September 2013, but the budget needed to run the museum remains absent. Without proper planning, such construction projects are futile even if done with external funding. These two examples demonstrate that while work progresses in the country, projects are unsustainable. Furthermore, both projects fail to maintain their responsibility to local communities: to be open and accessible.

Recently, the European Commission announced that the budget for 2014–2020 would be scaled back 13 percent (Abbott 2013). Previously, Greece received awards because funds are earmarked to improve infrastructure in and competitiveness of poorer regions in the eurozone. Meanwhile, the European Commission denies responsibility for increased antiquities trafficking because of their major investments, despite the Greek government’s spending cuts (Phillips 2012). Without a greater share of EU funds for cultural heritage, archaeology in Greece will have greater difficulties staying relevant and protecting antiquities. We must keep in mind that this is part of a wider Mediterranean crisis and similar cuts have also been made in Italy (see Kington 2012).

At this time, we must ask: what are our priorities? The official unemployment prediction for Greece in 2013 is 30.1 percent, double the figure calculated at the beginning of 2010. (The average unemployment rate of

**FIG. 3**
The Archaeological Museum at Polygyros being renovated. (Photo by C. Howery.)
the eurozone is 11.7 percent in comparison). The unemployed include archaeologists, conservators, museologists, and others who sought careers in the industry. In a crippled economy, where more people are fired than hired, what options are there to earn a livelihood? Both saving antiquities and creating jobs are vital, but investing in human lives surpasses heritage in importance. With youth unemployment soaring to over 60 percent, how can we teach the next generation to value archaeological heritage, much less train or employ them to save it? For now, initiatives to maintain and protect what has been found outweigh discovering more artifacts that will need to be preserved. Until the situation becomes more stable, we must find ways to deal with present limitations. If this is the case, though, what job opportunities are created and how are we protecting the Greek—our shared—heritage? More questions than solutions can be conjured, but somehow our values will either be maintained or will evolve in the face of economic disaster.

References


RESPONSE
Cultural Tourism in Greece at a Time of Economic Crisis
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In September 2008 I watched the global financial crisis develop on television in Athens. Custodians at archaeological sites were already nervous and shared quite openly their fears about the economic impact on their personal situations. Little did we realize how severe the situation would become, especially for Greece. These events coincided with the limited public opening of the New Acropolis Museum situated to the south of the Athenian Acropolis (Pandermalis and Tschumi 2008)
The formal opening of this stunning new venue took place in June 2009 and it allowed visitors to Athens to view, in a carefully planned way, the wide range of archaeological material derived from this major urban sanctuary. Visitors could encounter archaic korai, votives from the sanctuaries nestling in the crags of the Acropolis, as well as the remaining Parthenon sculptures that are linked visually with the Temple of Athena to the north. The new architecture encourages a dialogue between the architectural monuments and the carefully protected artifacts (Caskey 2011).

In 2009 the building attracted over 800,000 visitors (AFP 2010) and 1.3 million in 2010 (AFP 2011), but there were declines in 2011 and 2012 (1.2 million and 1 million respectively) (Fig. 2). This may have been in part due to political unrest and violent demonstrations that took place in central Athens. However, it could also be linked to the natural decline of visitor numbers seen after the opening of new venues. In the same period the National Archaeological Museum attendance fell from 258,139 in 2009 to 170,034 in 2011, but had a marked rise in 2012 to 311,129 (Fig. 3). The visitor numbers for museums across Greece appear to show a steady decline from 2006, though the opening of the Acropolis Museum gave a welcome lift (Fig. 4). If the visitors for the Acropolis Museum and the National Archaeological Museum are removed, it suggests that visits to museums have stabilized between 2008 and 2012, fluctuating between 1.7 million (2009) and 1.5 million (2010). This is still a major decrease from the numbers seen in 2006.

The economic crisis seems to have negatively affected visitor numbers to archaeological sites in Greece (Fig. 5). These numbers for 2010 were down by 7.1 percent from 2009, although museums reported an increase of 11.5 percent for the same period, which is likely explained by the significant number of people visiting the Acropolis.

**FIG. 1**  
The Acropolis Museum in Athens, adjacent to the Theatre of Dionysos, as seen from the Athenian Acropolis in 2008.  
(Photo by D. W. J. Gill.)
FIG. 2
Admissions to the Acropolis Museum in Athens from its opening in June 2009 through 2012.

