Classics and Rockefeller Center: John D. Rockefeller Jr. and the Use of Classicism in Public Space

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by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Classics in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

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Advisor: Ronnie Ancona

This dissertation situates the mythologically-inspired artwork of Rockefeller Center in the classical education of its sole proprietor, John D. Rockefeller Jr. I argue that his extensive classical education at the Browning School and Brown University led to an adult interest in the Classics. Through extensive, original archival research at the Rockefeller Archive Center and the Rockefeller Center Archive Center, I demonstrate that this interest was expressed through his philanthropy of prestigious institutions such as the American Academy in Rome, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, and the excavations of the Athenian Agora. Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles are also examined as important examples of Rockefeller’s restoration projects prior to Rockefeller Center. This biographical and historical investigation into the education and philanthropy of Rockefeller Jr. contextualizes his decisions during the construction of Rockefeller Center. I analyze the art program and design of Rockefeller Center, placing its development in the context of previous Rockefeller enterprises and the City Beautiful movement. Special attention is given to the most prominent mythologically-inspired artworks such as Paul Manship’s Prometheus, Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan’s Atlas, and several representations of Mercury. Lastly, I examine the ancient source material for
the myths of Prometheus and Atlas and explore their reception histories in literary and
art, in order to better understand the context and symbolism of these myths at Rockefeller
Center.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockefeller Jr.’s Classical Education and the State of the Discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of Classics in late Nineteenth Century Private Schools in the United</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>States</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s Philanthropy of Classical Initiatives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockefeller Center and Its Mythologically-Inspired Art</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Prometheus and Atlas Myths and Their Reception in Rockefeller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1. Tympanum over the entrance to the Oriental Institute, Chicago..............247
Figure 2.2. Wren building, Colonial Williamsburg and College of William & Mary....247
Figure 2.3. Capitol building, Colonial Williamsburg..............................................248
Figure 2.4. Governor’s Palace, Colonial Williamsburg.........................................248
Figure 2.5. Aerial view of Governor’s Palace, Colonial Williamsburg.....................249
Figure 2.6. Rear entrance to Governor’s Palace, Colonial Williamsburg....................249
Figure 2.7. Aerial map of Colonial Williamsburg.................................................250
Figure 2.8. Aerial view of Palace Green, Colonial Williamsburg.............................250
Figure 2.9. Entrance to the Palace of Versailles....................................................251
Figure 2.10. Aerial view of roads leading to Versailles............................................251
Figure 2.11. Aerial view of the Gardens of Versailles............................................252
Figure 2.12. Hall of Mirrors, Versailles.................................................................253
Figure 2.13. Aerial view of Gardens of Versailles, with fountains.........................253
Figure 3.1. Aerial view of Rockefeller Center in 2016..........................................254
Figure 3.2. Map of Rockefeller Center in 1948 showing the original eleven buildings..255
Figure 3.3. Map of Upper Estate and Midtown......................................................256
Figure 3.4. Chicago World’s Fair, 1893, Court of Honor........................................257
Figure 3.5. Grand Central Terminal as viewed from Park Avenue from the south.....258
Figure 3.6. Morris plan from May 1928................................................................259
Figure 3.7. Organization flow chart for Rockefeller Center.....................................260
Figure 3.8. Morris plan from 1929.........................................................................261
Figure 3.9. Reinhard and Hofmeister plan from November 28, 1929......................262
Figure 3.10. Reinhard and Hofmeister G-3 plan from January 8, 1930....................263
Figure 3.11. Reinhard and Hofmeister G-3 plan January 8, 1930..............................264
Figure 3.12. Scale model displayed to the public in March 1931..............................265
Figure 3.13. Plans for Rockefeller Center displayed to the public in March 1931......266
Figure 3.14. Map showing the four identical building facades along Fifth Avenue.....267
Figure 3.15. Color rendering of planned rooftop gardens by John Wenrich.............268
Figure 3.16. Aerial view of the Garden of the Nations on the rooftop of 30 Rockefeller Plaza.........................................................................................................................269
Figure 3.17. Grand Central Terminal exterior clock sculpture group......................270
Figure 3.18. Paul Manship’s Prometheus in the sunken plaza of Rockefeller Center....271
Figure 3.19. Early 1930s photograph of Paul Manship’s Prometheus, along with Man and Woman in their original locations..................................................272
Figure 3.20. Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan’s Atlas in the forecourt of the International Building at Rockefeller Center..................................................273
Figure 3.21. The armillary sphere of Atlas..............................................................274
Figure 3.22. Atlas shown with the original pedestal...............................................275
Figure 3.23. Lee Lawrie’s Wisdom, Light and Sound at the entrance to 30 Rockefeller Center..................................................................................................................276
Figure 3.24. Lee Lawrie’s Wisdom........................................................................277
Figure 3.25. Lee Lawrie’s Sound............................................................................278
Figure 3.26. Lee Lawrie’s Light.............................................................................279
Figure 3.27. Lee Lawrie’s Mercury with Blazing Sun over the southern entrance of the British Empire building.................................................................280
Figure 3.28. Mercury in the Channel Gardens................................................281
Figure 3.29. Lee Lawrie’s The Purpose of the International Building over the south entrance to the International Building...........................................282
Figure 3.30. Attilio Piccirilli’s Commerce and Industry with Caduceus above the entrance to International Building North facing Fifth Avenue.........................283
Figure 3.31. Attilio Piccirilli’s Youth Leading Industry in context with Commerce above the entrance to the International Building North facing Fifth Avenue...........284
Figure 3.32. Leo Lentelli’s Europe in the spandrel of the International Building North facing Fifth Avenue...........................................................................285
Figure 3.33. The Center Theater marquee..........................................................286
Figure 3.34. Radio City Music Hall marquee......................................................287
Figure 3.35. “Amelia Earhart Crossing the Atlantic,” glass mural, Center Theater interior......................................................................................................288
Figure 3.36. Grand Foyer of the Center Theater..................................................289
Figure 3.37. Print out of the satyr and woman scene above the far left theater entrance in the Grand Foyer.................................................................290
Figure 3.38. The Center Theater chandelier.......................................................291
Figure 3.39. Rene Chambellan’s clay model of the Center Theater chandelier....292
Figure 3.40. Clay model for Poseidon, Center Theater chandelier.......................293
Figure 3.41. Clay model of Artemis and hunting dogs for Center Theater chandelier...294
Figure 3.42. Clay model for Actaeon and dogs for the Center Theater chandelier....295
Figure 3.43. Clay model of Apollo for the Center Theater chandelier....................296
Figure 3.44. Clay model of Aphrodite and Eros for the Center Theater chandelier...297
Figure 4.1. Kylix depicting punishment of Atlas and Prometheus..............................298
Figure 4.2. The Creation of Man from Clay, Piero di Cosimo, c. 1515/1520..........299
Figure 4.3. Stealing Fire, Piero di Cosimo, c.1515/1520........................................300
Figure 4.4. Prometheus Bound, Peter Paul Rubens, begun c. 1611-1612, completed by 1618..............................................................................................................301
Figure 4.5. Prometheus, Rienhold Begas, 1911......................................................302
Figure 4.6. Prometheus (Prométhée), Constantin Brancusi, 1911..........................303
Figure 4.7. Prometheus, along with Man and Woman, Paul Manship, 2016..........304
Figure 4.8. Atlas Farnese, second century CE Roman copy of a Hellenistic Greek original...........................................................................................................305
Figure 4.9. Atlas, Artus Quellinus the Elder, 1655.................................................306
Figure 4.10. Atlas, Henry Frederick Metzler, 1853...............................................307
Figure 4.11. Atlas, Isaac Fletcher House, now Ukrainian Institute of America, 1899...308
Figure 4.12. Atlas, Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan, 1937.................................309
Figure 4.13. Atlas, Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan, 1937..................................310
Figure 4.14. Atlas, William Cunningham, Cosmographical Glasse..........................311
Figure 4.15. Atlas, along Fifth Avenue...................................................................312

Table 1.1. Timeline of the original eleven Rockefeller Center buildings...............313
Introduction

In conducting extensive and original archival research and in contextualizing the biography of John D. Rockefeller Jr., this dissertation seeks to understand the mythologically-inspired art of Rockefeller Center. I argue that Rockefeller’s classical education continued to influence him through adulthood, and that this becomes evident by examining his philanthropy of classical initiatives and his role as sole financier of Rockefeller Center. Ultimately, I argue that after a series of public relations missteps his increasing control over the development of Rockefeller Center accounts for the mythologically-inspired art that constitutes a large percentage of the Center’s art program. As a result of the research methodology used, this dissertation demonstrates that an in-depth biographical approach to reception studies accompanied by comprehensive art history surveys best accounts for the complex factors influencing the development of Rockefeller Center.

Background

John D. Rockefeller Jr. (b. 1874-d. 1960) was the youngest child and only son of John D. Rockefeller and Laura Celestia Spelman. Rockefeller Sr. is regarded as one of the richest men of all time, thanks in large part to his shares of Standard Oil, the company he founded. Rockefeller Jr.’s earliest childhood years were spent in Ohio, where the Rockefellers raised their children in accordance with the Protestant ethics they themselves believed in and lived by. In addition to this ethical training, Mr. Rockefeller also sought to instill in his son his own disciplined focus and work ethic that was a large part of his success in business. In 1884, when Rockefeller was ten years of age, Mr.
Rockefeller moved the family to New York City permanently. The family lived in a townhouse on Fifty-Forth Street.

The late nineteenth century in United States history is often referred to as the Gilded Age, because it was a period of extreme wealth and poverty. The term itself, “gilded age,” was coined by Mark Twain in his novel *The Gilded Age: A Tale of Today*, published in 1873. The remarkable industrial growth during this period and the corresponding prosperity were to a great extent enjoyed by only the newly made industrial and financial capitalists such as John D. Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt, Leland Stanford, Andrew Mellon, Andrew Carnegie, and J.P. Morgan. For this reason, those critical of their industrial monopolies and ruthless capitalist practices referred to them as “robber barons.” During the early twentieth century, industrial growth, largely powered by new technological advances, continued to change life in the United States. After World War I (1914-1918), the United States entered a period of increased economic prosperity, which came crashing down along with the stock market on October 29, 1929. The stock market crash and the Great Depression, which it helped usher in, are the immediate contexts for the construction of Rockefeller Center in the 1930s.

Rockefeller Center is commonly regarded as the crowning achievement of Rockefeller Jr. Regarded as a “city within a city,” the complex of fourteen buildings located in Midtown Manhattan encompasses the entire space between Fifth and Sixth Avenues between Forty-Eighth and Fifty-First Streets. Construction began May 17, 1930 and the final rivet was driven in on November 1, 1939. Built during the Great Depression, the project employed thousands of construction workers, engineers, architects, and artists, and remains an important part of Rockefeller Center’s legacy. The
complex also has a rich art program which consists of over one hundred distinct artworks, about one third of which is mythologically-inspired art.

Chapter One - Rockefeller Jr.’s Classical Education and the State of the Discipline of Classics in late nineteenth century Private Schools in the United States

Chapter One of this dissertation accomplishes two goals. First, I examine Rockefeller’s entire educational history. This is essential biographical information that I argue underpins the types of institutions and projects Rockefeller supported in his philanthropy as an adult. Second, because Rockefeller’s education is typical for children of elite individuals in the Gilded Age, and because his education was so heavily based on a classical curriculum, his education biography provides important information about the popularity and success of such curricula in private schools.

