



HELLENIC REPUBLIC
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS,
CULTURE AND SPORTS
— ALTERNATE MINISTER —

Greeting by the Alternate Minister of Education and Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports Mr. Kostas Tzavaras to American journalists visiting Athens in connection with the Exhibition “HEAVEN and Earth. Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections”, Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum, 25 April 2013

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

On the occasion of the exhibition “HEAVEN and Earth. Art of Byzantium from Greek Collections”, which will be held at the National Gallery in October and later at the J. Paul Getty Museum, I welcome you to Athens, the city that retained its spiritual aura throughout the long and uninterrupted history of Greece, suitably illustrated by the selected exhibits.

It is well established that the celebrated Athenian schools of philosophy and rhetoric also served as spiritual breeding grounds for the Byzantine Empire until the 6th century, when they were finally shut down in accordance with policies for the establishment of Christianity.

The Acropolis was always the core of Athens and the dominant element of the urban landscape. The Parthenon, which during the 5th century was converted into a Christian church, maintained its aesthetic and symbolic radiance well into the Middle Byzantine period. It also stood as a center point of self-awareness to the Greeks throughout the centuries of Ottoman occupation. The Middle Byzantine churches of Athens, many of them excellently preserved and still functioning today, impress with their combined display of apparent classical influences, subtle elegance and spiritual nobleness. These characteristics are attributed by scholars to the direct and continuous interaction between the Athenians and the monuments of classical antiquity.

Today, Athens is not just a city of monuments, but also a city of museums, where material testimonies to its glorious past are enshrined and displayed. Several of the city’s museums participate in the exhibition with loaned treasures from their collections. You will be able to visit some of them during your stay and find out for yourselves that the country’s present too is not as bleak as it is sometimes portrayed. We are all working hard to build a bright future for Greece, motivated and reinforced by our rich historical legacy.

The Byzantine and Christian Museum, our host for the day, together with the Byzantine Museum of Thessaloniki that you have already visited, and a handful more like the Monemvasia Museum that you will visit tomorrow, are the only museums in the world dedicated to Byzantine history and culture, which are major constituents of our national heritage. As you have seen, some of the greatest masterpieces of Byzantine and Post-Byzantine art are on display here, and several of these will be travelling to the United States in a few months to be included in the planned exhibition.

The aim of every archaeological exhibition held abroad is, of course, to acquaint visitors with the most important aspects of our culture for the given historical period.

Our vision, however, is to make this exhibition also a further link in the strong chain of friendship and cooperation that ties out two peoples, the American and the Greek.

I am convinced that Culture is a purely cohesive and creative force with exponential and lasting effects.

I also believe that monuments of Culture are the true witnesses to the dynamism and the potential of the people that create them.

Once more, welcome to Greece of Byzantium and to Greece of today. I am confident that at the end of this visit you will leave us with the best of memories. And, by all means, do come back soon.

Kostas Tzavaras,
Alternate Minister