FIG. 3
Admissions to the National Archaeological Museum in Athens from 2006 through 2012.
The combined number of visitors to both archaeological sites and museums looks stronger (Fig. 6), although decreases are masked by the large numbers of visitors to museums and sites in Athens. The United Kingdom Office for National Statistics indicated that there was a reduction of 5 percent in the number of British tourists travelling to Greece in 2012 (down to 1.8 million). The planned closure of archaeological museums and sites, as well as the disruption in the spring of 2013 due to industrial action, are likely to have further impact on visitor numbers and income. However, in 2011 there was an increase in the combined numbers of visitors to museums and archaeological sites (see Fig. 6). This alone contributed some €48 million to the Greek economy through ticket sales (Fig. 7). Note that this excludes additional spending associated with cultural visits, such as hotels, restaurants, and transport.

These figures can be compared with the 5.2-million paying visitors to English Heritage sites in 2011–2012 (English Heritage 2012). In addition, there are some 1.12 million members of English Heritage. Both tickets sales and membership fees generated £35.1 million, and retail and catering £12.6 million. For the same period, Historic Scotland welcomed 3.4 million visitors, with some 122,500 members (Historic Scotland 2012). Additionally, Historic Scotland generated some £31.5 million through ticket sales and its retail outlets.

The economic downturn also coincided with the completion of the restoration of a series of buildings on the Athenian Acropolis (Bouras, Ioannidou, and Jenkins 2012). In late 2009 the scaffolding came down from around the Propylaia, the monumental gateway (Figs. 8–9). It is perhaps ironic that its walls show that lifting bosses had been left in place (rather than being

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**FIG. 4**

Visitors to all museums in Greece from 2006 through 2012. The adjusted figures remove the visitors for the Acropolis Museum and the National Archaeological Museum.
FIG. 5
Visitors to all archaeological sites in Greece from 2005 through 2012. The figures for the second half of 2012 were not available at the time of writing this article.

FIG. 6
Visitors to all museums and archaeological sites in Greece from 2005 through 2012. The figures for the second half of 2012 were not available at the time of writing this article.
flattened) as the construction work in the late 430s BCE came to halt as war loomed and financial restraints came into place (Tomlinson 1990). Other restored buildings on the Acropolis include the Temple of Athena Nike, the Erechtheion, and the Parthenon itself. Such work has stabilized deterioration due to atmospheric pollution as well as enhanced the visitor experience. While it is too early to detect an increase in numbers from the period before the restoration was completed, some 1.3 million visitors came in 2011 (Fig. 10). A similar upward trend can be detected for Knossos (with a peak of 623,338 in 2011) and Olympia (with a peak of 438,452 in 2011).

Howery identifies two key issues for Greece: the destruction of archaeological sites and the effect on archaeological projects. It could be argued that unexcavated and, indeed, unidentified archaeological sites can be seen as a source of revenue in an economic downturn. If objects can be removed from Greece and sold on the international market, then the finders (and especially the agents in the middle) can make substantial money. In February 2012 a number of items were seized from one of the archaeological museums at Olympia, resulting in the three arrests in Patras later that year (Gill 2012: 64; noted by Catherine Morgan in Archibald 2011–2012: 1). In December 2012 two men were given life sentences for pillaging an archaic cemetery in northern Greece. Some $15.85 million worth of objects were seized (Gill 2012: 64). In May 2010 a pair of kouroi was seized (Gill 2010a: 74). They had an estimated value of some $12 million and are likely to have been removed from the site of Tegea.

The same period has seen the return of important objects to Greece, including a religious calendar known to derive from Thorikos in Attica and a fragment of a funerary relief. Both were returned to Greece by the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2011 (Gill 2012: 64). However, little action seems to have been taken by the Greek authorities to make claims on objects identified from the Schinousa photographic archive (Tsirongiannis 2012; see also Gill
Fig. 8
Restoration work on the sanctuary of Athena Nike and the Propylaia on the Athenian Acropolis in 2006. (Photo by D. W. J. Gill.)