After 1884, when the Rockefeller family moved to New York City, Rockefeller attended mostly small, private schools. Along with him, children of elite individuals attended these schools, which often had a founder who also acted as headmaster and in some cases the only teacher. Rockefeller attended the New York School of Languages, the C.N. Douglass School, the Cutler School, and the Browning School before graduating from Brown University. Chapter one investigates the curriculum at each of these schools. Throughout his education, Rockefeller encountered a classical curriculum. Of particular interest are the Cutler and Browning Schools because their curricula were heavily classical. The headmasters of both schools each had classical training themselves. Rockefeller learned Latin and Greek, as well as French and German. He was exposed to a variety of canonical authors in both ancient languages. In his time at Brown University,
Rockefeller was exposed to an expanded classical curriculum that included philosophy and several art history electives. Collectively his art history courses covered ancient art, both Greek and Roman, and included discussion of their influences on Medieval and Renaissance art. Collectively, chapter one argues that this classical curriculum later influenced Rockefeller’s philanthropy.

This in-depth examination of Rockefeller’s educational biography contributes to studies of the state of the discipline of Classics during the late nineteenth century. Recent research has focused on the academic status of Classics in this period, especially the reputation of Classics as a discipline in higher education, another sector rapidly changing during this period. Caroline Winterer and Lee Pearcy, for example, have begun to explore how classicists both talked about their discipline and responded to the changes in education during the mid-to-late nineteenth century. According to Winterer and Pearcy, classicists attempted to shift the perception of their discipline by the wholesale embrace of the philological science promoted by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, even to

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1 The major changes during the nineteenth century were two-fold: first, the term liberal arts was expanding to include the new disciplines of History, English, modern languages; second, these disciplines, now constituting the Humanities, were under attack as useless in light of the emerging industrial economy because they were non-vocational. Classicists and Classics were the primary target of the critiques of a liberal arts education during the nineteenth century. Paradoxically, however, as European classicists such as the German Wilamowitz, attempted to claim their discipline was indeed scientific by pursuing a narrowed, specialized philology, they inadvertently simultaneously alienated antiquity from the cultural purview of the general public in the United States during this time. Modernity--with its industrialization, vocationalism and progress in standards of living--was now viewed as a positive rupture from the cultures of antiquity, which were perceived as so different and alien as to be utterly useless as a topic of study. As Winterer puts it in her 2002 *The Culture of Classicism*, “the mirror of antiquity” was shattered. Americans no longer saw themselves when looking to the classical past. This summary is based largely on Winterer’s argument in *The Culture of Classicism*. Lee Pearcy, *Grammar*, 2005, reflects further on how the shift postulated by Winterer resulted in a weakening of the value assigned by Americans to classical studies and offers concrete suggestions for reversing the century-long trend.
the isolation of the discipline within the new liberal arts academy of the day.\textsuperscript{2} Winterer and Pearcy mainly cite the public speeches and academic introspection of classicists. Thus, by expanding their inquiry to include the curricula at private preparatory schools, many of which educated the children of elite individuals, including Rockefeller, this dissertation explores early childhood and young adult education, and Classics’ place within its curriculum.\textsuperscript{3}

Chapter Two - John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s Philanthropy of Classical Initiatives

The second chapter of this dissertation examines Rockefeller’s philanthropy. Of particular interest are the many classical initiatives and organizations that he personally supported, that the various Rockefeller foundations supported, or that both he and the Rockefeller foundations supported at the same time. I first study the philanthropy of Rockefeller’s father, John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller Sr.’s own principles of giving influenced Rockefeller’s position on philanthropy, and since he came to control his father’s vast fortune, this influence has significant consequences. Together, both Rockefellers established a series of foundations to dispense their wealth through an intermediary team of experts. Of these foundations, I investigate the practices and classical initiatives funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, the General Education Board, and the International Education Board.


\textsuperscript{3} For the most part, public k-12 education in the United States, funded by the government, was not institutionalized until the late nineteenth century and into the early part of the twentieth century.
Regarding Rockefeller’s personal philanthropy of classical initiatives, I investigate a complex array of projects and institutions that demonstrate a sincere interest in the ancient world and especially its material culture. I argue that this interest stems from his classical education. For example, I consider his support for a series of museum projects related to the study of ancient Near Eastern civilizations, including proposed museums in Egypt and Palestine. Next, I examine his substantial financial contributions to the American Academy at Rome and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. In particular, I investigate his significant support for the excavation of the Athenian Agora. Finally, I close this survey of his philanthropy by discussing his restoration projects of Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles, which I argue foreshadow much of what was to come in Rockefeller Center. Ultimately, Rockefeller’s philanthropy of classical initiatives demonstrates how a biographical approach to reception studies can reveal important areas for further investigation in classical reception studies, such as, in this case, philanthropy.

Chapter Three - “Rockefeller Center and Its Mythologically-Inspired Art”

Chapter Three brings Rockefeller’s classical education and philanthropy of classical initiatives into conversation with the development of Rockefeller Center in the 1930s. Rockefeller Center was a private, business enterprise funded entirely by Rockefeller during the Great Depression. By having investigated his philanthropy, it is clearer as a result how Rockefeller exerted control over this business enterprise, as if it was another one of his many prestigious philanthropic projects. I study the history of the City Beautiful movement and argue that it was an important influence on the
development of Rockefeller Center. As part of an overview of the history of Rockefeller Center, I also investigate the team of architects and managers who played important roles in the design of the Center, and I examine the critical responses to the design of the Center after a public exhibition.

In the second half of the chapter three, I bring to bear the preceding evidence and arguments on the mythologically-inspired art program of Rockefeller Center. First, I conduct a sweeping overview of the entire art program. In particular, I am concerned with the origins of the program and how decisions were made about how to decorate key spatial areas of the Center. The focus remains on the most iconic mythologically-inspired artworks, such as Paul Manship’s Prometheuss, Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan’s Atlas, as well as several artworks featuring Mercury. Lastly, I investigate the use of mythological decorations in the now demolished Center Theater.

Chapter Four - The Prometheus and Atlas Myths and Their Reception in Rockefeller Center

The fourth and final chapter takes an extended look at the myths of Prometheus and Atlas in order better to understand their reception in two of the most prominent artworks of Rockefeller Center. I begin by gathering the various ancient sources that provide the most canonical accounts of their myths. In the case of Prometheus, that involves examining Hesiod’s Theogony and Works & Days, Aeschylus’s Prometheus Bound, and Lucian’s Prometheus. Next, I chart the reception and re-workings of the Prometheus myth in the literature and art of Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Romantic period. I also examine the most recent sculptures of
Prometheus in the twentieth century. This historical survey of the history and reception of
the Prometheus myth aims to better situate the reception of the myth in the context of
Rockefeller Center. A careful re-examination of the specific iconography and context of
*Prometheus* at Rockefeller Center reveals new aspects of its function in the art program.
A similar treatment is conducted regarding the myth of Atlas. His treatment, however, is
more limited because his myth has not had as similarly extensive a reception history as
Prometheus’.

Methodology

This dissertation regards reception theory and biography as essential
methodologies for analyzing the mythologically-inspired art of Rockefeller Center and
for understanding how that occurrence came about.4 By examining the biography of
Rockefeller Jr., I am making an explicit connection with reception theory in that I seek to
demonstrate how his classical education affected the art program of Rockefeller Center. I
examine the traces of how his classical education permeates his entire life leading up to
his financing of the Center. Therefore, I claim that this biographical approach is in fact
another form of reception studies. For this dissertation, reception studies is also a bridge
to interdisciplinary inquiry. A variety of source material is used throughout the
dissertation, including archival evidence, biographical information, secondary
scholarship, and material culture (in this case the buildings and artworks themselves). A

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4 For some of the first published thoughts on reception theory and Classics, see
Martindale, *Redeeming the Text*, 1991 and 1993. Of course, even in the ancient world,
issues of reception are found. Roman literature, art and architecture can be studied with
reception theory in mind because they are often engaged in re-reading or re-interpreting
Greek literature, art or architecture. Therefore, in many ways, without being consciously
aware of it, classicists have already been engaged in reception studies.
variety of subjects are also explored, including education curricula, philanthropy, New York City, and Rockefeller Center and its art program. Thus, reception studies is a way to articulate an argument across a variety of source materials and through various disciplines.
Chapter One - Rockefeller Jr.’s Classical Education and the State of the Discipline of Classics in late Nineteenth Century Private Schools in the United States

Chapter One argues that Rockefeller Jr.’s fondness towards classical art and mythology, so evident in the mythologically-based artwork of Rockefeller Center, was rooted in his classical education. In particular, I detail the curriculum at the Browning School, which he attended prior to college, and at Brown University. Much of the program of study Rockefeller experienced was classical in some way. Instruction in Latin and Greek languages and Greco-Roman history are two examples of the classical curriculum to which he was exposed. Although a late nineteenth century classical education in the United States was not uncommon, Caroline Winterer has nevertheless convincingly argued that during the course of the nineteenth century in the United States classicism\(^5\) declined in national pervasiveness and receded to institutions of higher education.\(^6\) Lee Pearcy has also investigated the origins of the pervasiveness of classical education and how it was challenged and as a result was changed by many of the same forces Winterer describes.\(^7\) Both scholars gather much of their evidence from the writings and speeches of university presidents and professors. Rockefeller’s education is known in great detail and therefore, a focus on curricula can provide additional material for a more accurate assessment of classicism in the United States than what the speeches of higher

\(^5\) I am not referring to the word’s use in the disciplines of art history and architecture. In the context of United States culture and history, I use the term to refer to the all-encompassing and historical impact of the study and appropriation of Greco-Roman languages, literature, art and material culture. Winterer (2013), “Classicism,” defines classicism as referring to an “admiration for the totality of the cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, including politics, art, architecture, education, and literature."

\(^6\) Winterer (2002), *The Culture of Classicism*.

\(^7\) Pearcy (2005), *The Grammar of Our Civility*.
education professionals alone can provide. Analysis of Rockefeller’s educational history is an opportunity to add to the conclusions of Winterer and Pearcy. Furthermore, a focus on curricula will demonstrate the interdisciplinarity of classical studies and will provide evidence that classical studies remained in demand among private preparatory schools in the nineteenth century. Thus, by studying the classical education of Rockefeller, chapter one contributes to our knowledge of Classics in late nineteenth century United States.

Rockefeller Jr.’s Early Education

Rockefeller Jr. was the only male child of oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller. Rockefeller Sr. was characterized during his lifetime as the epitome of Gilded Age wealth. He was one of the wealthiest men in the United States, if not the world.\(^8\) Thus, one can assume that Rockefeller received the best education that his father’s fortune afforded him. This is true in part, but education during the late nineteenth century was not as uniform as it is today. For example, children of elite individuals often attended small private schools whose founder also acted as headmaster and, in some cases, the only teacher. Thus, schools might vary widely in their approach depending upon their headmaster and his or her own personal beliefs and training in education. Rockefeller’s early education was a mixture of informal and formal training that included an upbringing informed by his parents’ Protestant ethics, tutoring at home, and a series of small private schools catering to the children of wealthy individuals.

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Religion was the central pillar of the Rockefeller household. Rockefeller Sr. was Baptist and his wife, Celestia Spelman, was raised in the Congregationalist tradition. Neither Rockefeller Sr. nor Mrs. Rockefeller, however, adhered to scripture in any literal sense. Rather, they sought to instill in their children the Protestant ethics they themselves believed in and lived by. Principals of simplicity and a strict avoidance of worldly activities dominated the Rockefeller household. There was no card-playing. Dancing, theater and opera were also forbidden, as were smoking and drinking. Sundays were observed as a day of rest. In addition to this religion-based ethics, Rockefeller Sr. also sought to instill in Rockefeller his own disciplined focus and work ethic that led to his business success. His parents succeeded to a remarkable degree in imparting their own beliefs to him.

Besides the informal ethical training he received from his parents, Rockefeller was also tutored at home, while he lived in the family’s Cleveland home. In 1884, at the age of ten, the Rockefellers permanently moved to New York City. Rockefeller’s personal archives at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) do not contain any information on the nature of the tutoring he received while in Cleveland, nor does his biographer Raymond Fosdick. The only piece of information regarding his tutoring

10 Fosdick (1956), 18.
11 Rockefeller Sr. had already moved the family to New York City by 1883 but their residence became permanent thereafter in 1884. The family frequently returned to their home in Cleveland for the summers.
12 Fosdick (1956), 38. Fosdick mentions that two governesses, Ada Piper and Miss Davis, might have had a hand in his tutoring in Cleveland, but no additional information has been found about them or the nature of their role in the Rockefeller home. Fosdick stands out among Rockefeller Jr.’s biographers because he personally worked for the Rockefeller offices and had full access to their personal papers and records before the Rockefeller Archive Center came into existence. That closeness could lead to favorable
comes from Rockefeller himself, who recalled that he thinks that he began to learn French at this time.\textsuperscript{13}

Rockefeller Jr.’s Formal Education

The tutoring seems to have stopped by the time Rockefeller Sr. moved the family permanently to New York City by 1884. Fosdick suggests that Rockefeller Sr. and his wife deemed it appropriate when he was ten to send Rockefeller to regular schools and cease at-home tutoring.\textsuperscript{14} Thus, it is certainly possible that tutoring could have continued at home but it seems unlikely. It is also evident that Rockefeller was taught some form of arithmetic as early as when he was ten years old because he kept an account of all of his expenses which date to 1884 at the earliest.\textsuperscript{15} This type of business education in accounting most likely originated with his father, whose own discipline in this regard was a model for his family.

Beginning in November 1883 and lasting until April 1885, Rockefeller attended the New York School of Languages then located on Forty-Third Street and Broadway.\textsuperscript{16} This was the first formal school Rockefeller attended. Rockefeller’s report cards make clear that he either continued beyond the earlier tutoring he received in French or began formal classes in French at this time. Rockefeller practiced penmanship as well as the writing of short essays on a variety of topics. The report cards do show spaces for Latin biases. The only other biography solely on Rockefeller Jr. is Albert Schenkel’s \textit{The Rich Man and the Kingdom} (1995) which deals exclusively with Rockefeller Jr. as an adult and his relationship to what Schenkel calls the “Protestant Establishment” in the United States.

\textsuperscript{13} Fosdick (1956), 38.
\textsuperscript{14} Fosdick (1956), 38.
\textsuperscript{15} RAC, (FA335), Personal Papers-Account Books, 1884-1886, Box 11, Folder 108.
\textsuperscript{16} Fosdick (1956), 38.
and Greek and several other subjects, but no grade is reported for them.\textsuperscript{17} Some of the subjects included reading, spelling, composition, declamation, arithmetic, history, and geography.\textsuperscript{18} One of the school’s directors, Henry Clay Miller, was a well-known numismatist, having amassed a large collection of ancient Roman coins. It is also known that he taught Latin and German in his academic career.\textsuperscript{19} Based on the subjects listed on the report card and also Miller’s own classical background, it seems likely that part of the school’s curriculum was classical but that Rockefeller did not study at the very least Latin and Greek at this time. In the subjects Rockefeller did take, he maintained an A average.

In November 1885, Rockefeller, now age eleven, attended a small private school run by C.N. Douglass, which met in a room overlooking Thirty-Fourth Street and Sixth Avenue. He remained enrolled just one academic year, until April 1886.\textsuperscript{20} Comparatively little is known about C.N. Douglass or his school for boys. Precise dates for the school’s opening are not known. It seems to have opened as early as 1882 and was advertised as providing preparation for scientific and business schools.\textsuperscript{21} Based on the two lesson reports in the RAC, it seems that Rockefeller continued with basic subjects of study as in his previous school. Neither Latin nor Greek is listed as a subject of study. It would seem that for whatever reason, Rockefeller attended the Douglass School for

\textsuperscript{17} RAC, (FA335), School Papers-New York School of Languages-Report Cards, 1883-1885, Box 35, Folder 290.
\textsuperscript{18} Fosdick (1956), 38.
\textsuperscript{20} Fosdick (1956), 39. See also, RAC, FA335, “Notes Made by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. ... as to His Early School Connections”, 1951, Box 35, Folder 284.
\textsuperscript{21} Douglass, C.N. \textit{The Sanitary Engineer}. New York, June 1, 1992, 357.
only one academic year. Rockefeller maintained an A average. While impossible to confirm, Fosdick’s narrative of events and the knowledge that Rockefeller Sr. would later found a school just for his son makes it seem that the only likely cause for Rockefeller jumping from one school to another during this period was Rockefeller Sr.’s dissatisfaction with the education he was receiving. Fosdick hints that the Douglass school was much smaller than the New York School of Languages. Therefore, Rockefeller Sr. may have been looking for more individual attention and smaller class sizes.

At age twelve, Rockefeller next attended the Cutler School for two academic years from November 1886 to May 1887, and November 1888 to May 1889. The school was founded and directed by Arthur Hamilton Cutler. It was during this time that Rockefeller convalesced back on the family’s Forest Hill estate in Cleveland during Fall 1887 through March 1888. It is unclear what ailed the young Rockefeller, but whatever the cause, the cure was outdoor exercise interspersed with periods of time where all Rockefeller did was “vegetate.” While in Cleveland, Rockefeller received tutoring several days a week by a student from East Cleveland. It is not known what the tutoring covered. Rockefeller then returned to the Cutler School for a second year 1888-1889. The two years at the Cutler School marks the first documented exposure to Classics and classical languages for Rockefeller. The Cutler School made use of a classical

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22 RAC, FA335, School Papers-Douglas School-Lesson Reports, 1885-1886, Box 35, Folder 291.
23 Fosdick (1956), 39.
24 Fosdick (1956), 39.
25 RAC, FA335, School Papers-General-"Notes Made by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. ... as to His Early School Connections", 1951, Box 35, Folder 284
26 Fosdick (1956), 39.
curriculum that encompassed instruction in Latin and Greek and the cultural history of the Greeks and Romans. Cutler was a Classicist in the New York City area and thus the curriculum’s emphasis on Classics is no surprise. It was reported that he attended the popular performance of *The Acharnians*, which was also attended by several notable Classicists from the Northeast. Rockefeller attended the school with several other sons of elite individuals. Thus, any investigation into Rockefeller’s education also provides a wider perspective on the type of classical education such children were receiving. For example, the Cutler School’s first graduate was future President of the United States of America, Theodore Roosevelt.

The RAC preserves several pieces of information regarding Rockefeller’s program of study while at the Cutler School. He seems to have begun his study of Latin and Greek at this time earning high marks in Latin in the report cards of 1886 and 1887 and eventually advancing to readings of Caesar. He also started to learn Greek towards the end of his time at Cutler in 1889 earning 9s out of a scale of 10, and continued his study of French. This language instruction in Greek and Latin alone would offer a wide exposure to Classics. Based on his school essays from this time, Rockefeller must also have been learning about classical mythology and classical history. In one such essay, “The Siege of Troy,” Rockefeller traces the history of Troy utilizing the then traditional date 1194-1184 BCE. He mentions the mythic etiology for the cause of the war, Paris

28 “Dr. Arthur H. Cutler, School founder, dies; Tutor of Roosevelt, Morgan, and many other noted New Yorkers started the Cutler 40 years ago,” *The New York Times*, June 22, 1918.
seizing Helen, and also discusses Ulysses’s travel home and his interaction with Minerva. On this essay he received a 48 out of 50. As the above grade scores indicate, Rockefeller excelled in this classical curriculum. This is no surprise, since the work ethic and attention to detail that his father instilled in him naturally was applicable to successful language study. In addition, he made the honor roll in “Classical” sections for several grade terms, further emphasizing that the Cutler School utilized a classical curriculum and Rockefeller excelled in it.

The Browning School

Rockefeller went on to join the inaugural class of the Browning School in Fall 1889 at the age of fifteen. He would spend four years at the Browning School, finally graduating in Winter 1893. It was no accident that Rockefeller was part of the inaugural class at the Browning School. In fact, according to Rockefeller Sr.’s biographer, Rockefeller Sr. and his brother William Rockefeller conferred together, and subsequently with John A. Browning, a local teacher, to create the Browning School in 1888 as an all boys private preparatory school. Thus, the Browning School was a Rockefeller enterprise from the very beginning. Furthermore, the first building for the school was on Rockefeller-owned property not far from the family’s own home. The Rockefellers paid Browning’s salary and reserved the right to screen other applicants. Rockefeller Sr.’s

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30 I am here using Ulysses and Minerva because that is what Rockefeller Jr. uses in his essay. The conflation of Roman names with their Greek equivalent was commonplace during the nineteenth century in the United States.
31 RAC, FA 335, School Papers-Cutler School-Compositions, 1887, Box 35, Folder 292.
32 RAC, FA335, School Papers-Cutler School-Honor Rolls, 1885-1889, Box 35, Folder 293.
33 RAC, FA335, School Papers-General-"Notes Made by John D. Rockefeller, Jr. ... as to His Early School Connections", 1951, Box 35, Folder 284. Fosdick (1956), 40-41.
biographer also confirms the curriculum was classical from the beginning.\textsuperscript{34} “The Browning School was yet another attempt by John D. [Sr.] to prevent his children from putting on airs or slipping into idle dissipation.”\textsuperscript{35} Rockefeller’s final schooling before college was meant to keep him on the right ethical track set out for him by his parents. In addition, a largely classical curriculum would ensure he had training in all the proper fundamentals that he would need as an adult. Language instruction, both ancient and modern, was meant to sharpen the mind and acquire an attention to detail. Greco-Roman cultural and historical instruction, as well as English literature, was meant to provide the context for what was read in the ancient languages and stress the importance of classical models for the modern world. Founding a school for him also meant that Rockefeller Sr. could assert some control over the enterprise and above all ensure the results he wanted. Browning and Rockefeller Sr. had a rapport even if Rockefeller Sr.’s motive was to keep track of Junior’s progress. In a letter dated 25 July 1891, Rockefeller Sr. wrote to Browning, “We can hardly express to you our pleasure and satisfaction in the result of John’s examination. It furnishes another proof of your faithful and valuable services, as his instructor, as fully appreciated by John, as by his parents. Thanking you very sincerely and hoping that you are receiving the full benefit of your summer rest.”\textsuperscript{36} Thus, the Browning School was built for Rockefeller and he received the full instruction and attention of Browning while in attendance. Furthermore, the classical curriculum was also then thought of by Rockefeller Sr. as a positive addition to Junior’s education.