Fig. 9
Restoration work on the northeast entrance to the sanctuary of Athena Nike on the Athenian Acropolis in 2006. (Photo by D. W. J. Gill.)
This in spite of material from the archive being identified in public collections in Madrid and on the London antiquities market (Gill 2010a). The expense of pursuing the return of items such as a Minoan larnax and a pithos identified from images in the Becchina archive through legal channels could be prohibitively expensive in the current economic climate (Gill 2009a; 2010a: 73). Yet at the inter-governmental level there seems to be an interest in addressing the problem. In 2010 Greece approached the United States (US) government to sign onto a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to impose import restrictions on cultural property derived from Greece, which was signed in 2011 (Gill 2010a: 73–74; 2011a).

Some asserted during the MOU negotiations that the international community should overlook looting in Greece due to the economic downturn and its impact on the country. Some argue that antiquities would be better looked after if they were moved to public and private collections in northern Europe or North America. Such a position overlooks the scale of looting in Mediterranean countries that has been demonstrated by the 2004 conviction of Giacomo Medici, an Italian art dealer who was convicted of large-scale international trafficking in stolen ancient artifacts (Watson and Todeschini 2007; see also Gill 2009b).

The effect of the current economic crisis on archaeological field work has been discussed elsewhere (e.g., Archibald 2011–2012). There is also the issue of unemployment in Greece: in February 2013 it stood at 27.0 percent, compared with 12.2 percent for Europe (figures published in May 2013). However, youth unemployment stands (in late May 2013) at 64.2 percent. The lack of money available from the public sector restricts access to work in museums and archaeology, which will have long-term consequences for the training of future archaeologists and museum curators in Greece.
Foreign institutes operating in Greece have not been immune to the economic crises in their home countries. For example, the Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene (the Italian Archaeological School in Athens), which celebrated its centenary in 2009, is now being threatened with closure. This disruption needs to be seen in a broader chronological perspective to include the disruptions to archaeological work in 1909 (Gill 2011b: 59). The economic pressures on the Greek government following the destruction of Smyrna and the resulting exchange of populations between Turkey and Greece in the 1920s brought about the opportunity for staff of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens to excavate in the Athenian Agora (Lord 1947: 177–78; Mauzy 2006). The depression of the 1930s made apparent the redundancy of staff at the British School at Athens (Gill 2004a), though some, like Winifred Lamb, used private income to sponsor archaeological work in the islands (such as Thermi on Lesbos: Lamb 1936; see also Gill 2004b).

What could be the short-term solution? The last few decades have seen public museums and private collectors spending tens of millions of dollars on “recently surfaced” antiquities that have subsequently been returned to countries such as Greece and Italy (Gill and Chippindale 2006; 2007; Gill 2010b). Such sums could have been spent on archaeological conservation, the development of museum collections, or archaeological site interpretation instead of being lost in the middle ground of dealers and galleries. Money invested in this positive way would have demonstrated a genuine interest in the past rather than a passion to own fragments of antiquity (Chippindale and Gill 2000).

Note

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1. Statistical information relating to visitors figures in Greece and presented in this response is derived from the Hellenic Statistical Service.

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**RESPONSE**

The Effects of the Economic Crisis on Greek Heritage: A View from the Private Cultural Sector

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Howery’s article offers a very clear and informative picture of the effects of the economic crisis on the public archaeological and cultural sector in Greece. The public cultural sector, however, is not the only victim of this crisis; Greece’s private cultural sector has also suffered a great deal. As the latter is absent from Howery’s paper, this short response seeks to remedy this by shedding some light on the effects of the economic crisis on the country’s private cultural sector.

Although the Greek private cultural sector is quite large and diverse, including several museums, learned societies, and non-profit cultural foundations, focus will be given on two of the most important and publicly recognized cultural institutions: the Benaki Museum and the Foundation of the Hellenic World. Both have suffered greatly, if not the most, during these long four years of austerity and recession.

The Benaki Museum is the oldest and biggest private museum in Greece, spread over eight different buildings (Fig. 1). The museum’s permanent collection includes a great range of artifacts that trace the development of Hellenic civilization from prehistory to the formation of the modern Greek state. Moreover, the museum owns a collection of traditional Greek costumes, an antique toy collection, a branch devoted to Islamic art, a state-of-the-art conservation laboratory, and a building for temporary exhibitions and cultural events. For the last 40 years, the museum has been under the direction of Professor Angelos Delivorrias, an archaeologist and art historian, and it was under his directorship that the museum expanded to its current size and acquired its diverse character.