\textsuperscript{34} Chernow, Ron. (1998), \textit{Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.}, 233.
\textsuperscript{35} Chernow (1998), 233.
\textsuperscript{36} Browning School, Archives, Early years binder, Rockefeller Sr. Letters.
John A. Browning was the first headmaster and sole teacher in the early years and believed in a broad course of study that would foster a lifelong love of learning. At the Browning School that course of study in the late nineteenth century was a rich classical education that encompassed language study of primarily Latin and Greek but also important modern languages such as French and German. The curriculum also included historical and cultural instruction about Greco-Roman times down to the Renaissance. Basic subjects like writing, English literature, mathematics and geography were also part of the curriculum. Like Rockefeller’s many prior teachers, Browning had an education in Classics, which undoubtedly influenced the curriculum. Based on the archives at the Browning School, Browning attended Columbia Grammar School where he had an extensive classical education. Not surprisingly for someone who would go on to found his own school, Browning was ranked first in his class in many of the categories listed. The Browning School’s archives also preserve a booklet of reading lists used in Browning’s classroom, which provide a window into the curriculum used during the Browning School’s early days. While not entirely classical, the reading lists for boys ages 8-18 consist of a fair number of writings about ancient history, mythology, and philosophy. There was also a list of books included in the booklet for college preparatory reading. A college-bound student was meant to read these books starting in his sophomore year. Among the books listed in this section was Pope’s *Iliad*. Alfred Pinneo, in “John A. Browning: a forerunner of Progressive Education,” discusses some of Browning’s philosophy and the educational techniques he pioneered as a forerunner to

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38 Browning School, Archives, Early years binder, John Browning Letters.  
39 Browning School, Archives, Early years binder, “Books for School and Home Reading…Mr. Browning’s Private Classes.”
the Progressive movement in education that took off in the early twentieth century. Pinneo provides a glimpse into Browning’s classroom and mentions his “Progressive Method” and “Project Method.” The “Progressive Method” sought to “bring to bear upon the task in hand some creative, personal, or social motive, so that one is carried on and on by the sheer joy of doing things. All the time the pupils are learning.” Pinneo cites Browning’s example of the “Latin Derby” whereby Browning timed his own recitation of a paradigm and the students then tried to beat his time; whoever succeeded was awarded a prize. The “Project Method,” having originated with Browning according to Pinneo’s knowledge, “includes the group development of some constructive enterprise, involving study, exploration, [and] research with manual construction and decoration.” The notebook of Bayard Dodge, a student of Browning’s in 1898, just a few years after Rockefeller graduated, is an excellent example of the type of constructed notes Browning had his students build. Each student began his notebook with a synoptic outline of the main facts from a given text and then went about expanding and enriching that information with illustration and data gleaned from other sources. Thus, a final notebook would have outlines, timelines, maps, photographs, drawings, and prints from a variety of sources. As Pinneo puts it, “thus Thermopylae, Marathon and Olympus became not only proportionally placed in the setting of the world, but also inspirations and points of departure for an expanding consciousness of things that are much more than they

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41 Pinneo, “John A. Browning,” 547.
42 Pinneo, “John A. Browning,” 547.
44 Browning School, Archives, Bayard Dodge, 1898-1905.
The RAC does not preserve such a notebook for Rockefeller Jr., but his notes do betray the style of synopsis and outlining of Browning’s “Project Method.” It does not seem a stretch to conclude that Rockefeller Jr. must have undergone training very similar to Dodge under Browning.

As was the case with his performance at the schools Rockefeller attended prior to the Browning School, he excelled in the classical curriculum. The RAC preserves more details about his time at the Browning School than any other school except Brown University. The preserved class schedules provide a clear picture of the type of classes Rockefeller took while at the Browning School and point to a broad classical curriculum. For example, the language study he began at the Cutler School continued at the Browning School. Three years of class schedules are preserved. During the academic years 1889-1891, Rockefeller had Latin class every school day for all three years, except for the final year when Wednesday was the only day without Latin listed on the schedule. His study of Greek continued in 1890-1891 meeting four days a week in the first year and every school day the following year. Rockefeller began his study of German while at the Browning School. German is listed on his course schedule for the three years we have information. Thus, the majority of Rockefeller’s school days consisted of language instruction and represents the core of the classical curriculum at the Browning School. Rockefeller also took a number of other traditional classes.46

Several of Rockefeller’s notebooks are preserved, offering additional insight into the details of the language curriculum at Browning. For example, his Latin notebooks for

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46 RAC, FA335, School Papers-The Browning School-Class Schedules, 1890-1891, Box 35, Folder 298.
the 1889-1890 school year are preserved. This RAC folder contains four notebooks, the biggest of which has written out a total of thirty-nine Latin Prose Composition exercises. A second, smaller notebook has notes copied from Allen and Greenough’s *Latin Grammar*. The third notebook contains exams “tried by John D. Rockefeller Jr., Spring 1891.” It is evident from this notebook that Rockefeller took several old Yale entrance exams by way of practice. He took the Latin Grammar, Caesar, Catiline, Archias, Cicero, and Latin Composition exams. These exams all date from the 1880s, the earliest being from 1882 and the latest from 1888. The fourth and final notebook is from Winter 1893 and contains a full grammar review of Latin, with noun declension paradigms, verb conjugations and grammatical explanations written out. The back of this notebook has a sort of quick reference of full declension paradigms and the full conjugation of the verb *amō*.

Rockefeller’s Latin notebooks reveal important aspects of his study habits and education. First, Rockefeller’s characteristic bent towards detail shines forth. The notes are not rushed and are all handwritten in careful script. It is evident that he put much time, care, and effort into his notebooks. Pages are not torn or crinkled in any way. Second, the use of Allen and Greenough’s seminal grammar, already a few decades old at the time, points to the advanced work and seriousness with which Latin, and language instruction in general, were taken at the Browning School. Rockefeller must have been reading authentic texts with few aids. Finally, the series of old exams from Yale points to

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48 RAC, FA335, School Papers-The Browning School-Latin Notebooks, 1889-1890, Box 36, Folder 303.
a canon that was largely rhetorical and historical in content with no Latin poetry represented at all. The works are mostly from Cicero’s political speeches or Caesar’s writings. Both lend themselves to rhetorical and stylistic inquiry. Rhetorically, one could examine the ways in which Cicero structures arguments and to what effect. Stylistically, one could examine the Latin word order and word choice and their relationship to the general arguments. Readings from Caesar would also have introduced one to an example of Roman ethnography. Furthermore, these selections point towards an emphasis on rhetoric and public speaking in the Browning School curriculum. This, in particular, would serve Rockefeller very well in the future as a public figure.

A second set of notebooks reveals a deeper classical curriculum than just language instruction in Latin and Greek and the modern languages of German and French. Rockefeller also studied Greek and Roman history. Which class this course of study was a part of is unclear from his class schedules, but presumably this instruction occurred alongside the textual discussion in the individual language classes. The first page of the notebook labeled “Notes on Greek Text” is titled “Epitome of Portions of Herodotos History of the Persian Wars.” Rockefeller’s notes are divided into subsections that are each labeled with the various important battles and their accompanying dates. From the list of subsections it is clear he studied a wide section of the Histories but with a clear focus on the various Persian expeditions into Greece and the most famous battles fought between the two sides, including Marathon, Thermopylae, Salamis, and Plataea. Although not specifically stated as with Herodotus, it seems that his studies in Greek history continued in reading portions of Thucydides because the next section of notes discusses the years following the Persian Wars and moving into the Peloponnesian War.
His notes consist of what might be called “purple passages” such as the causes of the war, the 30 tyrants at Athens, the 10,000, and the Theban supremacy 371-361 BCE. Lastly, his study of Greek extended to include readings from the *Odyssey*. Rockefeller also lists several books with their price, presumably books he was reading in school. The first book listed is Thomas Seymour’s *Introduction to the Language and Verse of Homer* (1855). This was most likely used in conjunction with his readings from the *Odyssey* and hints that he most likely read the *Odyssey* in the original Greek. He also lists Richard Jebb’s *Greek Literature* (1884), which provides an overview of Greek literature. The third and final book listed is Charles Gayley’s *Classic Myths in English Literature* (1893).\(^{49}\) Compared to his Greek history notes, very little is preserved of his notes on Roman history, for which there is a separate notebook. This notebook contains a list of emperors, of whom Trajan gets his own page. Constantine is listed as well, as is a brief list of events down to the invasion of Italy by barbarians.\(^{50}\)

Rockefeller’s history notebooks reveal an emphasis on some of the key events in Greek and Roman history such as the Persian and Peloponnesian wars. That so many of Rockefeller’s Greek history notes detail the Persian wars provides validation for his subsequent interest in Near Eastern antiquities. In addition, the listing of textbooks on Homeric style points to a reading of Homer in the original Greek. Furthermore, the close attention to stylistics in Homeric poetry would have complemented the rhetorical training Rockefeller was receiving in his other classes. Most importantly, his inclusion of a book on the reception of mythology in English literature is evidence of his exposure to

\(^{49}\) RAC, FA335, School Papers-The Browning School-Greek Grammar, n.d., Box 36, Folder 302.

\(^{50}\) RAC, FA335, School Papers-The Browning School-Roman History Notes, n.d., Box 36, Folder 306.
classical mythology at this young age and the many ways it can be appropriated. Charles Gayley also published a book on classical mythology in art a few years later and it does not seem unlikely that Rockefeller might have read that as well. As Gayley’s book is listed on Browning’s reading list noted above, it seems all the more likely that Rockefeller did in fact read this book as part of his studies at the Browning School. The inclusion of mythology in the curriculum provides strong evidence for a broad classical curriculum at the Browning School. Moreover, Rockefeller’s exposure to this curriculum speaks to his future interest in history and antiquity.

The classical curriculum at the Browning School reached all subjects. In Rockefeller’s art sketches, debating exercises, and essays, classical references are scattered throughout. For example, one of the most detailed and best of his art sketches is of a bearded Greek soldier with his helmet lifted backward slightly. The sketch is strikingly similar to busts of Pericles and Ajax and could be modeled after either. It will be shown below that art and art history, of which classical and near eastern art was a significant portion, were part of the general curriculum. The classical curriculum is also evident from his debate exercises. One of his essays on whether eloquence is a gift of nature or can be acquired mentions Demosthenes as one of the greatest orators that ever lived. Rockefeller also mentions the story of Demosthenes’s speech impediment and how it is said that he overcame it by practicing speaking with a pebble in his mouth. In

51 Browning School, Archives, Early years binder, “Books for School and Home Reading…Mr. Browning’s Private Classes,” 11.
52 RAC, FA335, School Papers-The Browning School-Art Portfolio, 1890-1891, Box 35, Folder 297.
another of his essays, this one on prize giving, a young Rockefeller argues that the only
prizes that ought to be given are those like the ones given at the Olympic games in
Greece, since whatever was won came about from “the lasting good derived from years
of training.” In a third debate exercise, Rockefeller argues against capital punishment
unless all other modes of punishment have been tried and failed by making a comparison
to the effective Porcian law during Rome’s Republic, under which citizens could avoid
capital punishment through voluntary exile. Finally, in an essay about ambition, the
young Rockefeller warns against excessive ambition as in the examples of Caesar,
Alexander and Pyrrhus. Taken together, Rockefeller’s debate exercises and essay
assignments show his capable use of classical *exempla* in argumentation and also
demonstrate the strong classical rhetorical training that must have been a part of the
curriculum at the Browning School. His essays and debates also betray a viewpoint that
the past helped form the present, and, in fact, can even inform the present. That he
continually drew from the classical past, in particular, is partly a result of the classical
curriculum at the Browning School, but is also a result of his own curiosity and fondness
for the ancient world and the past more generally. Thus, the reception of the past for
Rockefeller was a very personal experience, and it would continue to reverberate
throughout his adult life.

Overall, the classical curriculum of the Browning School provided Rockefeller
with a solid foundation for success in his future business endeavors and for immediate

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54 RAC, FA335, School Papers-The Browning School-Debating Exercises, 1889-1890,
n.d. Box 35, Folder 299, “Prize giving ought not to be encouraged.”
55 RAC, FA335, School Papers-The Browning School-Debating Exercises, 1889-1890,
56 RAC, FA335, School Papers-The Browning School-Essays, 1889-1891, Box 35,
Folder 300, “Ambition.”
success at Brown University. His future speeches point to the lasting influence of the rhetorical training and debate practice he underwent at the Browning School. The overall knowledge of the ancient world and mythology, in particular, would be a strong influence on some of his international philanthropy. One can already see in his art sketches a preference for the aesthetic of classical art, which he would carry over to his art collection habits.

All of Rockefeller’s classical training was put to good use in 1891 when he took the entrance exam for admission to Yale University. Many of his peers were going to Yale, which had a reputation as one of the best universities, and thus Rockefeller initially decided to go there. The exam took place over three days, June 25th, 26th, and 27th. While the exam did test Arithmetic, Algebra and Geometry with one additional section of French or German translation, the majority of the exam was comprised of translation and composition of Latin and Greek passages as well as a short essay on Greek and Roman history. The Browning School’s classical curriculum was thus college preparatory and would benefit Rockefeller on this exam, much of which he should have read beforehand in the various practice exams we know he took. Rockefeller’s biographer, Raymond Fosdick, records that Rockefeller failed just the “Ovid at Sight” portion of the Yale entrance exam, which caused him to delay entrance to college one year and which ultimately led him to choose another university better suited to his deficiencies.57 In fact, however, he failed much more than just the Ovid at Sight portion mentioned above. According to the examination report in the RAC, J.B. Dexter, the examiner, notes that he failed the French/German, Ovid at Sight, Vergil, Latin Prosody, Prose Latin at Sight,

Xenophon’s Anabasis, Homer, Greek Composition, Prose Greek at Sight, and the Geometry portions of the exam. He passed Cicero, Caesar, Latin Grammar, Latin Composition, Roman History, Greek Grammar, Greek History, Arithmetic, Metric System and Algebra. It is of no surprise that Rockefeller passed the math portions of the exam since he inherited his father’s aptitude for numbers and accounting. He also passed more of the Latin portions of the exam than the Greek, a fact that is also accounted for. He studied Latin for several more years than Greek. Also, the Latin sections he did pass, Cicero and Caesar, he had already shown a proclivity towards based on his debate and rhetorical trainings. The results from the exam were a bit sobering for Rockefeller. He stayed a fourth year at the Browning School. His inability to pass the exam on the first attempt did not stem from any academic failing. It is much more likely that Rockefeller’s nervousness and shyness ultimately led to a lack of confidence. Rockefeller re-evaluated the possible universities he could attend, and Brown University increasingly became his new ideal school.

In February 1893, Rockefeller wrote to Dr. William Rainey Harper, President of the University of Chicago. Harper was a close family friend and Rockefeller trusted his advice. Rockefeller is remarkably candid in the letter, especially in regards to a self-assessment of his own negative personality traits. For example, he says that he is “naturally somewhat retiring” and that he does “not make friends readily.” He recalls that those interested in his success fear that if he goes to Yale he will be “lost in the crowd.” Rockefeller’s concern is clearly which school would provide the better social

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58 RAC, FA335, School Papers-General-Yale University Entrance Examination, 1891, Box 35, Folder 286.
59 Fosdick (1956), 45.
contact, Yale or Brown, the latter where some of his good friends were going in the fall. In regard to each school’s academic prospects, he says that for someone good at studying and conscientious it should matter little where he goes. Harper replies a few days later detailing the advantages of Yale and Brown. Of Yale he says that it has a wider reputation, proximity to New York City, and is attended by more men of better family. Of Brown he says that its current president, Elisha Benjamin Andrews, is personable and Rockefeller would have closer contact with him than the president of Yale, it has a semi-denominational management, and it is a smaller institution. Harper states that if Andrews stays as president of Brown he should go there, otherwise go to Yale. Furthermore, Harper slights the reputation of Yale by saying that it is not the institution but the company you keep there that is important. He adds, speaking frankly and confidentially, that at Yale there are no men of preeminent character as instructors, but that Andrews, on the other hand, has the capacity to inspire. Rockefeller also sought the advice of his local minister, William Herbert Perry Faunce, of the Fifth Avenue Baptist Church, which the Rockefeller family attended. In April 1893, Faunce wrote to Rockefeller encouraging him to go to Brown because the air is more healthful in Providence than New Haven and that at Yale there is a “fast set” that would be “totally uncongenial to you.” Furthermore, Faunce notes that class sizes are smaller at Brown and that there Rockefeller would come into closer contact with professors rather than tutors. Rockefeller chose to attend Brown University in Fall 1893, most likely owing to its small size, his enrollment with three close friends, and its more amicable social atmosphere.

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60 Fosdick (1956), 46.
61 Fosdick (1956), 46-47.
62 The emphasis is Faunce’s.
Prior to the start of his freshmen year at Brown University, Rockefeller, along with his family, attended the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in early July 1893. The World’s Columbian Exposition, also known as “The White City,” was a world fair meant to celebrate the 400th anniversary of Columbus discovering the Americas. The fair ran from May 1 to October 30, 1893. The fair was dominated by Beaux-Art design and neoclassical architecture set inside a fair ground designed in such a way as to enhance the imposing facades of the many fair buildings. The fair was part of Chicago’s emergence as an important city in the United States. Part of Chicago’s transformation had begun just a few years prior when Rockefeller Sr. financially supported the founding of the University of Chicago in 1890. The first class of students enrolled in 1892. Progress was a central theme during the Columbian Exposition. The advances in science, math, and industry were on display in the form of locomotives, steamships, and electricity. Rockefeller Sr.’s company, Standard Oil, occupied a large portion of the Mines and Mining Building. The electricity that made the fair so spectacular, with buildings and monuments lit up at night, was even powered by oil supplied by Rockefeller’s Standard Oil, shipped in from nearby Whiting, Indiana. The Columbian Exposition, thus, heralded a transition from human and animal labor to

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63 Browning School, Archives, Early years binder, Rockefeller Jr. to Browning, September 3, 1893.
64 Rosenberg, C. (2008), America at the Fair.
65 Rosenberg (2008), 64-70.
67 Rosenberg (2008), 252.
68 Rosenberg (2008), 203-204.
electricity and fossil fuels. Much of that transition was capitalist in nature and helped fuel a consumption economy.\textsuperscript{69}

Rockefeller’s attendance at the Columbian Exposition is significant. The fair grounds were designed with symmetry as a theme, and harmony among the various buildings was achieved through a cohesive aesthetic. The fair was a Beaux-Art and Neoclassical wonderland. Many of the buildings were an impressive amalgamation of art and architecture. Some of these principals are later utilized in the design and aesthetic of Rockefeller Center. Rockefeller’s own artistic bent toward classical forms must have been further reinforced by his attendance.

Along with his academic training at the Browning School, Rockefeller felt the lasting impact of John A. Browning’s own presence in his life. The close bond the two developed is attested in personal letters. For example, Rockefeller wrote to Browning on 3 September 1893, saying he tried to call him at his house but must have missed each other. Rockefeller mostly discusses what he did over the summer. He ends by saying, “I shall miss much not being with you this winter for I have greatly enjoyed the years we have spent together, and shall ever feel grateful to you for what you have done for me, and the interest you have taken in me.”\textsuperscript{70} Rockefeller would continue to correspond with Browning throughout the next few years. These letters affirm Browning’s close instruction of Rockefeller.

Brown University

\textsuperscript{69} Rosenberg (2008), 269-274.
\textsuperscript{70} Browning School, Archives, Early years binder, Rockefeller Jr. to Browning, September 3, 1893.
Rockefeller, at nineteen years of age, ultimately decided to attend Brown University, 1893-1897. He forever cherished his time spent there, remarking upon it with fondness, both upon graduating and later in life. Rockefeller’s horizons broadened culturally and academically while at Brown. Most importantly, the classical education at the Browning School well prepared him for his collegiate coursework. On October 1, 1893, Rockefeller again wrote to John A. Browning telling him about his first days at Brown University. He glows about being placed in the highest division in all his subjects, including in Latin and Greek, which Rockefeller made sure to call to Browning’s attention in the letter, even detailing how long he takes to prepare passages each night in Latin and Greek.

The files in the RAC preserve records of his courses for all four years at Brown and for some of the final exams. Thus, researchers have a complete picture of the courses he was enrolled in. His first-year Latin and Greek exams are largely preserved. During his first year, 1893-1894, Rockefeller took Latin and Greek all three trimesters. Part of his Fall 1893 Latin exam was to answer six of eight questions. The questions mostly focused on the Republic’s assemblies, offices and Plebeians’s struggles. In addition, several questions reference readings from Livy and his attempts at rationalizing myths. A second part to the exam was translation of selections from Livy Book 1:6, 25;

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72 Browning School, Archives, Early years binder, Rockefeller Jr. to Browning, October 1, 1893.
73 RAC, FA335, School Papers-Brown University-Admission and Registration Materials, 1893-1897, Box 36, Folder 308, contains a complete list of the classes he enrolled in except for the third semester of his Junior year. RAC, FA335, School Papers-Brown University-Examinations, 1893-1897, Box 37, Folder 314, contains all of the copies of college exams that are preserved.
2:46; 1:4; 21:44. The RAC preserves his grades for Brown and we know that Rockefeller maintained an A average in Latin during his first year.\textsuperscript{74} For Greek, on an exam held December 25, 1893, he had to translate passages from Herodotus’s \textit{Historiae}, Book 6:112; 7:226; 8:95; 9:86. The first passage was mandatory, he chose the second over the third, and the fourth was sight. The exam continued with a short paragraph to be composed in Greek, followed by explaining the participles and use of subjunctives and optatives in the passages translated. The last part of the exam asked the student to discuss Herodotus, a timelines of events, the character of key figures, and to draw a map with key locations marked. Judging from the numbers tallied in the margin, it would appear he earned a 72 on this exam. For his first year of Greek at Brown, Rockefeller maintained a B average.