Although the Benaki Museum is run by a board of trustees and operates under private law, its main source of funding is the Greek state, which has the a legal obligation to cover the museum’s payroll as well as its operational costs. This has ultimately proved to be the museum’s biggest weakness. Back in the “good old days,” the state gave over €2 million per year to the museum. Since the crisis hit the country, the amount of money has dropped significantly, falling to €842,000 last year (Rigopoulos 2013). This massive drop in state funding has had a very negative impact on the museum and its activities. As Professor Delivorrias has openly admitted on more than one occasion, the museum has had to lay off several members of its staff in order to cope. In 2010 there were 267 people working there, while today there are only 191. Even those who are still employed have had their salaries cut between 20 and 40 percent and also had their hours reduced by 20 percent (Rigopoulos 2013; Daley 2013). As a result, the museum cannot afford to stay open on a daily basis and some of its branches are open to the public only four days per week. The implications of this state of affairs are many: first, a number of researchers and support staff are now jobless, adding to the staggering 27 percent unemployment level in Greece. Secondly, the Benaki Museum is in danger of becoming unable to perform some of its basic functions. According to Delivorrias, the Department of Conservation faces the greatest threat (Daley 2013). Although the Benaki Museum has introduced several schemes in order to attract funds and continues offering a wide range of cultural activities for its visitors, it is clear that without adequate state funding the museum cannot function properly.
The second case study is the Foundation of the Hellenic World (FHW; Fig. 2). The FHW is in many ways unique, as it is the only cultural organization in Greece which makes extensive use of cutting-edge technologies in the field of humanities. It was founded in 1994 by Lazaros and Ourania Efraimoglou, an affluent Greek family with origins in Asia Minor. The foundation’s mission, as stated on their website, is “the preservation and dissemination of Hellenic history and tradition, the creation of an awareness of the universal dimension of Hellenism and the promotion of its contribution to cultural evolution” (http://fhw.gr/fhw/index.php?lg=2&state=pages&id=80). In order to achieve that, the foundation started producing online encyclopedias and other educational websites, which mainly deal with Greek history and archaeology, spanning prehistory right up to the present day (e.g., Encyclopedia of the Hellenic World [http://www.ehw.gr/ehw/forms/Default.aspx?lang=en-US] and Hellenic History on the Internet [http://www.fhw.gr/chronos/en/]).

Their most innovative project, however, is a series of three-dimensional reconstructions of archaeological sites such as the Athenian Agora and the Asia Minor cities of Miletus and Priene. These three-dimensional reconstructions, which are targeted to both school children and adults, are screened at the Foundation’s IMAX-like cinema, known as the “Tholos.” These presentations are offered for a fee and their main characteristic is that they are interactive. This means that there is a museum educator who is “piloting” the audience around the reconstructed site, following different routes each time, and focusing on particular areas according to the audience’s demands. Although these shows have been successful with the Greek audience, and especially school groups, their rather inadequate advertising have made them less accessible to foreign tourists and/or scholars visiting Greece. Having said that, it was mostly due to these innovative projects that the FHW became an integral part of the international, and quite prestigious, Virtual Museum Transnational Network (V-MUST). Moreover, the FHW is the only private cultural entity in Greece to run its own archaeological excavation (at the site of Halka Bunar, Bulgaria).

Up until recently, the sources of the foundation’s money were several: dividends from bank stocks that the organization owns, sponsorship from two major Greek banks, revenue from the foundation’s cultural center, funding from the European Union (EU), and money out of the pocket of the founders. When the crisis hit Greece in 2009, one of the first things to go were the dividends paid...
by Greek banks. As these dividends were the foundation’s main source of income, the organization immediately started facing severe financial problems. The first measure taken in order to cope with the new economic reality was to force a month of unpaid leave to all members of the staff. This measure lasted for three years and it was apparently unsuccessful. The management then started firing people and also decided to enforce pay cuts ranging between 10 and 18 percent. In February 2013, the FHW closed down the Department of History and Archaeology, firing the vast majority of the remaining research and support staff. From the approximately 160 people who worked at the FHW in 2011, less than 80 are still employed today. The latter have not been paid for over five months (Kleftogianni 2013).