He had several more exams in March and June 1894 in Greek, Latin, and Roman History. The Greek exam took place in March and covered passages from Thucydides and Xenophon and was structured the same way as the previous Herodotus exam. A second Latin exam also took place in March, and was in two parts. The first part was a translation of selections from Cicero. The six passages listed were in the following order: \textit{ad Atticum} 2:14, 2:25, \textit{ad Familiares} 7.1, \textit{ad Atticum} 5:16, \textit{ad Familiares} 9.1, \textit{Cato Maior de Senectute} 8-9. The second part was on Roman history in eight questions and covered topics regarding Cicero, the triumvirate, the effects of conquest on Roman morals and a question on comparing Sulla and Caesar. The third Latin exam took place

\textsuperscript{74} RAC, FA335, School Papers-Brown University-Grade Reports, 1893-1897, Box 37, Folder 316. This RAC file has all of his Brown University grades for all classes, all semesters. The grade rubric varies across the four years, so I have chosen to convert them all to their modern equivalent in the text for the sake of consistency and clarity.
in June 1894 at the end of Rockefeller’s first year at Brown University. It consisted of the translation of seven passages of Latin prose from Tacitus: *Agricola* 4, 12, 33, 45; *Germania* 13, 12, 20. There was also a second Roman history exam. It was in the same format as the first history exam but covered Augustus to the Flavians, the imperial cult, and army tasks in the provinces. It seems likely that this exam took place in Spring 1894 because its subject matter is chronologically later than that of the previous history exam. Unfortunately, the RAC copy of this exam lacks a date. Rockefeller also took French, Mathematics and Rhetoric I during his first year.

Rockefeller’s freshman year at Brown demonstrates his ongoing interest in the classical world. He continued a full year in college with both classical languages. He took French for a full two years while at Brown and maintained an A average in French the entire time. This is no surprise, as Rockefeller had already begun his study of French many years prior. He also took one year of German in his sophomore year and maintained an A average. His reading of the Greek historians continued and expanded with the inclusion of Xenophon and his reading of Roman history seems to have expanded greatly with readings from Livy and Tacitus. His reading of Tacitus’s *Agricola* and *Germania*, rich in ancient geography and ethnography, complemented his reading of Herodotus and exposed Rockefeller to the variety of ancient historical writings.

This was the extent of his formal education in Latin and Greek. He did not continue with either language beyond his freshman year. It, however, was not the end of his exposure to Classics and the classical world. For example, Rockefeller took four semesters of art history while at Brown. In the third trimester of his junior year he took *History of Art 6*. In his senior year, 1896-1897, he took an art history course in all three
trimesters, among them History of Art 1, 4, and 8. The final exam for History of Art 8, which he took in his final semester, is not preserved in the RAC, but those from all three of the other courses are preserved. In his final term in his junior year, he elected to take History of Art 6. This course covered the Renaissance and mentions specific artists like Michelangelo, Giotto, Masaccio and Raphael, and how their art was influenced by or compared with previous art styles. His first term of 1896 he took History of Art 1. Based on the final exam questions this course covered mostly ancient Greek art. Beginning with questions about Phoenician influences on the development of Greek art, the exam continued with questions on the Ionic order, characteristics of Greek sculpture, and the effect of the Persian wars on Greek art. In his second term of the same year, he took History of Art 4. Judging from the questions on the final exam, this course covered Hellenistic, Roman and Gothic art. In his final exam, Rockefeller had to describe the characteristics of Hellenistic sculpture, making reference to the “Dying Gladiator.”

He also had to discuss possible influences on Roman art and what effect, if any, those influences might have had on its development. There was also a question on Roman architecture. The remaining questions touched on the influences of ancient art and architecture on Byzantine and Gothic architecture.

These three art history courses covered ancient to Renaissance art. Rockefeller, thus, had a substantial background and interest in art history and Greek and Roman art. It is important to note that his grades dipped in his junior and senior years as he became more social and traveled more. His interest in art history, however, clearly took priority his final semesters at Brown, because these were the only courses in which he maintained

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75 The “Dying Gladiator” is a Roman copy of a now lost Hellenistic sculpture from the late third century BCE. It is also known as the “Dying Gaul” or the “Dying Galatian.”
an A average during that time. His knowledge of Greco-Roman art and architecture and its influences on Gothic art, in particular, was clearly internalized and informed his adult interests, philanthropy, and views on aesthetic beauty. Furthermore, it seems that Rockefeller’s own views on what was beautiful art were in part developed through his experiences in these art history classes. A significant portion of that subjective aesthetic is based on classical art and can be seen at work in his philanthropy of archaeology of ancient Mediterranean cities and the mythologically-based artwork of Rockefeller Center.

Rockefeller also took three philosophy courses while at Brown University. Information is preserved about only one, Philosophy 8, which he took in the first term of his senior year. Based on the final exam questions in the RAC file, this course covered ancient philosophy. Rockefeller had to characterize the periods of Greek philosophy, its geographical movements, and its influence on Greek religion. He had to answer a question on the development of the Platonic theory of ideas and had to compare the systems of Plato and Democritus. He had to trace the development of rationalistic epistemology. Lastly, he had to compare and contrast the beliefs of Socrates and the Sophists. Judging from the sequence of art history courses, it is possible that these philosophy courses followed a similar trajectory in covering ancient philosophy and its reception in Renaissance and contemporary philosophy.

Rockefeller took a course of study at Brown that was a continuation of the classical curriculum he received at the Browning School. After graduating from Brown, Rockefeller did not continue with a master’s or doctoral degree. It was typical for the sons of elite individuals of the Gilded Age to enter directly into business after college. The classical and liberal arts education he received produced a young Rockefeller who
was both well-rounded in the knowledge of his day and comfortable with the ancient
world, its literature, history, art, architecture, and its reception. In seeking to understand
more fully the mythologically-based artwork of Rockefeller Center, built during a time
when Classics had long since begun to decline in national popularity, Rockefeller’s
classical education stands out as a deciding factor because of his long interest in history
and prior ages. In terms of his interests in art in particular, he remained interested in
prior historical periods rather than the modern art trends occurring around him. The son
of perhaps the richest man of the Gilded Age, Rockefeller grew up in the United States at
a time of remarkable change in society, including industrialization, urbanization, and a
revolution in the transportation industry with the invention of the combustible engine and
the adoption of fossil fuels. He grew up with horses and carriages and witnessed the birth
of the personal automobile and airplane. He grew up in a world where disease still killed,
but he was to witness, and support financially, the defeat and treatment of diseases
through modern medicine. Unlike those around him in his immediate family, namely his
wife Abby and his son Nelson, Rockefeller had a personal interest in art that looked
backward despite the fact that his family’s philanthropy supported forward-looking
activities that held the promise of long-term beneficial impact. His penchant for nostalgia
of prior ages is most evident in his early philanthropy and his personal art collections and
tastes, which stand in stark contrast to his wife Abby’s, which were entirely modern.
Thus, he was certainly exposed to all of the modernity of his time, but continually chose
older objects and artifacts as the objects of his desire.

Classics in Late Nineteenth Century United States
Due to the fact that researchers know about the type of education Rockefeller received in detail, his education is a window into the world of private preparatory schools in late nineteenth century United States and the role that Classics played in their curriculum. As a result, discussion of Rockefeller’s education adds to our knowledge about classicism in the late nineteenth century United States.

Caroline Winterer has investigated the influence of classicism in the United States in the nineteenth century. She argues convincingly that the ubiquity of classicism in the early part of the nineteenth century lessened as the century progressed. By the late nineteenth century, the nature of that classicism changed from a classicism rooted in the Romans to that of the Greeks. This change in classicism paralleled a contemporaneous shift in classical scholarship happening first at German universities but later brought to the United States, in large research universities that were recently established. Ultimately, Winterer concludes that classicism, besieged by modernist critiques of its lack of utility, receded in scope to that of the university, within which it was relegated to an even smaller corner of the humanities. Winterer largely supports this dramatic shift with evidence drawn from the writings and speeches of nineteenth century classicists and university presidents. Her primary source evidence is important but provides only part of the landscape of classicism in the United States, namely its role in higher education.

Lee Pearcy, on the other hand, is not as concerned with classicism as in examining the connection between studying classical literature and a moral society. In examining this connection, Pearcy looks as the origins of the liberal arts, their

76 Winterer (2002), The Culture of Classicism.
77 Winterer (2002), 44-98.
79 Pearcy (2005), The Grammar of Our Civility, ix-xii.
transformation in the nineteenth century, and how Classics influenced that change and was itself altered in the process.\textsuperscript{80} He concludes that a university’s purpose was to develop a student’s intellect so that he or she can learn anything; he teases out whether a classical education does that best and what that might look like.\textsuperscript{81} Most importantly, Pearcy’s primary sources of evidence are very similar to Winterer’s, and thus, his arguments tend to focus on higher education. I argue in this final section that Rockefeller’s educational biography demonstrates that the gateway to Classics lies much earlier in one’s education, namely in pre-collegiate education.

As I have shown above, much of Rockefeller’s formal schooling was based on a classical curriculum. In light of the research of Winterer and Pearcy, Rockefeller’s education both confirms some of their conclusions and complements them. In particular, Winterer and Pearcy note that universities began to eliminate the requirements for Latin and Greek for admission and graduation just as liberal arts education, with its plethora of humanities majors, arose in higher education.\textsuperscript{82} Mention is made of pre-collegiate school\textsuperscript{83} but their arguments rest on the writings and speeches of college professors and presidents. Rockefeller’s education at Brown University confirms the dwindling requirements for Latin and Greek in institutions of higher education in the late nineteenth century. He took only one year of Latin and Greek. In discussing the new liberal arts curriculum, however, Winterer and Pearcy do not fully account for the interdisciplinarity of Classics, because they look only at language requirements or enrollments in Latin and Greek. They neglect to investigate the curricula of the humanities courses that many

\textsuperscript{80} Pearcy (2005), 1-41.
\textsuperscript{81} Pearcy (2005), 12 and 117-129.
\textsuperscript{82} Winterer (2002), 101-107, 117-130. Pearcy (2005), 81-82.
\textsuperscript{83} Winterer (202), 101-103.
students were taking instead of Latin and Greek. In many of these courses students were still exposed to the classical past. Rockefeller’s education at Brown University provides this insight. While he took only one year of Latin and Greek, he went on to take several philosophy and art history courses that were specifically related to Greco-Roman culture. Philosophy and Art History were among the disciplines created in the new liberal arts curriculum. Therefore, in some ways all that the classical world has to offer was segmented in the new liberal arts curriculum into various disciplines, but it did not entirely leave the curriculum.

The detailed knowledge of Rockefeller’s private schooling demonstrates Winterer and Pearcy’s arguments can be taken further. Neither fully accounts for Classics in private school curricula.84 This is important because the public school system was not yet mandated in every state, so many children were still educated in private schools or through tutoring.85 Furthermore, these private schools educated future leading members of the socio-economic elite. I argue that enrollment numbers give researchers only part of a picture of a student’s exposure to and the health of Classics. Researchers have to investigate the actual curriculum as much as archival resources will allow. This information is more vital than an enrollment statistic because it could help explain that very same statistic. A student easily could have emerged from years of Latin and Greek study and know very little about the Romans or Greeks and why it might be worth studying them at all, but he or she would be able to identify and translate correctly a

84 Winterer (2002), 101-103. Winterer cites the statistics for enrollment in Latin and Greek in public and private high schools during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This data give a researcher very little knowledge about the place of Latin and Greek instruction in the larger curriculum.
ative of reference or a particular subjunctive usage. Rockefeller’s private schooling prior to Brown University was college preparatory. Thus, the classical curriculum of the many private schools he attended provides a counter narrative to the decline of Classics in higher education. It demonstrates that decline of Classics was a more complex phenomenon. While the discipline’s popularity may have declined in higher education in the late nineteenth century, Rockefeller’s education points towards its continued hold over private preparatory schools, particularly those catering to the children of elite individuals. The very fact that Rockefeller Sr. paid John A. Browning to found a school with a classical curriculum in the late nineteenth century is further evidence that the socio-economic elite wanted their children to experience a classical curriculum. Many of Rockefeller’s peers also received a similar private school education. Thus, these individuals grew up and entered industry and business in the twentieth century well-versed in the ancient world and shared a common educational experience. Rockefeller as an adult, then, could utilize the classical world in the art of Rockefeller Center in ways that he knew would be understood by visitors of his generation in the 1930s. Thus, the adult visitors to Rockefeller Center and the employees that work there would have received enough of a classical education to understand the symbolism in the artwork because they too, like Rockefeller, were educated in the late nineteenth century when classical curricula were still widespread. This generational delay in the long-term effects of the receding of classicism to higher education that Winterer and Pearcy argue for is not emphasized enough when charting the history of classicism’s popularity in the United States. Classicism did not disappear entirely during the nineteenth century. It receded
from a position of ubiquity and the effects of that decline took more than one generation to become evident in venues other than higher education.

The Cutler School and the Browning School are examples of the type of private schools that the children of elite individuals attended during the late nineteenth century. Classical education was standard at such schools. Some of Rockefeller’s classmates while at Cutler include those who also had notable surnames: Cornelius Vanderbilt Jr., Arthur A. Choate, A. Russell Peabody, Edgar and Samuel Auchincloss, and Cutler’s own son Frederick Morse Cutler. Rockefeller Sr.’s financial patronage of John A. Browning and the founding of the Browning School is further evidence that such schools with classical curricula were in demand among parents of the socio-economic elite. Rockefeller, his cousin Percy Rockefeller, and several other children all attended the Browning School. Their enrollment speaks to the popularity of classical education, and the value elite individuals placed in this curriculum as the best preparation for their children’s future success. Thus, while Classics, in particular Greek and Latin instruction, declined in higher education during the late nineteenth century, a broad classical education, including ancient language instruction, history, philosophy, and art history, remained steady and perhaps even increased in desirability among elite individuals especially in private preparatory schools. They would only have the best for their children, they had the means with which to ensure that was provided for, and they sought to enroll their children in private schools that provided just that in the form of a classical curriculum. If taken as paradigmatic of his peers, Rockefeller’s educational biography enlarges the research of Winterer and Pearcy. It points to the necessity of researching and including private

86 RAC, FA335, School Papers-Cutler School-Honor Rolls, 1885-1889, Box 35, Folder 293.
preparatory schools in any attempt to accurately assess the state of Classics in the United States during the late nineteenth century.

Analyzing the curricula at private preparatory schools in the late nineteenth century brings researchers another step closer to acquiring a fuller knowledge of the state of Classics during this time. The vast records of Rockefeller’s education provide just that information. For example, the very detailed notes and the list of books to be read at the Browning School are proof that Classics remained a significant part of the curriculum. Browning’s reading list contains some books that were cross-listed by Rockefeller in his notebooks.  

The most important of the books listed for the purpose of this investigation is Charles Mills Gayley’s *The Classic Myths in English Literature*. This book, originally published in 1858 with subsequent editions, adapts Bulfinch’s *Age of Fable* for use as a textbook by systematizing the presentation and interpretation of the myths that have most influenced English literature. Gayley’s opening sentence in the Preface reads as a reception studies manifesto: “It has long been evident to me that much of our best English poetry lies beyond the imaginative reach of many readers because of their unfamiliarity with the commonplaces of literary allusion, reference, and tradition. Of such commonplaces few are more frequently recurrent than the situations and agencies of myth.”

The majority of Gayley’s book outlines the most important Greco-Roman deities that appear in English literature, as well as their iconographical attributes as

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87 Browning School, Archives, Early years binder, “Books for School and Home Reading…Mr. Browning’s Private Classes.”
90 Gayley (1893), v.
illustrated in artwork. Gayley’s book includes over one hundred illustrations. Since it seems very likely Rockefeller read this book as noted above, it would have served as a thorough introduction to classical mythology. Furthermore, the emphasis on individual deity’s iconographical attributes would have well-prepared him for all of the art history courses he was to take at Brown University and are another possible early source for Rockefeller’s interest in classical mythology so prominently displayed at Rockefeller Center.

A second book likely read by Rockefeller while at the Browning School is James Jackson Jarves’ *The Art-Idea: Sculpture, Painting, and Architecture in America*. This book is also listed in Browning’s reading list mentioned above and thus is likely to have been read. Jarves’ book includes several chapters on classical art and its influence on subsequent art periods, which includes its reception in Christian art motifs. In addition, the book touches upon the very nature of art and its role in society, i.e. its ability to teach and address every mind. Lastly, an entire chapter addresses mythology in art. A lengthy middle section of the book discusses the relationship of art and architecture. In this section, Jarves discusses the ability of art and architecture to work together to create a cohesive message. Jarves makes a striking comparison between art and its relation to architecture, on the one hand, and nature, on the other hand, that must have stuck with the young Rockefeller who would thirty years later embark on a grand building campaign that did just this. Jarves writes that “mere building is the anatomy or geological structure;

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91 Gayley (1893), Chapters V and VI.  
93 Jarves (1866), v-x.  
94 Jarves (1866), Chapters IX.
founded on strict science; while sculpture and painting unite to cover it, as vegetation


clothes the earth, with forms and colors, that suggest alike the sensuous harmonies of


material things, and the loftiest aspirations of the human soul.”

Jarves’s sentiments are
everywhere tinged with Christian thought, so in his analogy above, God made nature like


man makes architecture.

Jarves, however, also allows for architecture and art to be


lacking overt religious symbolism and instead have merely a “spiritual significance.”

One can see in Jarves’s writings about art and architecture the thoughts of Rockefeller


building Rockefeller Center with its art program and use of sculpture and architectural


sculpture to produce a meaningful message that would delight both himself and visitors.


Conclusion

It is significant that John D. Rockefeller Jr. received a classical education that


spanned the entirety of his educational history. Beginning with the Cutler School and


continuing with the Browning School, Rockefeller attended private preparatory schools


in New York City that were founded by and at which instruction was given by


headmasters who themselves were trained in Classics. Rockefeller’s education prior to


university consisted largely of language instruction specifically in Latin, Greek, French,


and to a lesser extent German. As part of that language instruction, Greek and Roman


history was taught alongside texts like Herodotus’s Histories. This robust classical


curriculum extended to other subjects like English literature that were not overtly

classical but which featured works of literature that were written by individuals inspired


95 Jarves (1866), 89.

96 Jarves (1866), 93.

97 Jarves (1866), 102.
by the classical past. Thus, the rich and multi-faceted reception of the ancient world in literature and art was addressed in the curriculum. While his reading of Latin and Greek texts continued when he attended Brown University, the influence of ancient art and philosophy was also felt in the many liberal arts courses in which he enrolled. Thus, Rockefeller’s classical education was both enriched and also expanded during his years as a student at Brown University. The adult Rockefeller who graduated from Brown University had an interest in the past and the classical past, in particular, and simultaneously understood how that past was affecting the present. The educational history of Rockefeller, known in such great detail based on original archival research, demonstrates that further research on the state of Classics in educational institutions must account for private preparatory schools. Rockefeller’s own education mirrored that of peers from similar backgrounds and with access to similar private preparatory schools and leads to the conclusion that classical curricula were not only well-regarded but in some cases may have been in demand. The education of Rockefeller produced an adult who was knowledgeable about the past, its reception, and the importance of continuing to learn about it and preserve it for future generations. This is most clearly evident from Rockefeller’s philanthropic activities, which will be addressed next in Chapter Two.
Chapter Two argues that Rockefeller’s classical education influenced him as a young adult, particularly in the philanthropy that became his life’s work. As a continuation of the biographical approach used in Chapter One, I examine the beginnings of the Rockefeller family’s philanthropy, especially the principles of giving laid out by Rockefeller Sr., and the changes that occurred in that philanthropy with the development of a series of Rockefeller foundations. The role and influence of Rockefeller Jr. in these matters is central to this investigation, since many of the philanthropic causes that he had a personal interest in were related to classical antiquity in some manner. Rockefeller supported the study of Ancient Near Eastern civilizations through the proposed funding of the Cairo Museum and the funding of the Palestine Archaeology Museum of Jerusalem, later known as the Rockefeller Museum. He also donated substantial funds to the American Academy in Rome (AAR) and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA). Funding for the latter was often closely associated with one of Rockefeller’s largest financial donations at the time: funding the excavation of the Athenian Agora. Finally, Rockefeller’s close association with the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia, and his prominent role in the restoration of Versailles foreshadow much of what was to come with Rockefeller Center. Rockefeller’s philanthropy of classical initiatives is also evidence that classicism continued to remain relevant well into the twentieth century, despite a decline in the percentage of students enrolled in Latin or Greek at both the secondary and undergraduate levels.
Origins of Rockefeller Philanthropy

Philanthropy in the United States originated during colonial times. Protestant ethics, ubiquitous in pre-twentieth century United States, encouraged charity among the fortunate. Philanthropy in the ante-bellum period of the United States is very different from what today is considered philanthropy. Then, philanthropy encompassed everything from small scale giving to volunteerism. Charity occurred on an individual level. One person generally more well off than others gave to those less fortunate. This helped the recipient of the gift only for a short while and did nothing to address the underlying causes of the misfortune of the many.98 During the Gilded Age in the United States in last half of the nineteenth century, the nature of philanthropy and charity began to change. To a great extent, men such as John D. Rockefeller ushered in this shift from small-scale charity to large-scale philanthropy. The large, concentrated fortunes of the robber barons allowed them to effect change on a scale that previously only governments could achieve.