In contrast to the Benaki Museum the FHW has been quite secretive about the layoffs and its overall response to the effects of the crisis. As a result, very few people in Greece are familiar with the horrid situation at the foundation and the effects on its workforce (both past and present). The massive decrease in staff as well as the complete closure of a vital department like that of History and Archaeology have had tremendous effects not only on the foundation itself, but on the private cultural sector of Greece as a whole. The FHW has been one of the most successful cultural bodies in obtaining funding from the EU, and at the time of the Department of History and Archaeology’s closure (whose members were mostly responsible for running these EU-funded projects), there were several projects still running; their fate is less than clear today.
In difficult times like these, EU funding is of paramount importance as it not only sustains jobs, but also create new ones. By firing those who were bringing in EU funds and were responsible for the successful completion of EU-funded projects, the FHW have shot themselves in the foot. Moreover, the apparent lack of a coherent course of action renders the survival of the organization (at least in its present form) questionable.

The aforementioned case studies are clearly indicative of the dire situation of the private cultural sector in Greece. Although the financial crisis is mostly responsible for this, it should be mentioned that things could have been better if private cultural sponsorship, donations, and patronage were more widespread in the country. As Delivorrias has put it, “new money in Greece has never been renowned for its cultural and intellectual pursuits. There used to be a middle class that had a vision of modernization and of a different kind of Greece. This class is now gone” (Rigopoulos 2013). Also, professional fund-raising is still underdeveloped in Greece compared to the United States and some Western European countries, making things even more difficult.3 Unless this situation changes, the future for some of these private cultural institutions is bleak. The state should give more incentives when it comes to funding culture, such as tax incentives on the consumption of culture (mostly value-added tax reductions for buying cultural goods), tax reduction for individual and corporate donations, and so forth.

In conclusion, I believe that we should start treating the cultural heritage and infrastructure of Greece as a whole. The public and the private sectors must come closer to each other. Ideas, experiences, and technological know-how should be exchanged and freely shared. Collaboration between them is the only way forward.

Notes
1. Although the museum technically belongs to the Greek state, it is autonomous and free to implement its own administrative policy.

References

RESPONSE
Cultural Heritage and Historical Memory in Danger: Some Notes on Greece’s Situation
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What has been going on in Greece for the past four years is not just the result of the economic crisis in a poor or nearly bankrupt country; it is more reminiscent of colonial times. When everything started in 2010, the public debt was 120 percent of the total gross domestic product, while now, after three bail-out attempts, the public debt is around 172 percent, unemployment is at 27 percent (with youth unemployment at 58 percent), and many young scientists are forced to leave the country to find a job. These policies look more like a big social experiment. The truth is that in the name of the global economic crisis and public debt, and with the International Monetary Fund acting as a Trojan horse, austerity measures have undermined public services, the overall welfare of the nation, and the social
cohesion in Greece. At the same time, democracy and national dignity are under attack, and neo-Nazi ideas are growing in a country which was proud of being the cradle of democracy.

The Archaeological Service in Greece is dedicated to the pursuit of scientific knowledge and defending culture as a public good. However, as part of the public sector, it suffers from constant lack of funding and personnel. It also suffers from the tendency to treat archaeological research as an obstacle to development. For many years the Archaeological Service and the Forestry Service have been treated as the main obstacles to growth, investment, and development. Especially recently, as exemplified in new legislation designed to facilitate investment through so-called fast-track procedures, there is open talk, even from the part of government officials, that archaeology is an obstacle to investment and development.

This is not something new. Since the 1980s, the Ministry of Culture has never received more than 1 percent of the total national budget and has the lowest rate of hiring new permanent staff. Funding for excavations and archaeological research has been constantly reduced in the past years, and in 2011 the Ministry of Culture announced that it would not fund any systematic excavation unless it was co-funded from foreign institutions.

As a result, all major archaeological excavations and research now take place in Greece within the context of big construction works, either public or private. We work primarily in terms of so-called salvage excavations. We have gained a wealth of knowledge from this kind of excavation that, in one sense, is bigger than what comes from systematic excavations. The great difference, however, is that in a salvage excavation the time, place, manner of excavation, as well as the presentation of the findings are not determined by archaeologists’ choices and decisions. In the best case scenario there is a co-decision process, whereas in the worst case these decisions are being imposed by the technical requirements of the work, the resources of the contractor, etc. We are also facing the charge that archaeologists think only of the past and do not care for the present economic situation and the needs of contemporary Greece. This was, for instance, the main argument against in situ preservation at the metro station of Byzantine Thessaloniki, a major historical crossroad. The same argument is used to support major investments, such as the hotel and golf development project in eastern Crete (near Toplou Monastery), or public investment such as a big landfill near the Ovirkastros archaeological site in Attica. It was the same argument that led, long before the crisis, to the construction of an artificial rowing lake for the 2004 Olympics at the site of the battle of Marathon.

Preserving the cultural heritage is (or at least should be) per se a question of public interest. This is explicit in the Greek Constitution, according to which cultural heritage, including archaeological monuments and remains, is public property and a patrimony of the Greek people. This should make us pause and reflect. We have entered into a “development and investment frenzy” which is a “road to disaster,” especially when it ends up destroying exactly what is considered Greece’s comparative advantage: our way of life. It’s the way we co-exist with history, the very process of the historical formation of our identity, and by mimicking wrong examples of growth and development, such as big all-inclusive hotels and public works that destroy surrounding environments and local cultures, we lose who we are. After all, this kind of development based on construction capital and the denial of historical heritage, including architectural heritage, contributed to the social crisis we are experiencing in Greece today.

In light of facing problems, such as the lack of personnel and funds as well as the lack of interest about antiquities by the state, more and more archaeologists turn to society for support. For many years, archaeology was a science supported by severe Greek laws and strictly controlled funding, and became more of a state science than a public scientific discourse. As the state withdraws its support and introduces new legislation that undermines the protection of antiquities, archaeologists feel the need to appeal to local communities by discussing the difficulties of their jobs with visitors of archaeological sites and museums, and are now open to new ideas. During the last four years of economic crisis and social devastation, without funding or support, archaeologists and other heritage specialists all over Greece have opened more museums, organized
more educational programs, and chosen contemporary issues as themes for exhibitions, such as currencies during times of crisis in history. Some museums in isolated and poor areas of the country became real cultural and educational centers with exhibitions of modern art, music concerts, theatrical shows, and conferences, trying to be open to the local communities and help the children learn to appreciate art. Some of the more ground-breaking and widely discussed experiments in bringing together ancient culture and modern art were organized at archeological sites, such as the exhibition of the well-known modern artist Tsoklis on the island of Spinalonga (Figs. 1–2) in Crete or the exhibition of works by the modern Greek sculptor Xenos among the ancient ruins at Delphi. Last but not least, many educational programs and exhibitions are dedicated to immigration over the centuries in order to quell the rising racism and xenophobia through education about the historical process.

This is our way of adapting to and combating the new situation. Currently, the biggest struggles of the Association of Greek Archaeologists are not about salaries or work conditions, but concerns regarding the protection of antiquities; the opposition to government plans that attempt to dismantle the Archaeological Service by delegating part of its authority to other ministries, such as the Ministry of Investments and Public Works; the opposition to the privatization of museums; and the struggle against the spread of an ahistorical and irrational approach to the past (Fig. 3). As stated in the International Appeal of the Association of Greek Archaeologists,

As archaeologists in the land that inherited democracy to the world we are perfectly aware of the dangers associated with the suppression of democracy. We are struggling to preserve the memory and the material traces of the past, because we know that a people without memory are condemned to repeat the same mistakes again and again. We are making an urgent appeal to our colleagues, to scholars and citizens all over Europe and the whole world, all the people expressing their solidarity and support to the Greek people, to defend cultural heritage and historical memory (http://www.sea.org.gr/press/pages/viewpress.aspx?PressID=107).
FIG. 2
Artist Kostas Tsoklis’ 2012 exhibition on Spinalongha. View from the entrance. (Photo by D. Chronakis.)

FIG. 3
Association of Greek Archaeologists’ poster appealing for the international support of Greek Cultural heritage. (Courtesy of D. Koutsoumba, Association of Greek Archaeologists.)
I greatly appreciate all of the responses received and the opportunity that the JEMAHS’s Forum allows to offer my rejoinder. Following, I will summarize a few points from each of the contributions and offer examples and suggestions in consideration of their concerns.

Gill examines the fluctuation of visitation numbers and ticket sales at museums and archaeological sites in Greece going back to 2005. The information, gathered from the Hellenic Statistical Authority, conveys the great interest in and importance of Greece’s ancient heritage. This has immense economic ramifications on the tourism industry beyond our limited consideration of just archaeology. He notes that there have been slight declines in visitation due to the economic crisis, mostly caused by the political situation and protests. Additionally, the effort to decrease operating costs, resulting in limited operating hours, will likely impact revenue when the final 2012 figures are published.

Beyond its brief mention in my essay, Gill specifically focuses on the illicit activities of looting and the global consequences of this practice. He notes that recent returns of ancient objects to Greece materialized despite any coordinated state initiatives. This contrasts greatly to the national and international campaigns arguing for the repatriation of the Parthenon marbles housed at the British Museum (Hamilakis 2007: 243–86; Plantzos 2011). The impetus behind the establishment of the new Acropolis Museum hinged upon the assertion that Greece did not have the facilities to care for these missing sculptures. Now, the country is inundated with state-of-the-art facilities where ancient material culture can be conserved, stored, and exhibited.

While the recent returns are a consequence of the changing ethical practices and the embracing of public accountability by collectors and museums, any authorized legal claims are now too expensive for the state to bear. This situation is drastically different from Turkey’s present practice of withholding archaeology permits as an attempt to force restitution (Evers and Knöfel 2013; Stonington 2013). Turkey’s efforts fail to consider that the universities and academics applying for these permits are generally removed from museums holding contested objects. The grave impact on scientific projects is a contentious rejection of the colonialist practice of archaeology, especially as it is practiced in the Mediterranean.

Greece needs to focus more on establishing stricter internal prohibitions to curb looting that compare to external ones in place, like the MOU with the US. Gill suggests that investment in the protection, exhibition, and excavation of ancient objects would better serve heritage rather than inflexible possession by collectors and museums. Because archaeologists in Greece generally oppose privatization, as suggested by Koutsoumba, this investment would have to take place in a public form, perhaps in the form of tax incentives, as suggested by Georganas.

Within my essay, Georganas recognized the absence of references to the private cultural sector. He reviews the situation experienced by the Benaki Museum that receives state sponsorship and the Foundation of the Hellenic World, which is primarily dependent on dividends, sponsorship, institutional revenue, and EU funding. He is concerned with the proper functioning and performance of these institutions. However, what does this mean in the midst of a crisis and should we maintain such expectations? One needs to expect changes and concessions because of the present situation, rather than a continuation of business as usual. Unfortunately, institutions cannot run at high capacity, maintain all jobs, not endure pay cuts, etc.

In comparison with the US, many public and private institutions were forced to cutstaff, reduce budgets, and limit programs (English 2009). This was caused by the dire financial circumstances heightened by the 2008 economic crisis and the reduction of the government’s cultural funding. Within the museum world, a debate ensues on whether museums can sell their collections as assets to keep them operating. For example, in 2009 the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis University was scheduled for closure and its works auctioned off (Smith 2009).
However, public outrage prompted a re-consideration of the decision (Kennedy 2011).

Currently, heritage is not sustainable despite positive efforts undertaken by heritage professionals to coordinate and implement projects in order to find this balance (cf. Barthel-Bouchier 2012; Silberman 2007). The balance needs to be achieved now in order to manage the effects of the crisis rather than ignore them while hoping that these problems will dissipate. I have shown, along with Georganas, that EU-funded projects have been extremely important for Greece’s cultural sector, both public and private. Because of the FHW’s success in receiving this funding, it will be important that they continue to responsibly run these projects and allocate funds accordingly. Further, Greece is not cut off from receiving EU funding and applications to these sources should continue in order to mitigate the effects caused by the state’s reduced cultural budget.

The ultimate priorities for heritage should be elucidated by recognizing what is necessary and critical at this time of extreme financial difficulty. Koutsoumba elaborates on the inconsistencies between development projects and research or rescue excavations, showing that further cooperation is needed. Development is of great importance to the country, but archaeologists should not concede to the demands of developers and compromise the integrity of the project. Koutsoumba shows that the economic crisis is not the only problem, but also the organization and management of the archaeological industry. In Greece, archaeology has been granted a favorable position within society and legislation supports its esteemed status. Despite reductions in the Ministry of Culture and the private sector, a greater proportion of archaeologists exist in Greece than the UK, Germany, and many other nations. However, that is not an argument to support terminating careers. A re-organization of management is needed along with a strategic plan to figure out how to keep heritage protected in the face of adversity. Perhaps reaching out to the informed public would better serve archaeology and provide a type of social cohesion through involvement.

References