Individual family fortunes have existed throughout the history of the United States. Prior to this shift in the late 1800s and early 1900s, however, whatever large donations made from family fortunes came about from what Olivier Zunz calls the “dead hand.” Wills and trusts were set up with a very narrow goal in mind, which later hindered their effectiveness.99 In fact, United States law even mandated such types of narrow

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99 Zunz (2012), *Philanthropy in America*, 3-4. Typically at this point in time, one could designate the recipient of one’s possessions either to a living person or organization. If given to an organization, that money was often restricted in what it could be used for subsequently.
giving. One way around this was to simply give away the fortune while you were still alive. This is the tactic Andrew Carnegie is said to have advised in order to get around legal barriers to his institutional giving and to prevent his heirs from spending his money in a way that was against his own wishes. New York State was a political player in the regulations of wills and trusts, especially because so many of the Gilded Age fortunes were located in New York. The 1893 Tilden Act created the legal framework for the shift from small-scale charity to large-scale philanthropy by changing the laws to allow for open-ended trusts. This meant that fortunes did not have to be controlled by estate judges or even the owner’s own intentions, but could now be managed by trustees of large foundations that could utilize the money over successive generations. The final transformation of philanthropy during this time period involved the ways in which money was used to effect change, particularly on social matters. The rhetoric often used in the charters of foundations created at this time stipulated a mission for the “well-being of mankind.” Such a broad mission statement allowed foundations a considerable degree of flexibility in their future philanthropy. The creation of foundations to spend down these vast Gilded Age fortunes was itself yet another example in the shift from the personal, direct philanthropy of the ante-bellum era to the more effective institutional and corporate philanthropy of the modern era. The latter was set up like a business, a

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100 Zunz (2012), 12-17, for a discussion.
102 Zunz (2012), 16.
103 Zunz (2012), 3-4. This is very similar to the Rockefeller Foundation’s mission statement.
structure that played to the talents of their founders, Gilded Age businessmen such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller.\textsuperscript{104}

When Rockefeller Jr. began to work at his father’s offices in 1897, he entered a world of business and philanthropy that was largely alien to him. Rockefeller Sr.’s businesses were already well established. His philanthropy, however, was beginning to change and Rockefeller Jr. was going to help him manage that process.\textsuperscript{105} That Rockefeller Sr. helped usher in a new age in modern philanthropy would not have been expected from his earlier business success. His views on giving and charity underwent a transformation, and these views were passed down to Rockefeller Jr. Rockefeller Sr.’s philanthropy goes back to his early days in Ohio. Then, his Baptist beliefs led him to a form of Christian charity common in his day, which encouraged giving to the church, the poor, and the widowed. This form of philanthropy continued until the 1880s when his wealth had grown to such an extent that he could influence major institutions and even found new ones.\textsuperscript{106} It had also grown so big that his offices were inundated with requests for money.\textsuperscript{107} Rockefeller Sr. began to believe that his fortune meant that he could and maybe even had a responsibility to help more than just individuals on a one-off basis.\textsuperscript{108} This is the first major shift in his principles of philanthropy. The second shift involved surrounding himself with advisors whom he trusted and who could help him establish various foundations to be staffed by experts better able to judge what causes were worthy

\textsuperscript{105} For an early history of Rockefeller Sr.’s philanthropy, see Rose and Stapleton (1992), 536-555.
\textsuperscript{106} Rose and Stapleton (1992), 537-538.
\textsuperscript{107} Gates, Frederick (1977), \textit{Chapters in My Life}, 159, 172-173.
\textsuperscript{108} Fosdick, Raymond (1952), \textit{The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation}, 4.
of funding. These two shifts in Rockefeller Sr.’s philanthropy began in the last decades of the 1800s. He did, however, continue to fund large projects on an individual basis and some of these are telling examples of the type of projects Rockefeller Jr. would also fund outside of the large philanthropic foundations the two set up during their lifetimes. Thus, while the Rockefellers became known for various foundations, they both continued to give in the tradition of direct philanthropy and exerted some influence and maybe even control over their foundations’ program of giving.

A few examples suffice to show the types of projects that received direct funding from Rockefeller Sr. during the last decades of the nineteenth century and into the early part of the twentieth century. Spelman College was one of the first large philanthropic efforts of Rockefeller Sr. Sophia B. Packard and Harriet E. Giles, two New England schoolteachers, founded what would become known as Spelman College in 1881 in Atlanta, Georgia as an all black school for women. By 1882, they embarked on a fundraising campaign that led them to Cleveland, Ohio, where they gave a speech at a local Baptist church. In the audience was Rockefeller Sr., who was so taken with their efforts that he donated a few hundred dollars to their cause. It is important to note that Rockefeller Sr. did not directly give the money to Packard and Giles, but rather funneled it through the American Baptist Home Mission Society (ABHMS). This was characteristic of his funding habits at this time, since ABHMS could keep track of recipients’ efforts and report back to Rockefeller. Furthermore, he trusted the judgment of his contacts at ABHMS. He did, however, remain in direct contact with Packard and

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109 Gates (1977), 244. The first two most important advisors to Rockefeller Sr. were Gates and Rockefeller Jr. These three individuals appointed the early members of the various foundations’ boards.
By 1883, additional requests for money came to Rockefeller through ABHMS. Packard and Giles needed funds to pay the mortgage of the school’s main building. At first Rockefeller was reluctant to donate the full amount, $7,200. After consultation with Henry L. Morehouse, secretary of ABHMS, however, and after an appeal by Packard and Giles that Rockefeller attach his name to the school, he agreed to the full funding request. Thus, on the third anniversary of the school’s founding the name was changed to Spelman Seminary in honor of Rockefeller Sr.’s wife’s parents, Harvey and Lucy Spelman, who were devout abolitionists. Up to the 1890s, donations to Spelman Seminary were a significant portion of Rockefeller Sr.’s philanthropy.

By 1914, Spelman Seminary had continued its traditional mission, namely the education of teachers and preachers. This was at the expense of the liberal arts. In 1924, the school changed its name to Spelman College. Lucy Hale Tapley resigned in 1927 as president, which afforded a large restructuring of the school. Trevor Arnett, who was then head of the Board of Trustees of Spelman College, and was also the president of the General Education Board (GEB), a substantial Rockefeller foundation, helped usher in a new president with a new mission. Florence Read took over as president but on the condition that an endowment was provided for the school. In the early 1900s, Rockefeller Sr. had balked at such a donation, but did provide $250,000 to the GEB to be invested in Spelman over the years. By 1927, Rockefeller Jr. had assumed a prominent leadership

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110 Rose and Stapleton (1992), 539-540.
111 Henry L. Morehouse helped coordinate Rockefeller’s efforts with ABHMS and Spelman College. The Atlanta Baptist Seminary was later renamed Morehouse College in his honor.
112 Rose and Stapleton (1992), 540-541.
113 Rose and Stapleton (1992), 541-542. This money was later given directly to Spelman College by the GEB.
role in the family’s philanthropy. He was a supporter of Spelman College but wanted the institution to become a pioneer in higher education, which would mean a broader curriculum that included the liberal arts. Only when this was agreed upon, and after discussions with Arnett, did Rockefeller Jr. wholeheartedly support funding for the school. This was a natural continuation of the earlier support Rockefeller Sr. had provided, and demonstrates that once the Rockefellers agreed to support an institution, the funding came more liberally. Spelman was able to raise $3,000,000 from various Rockefeller foundations.\footnote{Rose and Stapleton (1992), 542.}

In 1931 on the occasion of Spelman’s fiftieth anniversary, Rockefeller Sr. wrote, “Of all the investments we have made as a family, Spelman stands among its best.”\footnote{Rose and Stapleton (1992), 542.} The story of Rockefeller support for Spelman College highlights various aspects of Rockefeller giving from the 1880s to the early twentieth century. Rockefeller Sr. initiated his support for Spelman only after personal communications with its founders, and through the backing of ABHMS. Thus, his early philanthropy is characterized by a tendency to support Baptist efforts in education and only when such efforts were vouched for by either his own personal experience or those he trusted at ABHMS. Initially, larger funds were not forthcoming after the creation of education foundations by the Rockefellers. Again, it took the intervention of foundation presidents with close personal ties to both Spelman and to Rockefeller Jr., for Rockefeller to continue with the support his father had begun many decades earlier. The generous donation to secure Spelman’s future came with a personal obligation or put another way, only if certain conditions were met as stipulated by the donor. In the case of Rockefeller Jr., this was his insistence that

\footnote{Rose and Stapleton (1992), 542.}
the school become a great institution and that it could only do so with a core liberal arts curriculum, a stipulation in keeping with his own educational background.

The history of Rockefeller support for the University of Chicago follows a similar pattern to that of Spelman College. Initially, Rockefeller Sr. was approached by ABHMS about either founding a new Baptist university in New York City or helping the University of Chicago. Rockefeller Sr. was very fond of the Baptist Union Theological Seminary, but he balked at such funding.\footnote{The Baptist Union Theological Seminary was located in Chicago.} It was only after the creation of a new Baptist organization, the American Baptist Education Society (ABES) in 1888, that its leaders’ dreams of a great Baptist university in the United States found a financier. The secretary for ABES, Frederick T. Gates, wrote a report underlining the need for a Baptist university.\footnote{Gates would become a close associate of Rockefeller Sr. For more on his life, see Gates (1977), 
*Chapters in My Life*.} The report went a long way in convincing Rockefeller of the merits of the Chicago plan as did his consultation with Baptist leaders whom he trusted.\footnote{Rose and Stapleton (1992), 544. This was the beginning of what would be a long professional relationship between Rockefeller Sr. and Gates. On Gates’ telling of the beginning of this relationship, see Gates (1977), 109-111.} Gates convinced Rockefeller to donate $600,000 to the endowment of the new University of Chicago. Rockefeller stipulated that the announcement be kept secret until the ABES voted for a $1,000,000 endowment. After that formality was taken care of, Gates was free to announce that nearly two-thirds of the endowment had already been donated by Rockefeller.\footnote{Rose and Stapleton (1992), 544. See also Gates (1977), 110-111.}

As with Spelman College, Rockefeller Sr. came to found a major educational institution after he had investigated the proposals, sought expert advice, and stipulated
that his donation was conditional upon other sources of support.\textsuperscript{120} Despite not wanting to be the sole financier, Rockefeller turned out to be just that in the ensuing years. By 1910, he donated a final $10,000,000. But while personal donations ceased at this point in time, donations from Rockefeller foundations continued for several more decades. By 1941, funding from Rockefeller sources totaled more than $84,000,000.\textsuperscript{121}

The history of Rockefeller Sr.’s funding of the University of Chicago is another link in a long chain of large-scale philanthropy that the Rockefellers began to engage in during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first two large-scale efforts, Spelman College and the University of Chicago, both catered to Rockefeller Sr.’s belief that education was the foundation of future success. The third large-scale philanthropy effort was the founding of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in 1901 (later renamed Rockefeller University in 1965). This project is important because it signaled a new area of philanthropy for Rockefeller Sr. and was the first project that involved Rockefeller Jr. In 1897 Rockefeller Jr. had graduated Brown University and immediately joined his father’s office in Manhattan then located at 26 Broadway. He worked closely with Frederick T. Gates, the Baptist minister who had convinced Rockefeller Sr. to fund the University of Chicago just a few years prior. Gates had joined Rockefeller Sr.’s office as his primary philanthropic advisor in 1891.\textsuperscript{122} Together, Gates and both Rockefellers would embark on changing the function, efficacy, and structure of philanthropy in the United States. The scale of their efforts had rarely been seen before. They accomplished

\textsuperscript{120} Rose and Stapleton (1992), 544.
\textsuperscript{121} Rose and Stapleton (1992), 545.
\textsuperscript{122} Rose and Stapleton (1992), 546.
things that previously only governments had the funds to achieve. In this example, Gates was a leading push behind the shift in resources to medical research. Gates and Rockefeller Jr. researched the idea of establishing a medical research facility and in 1901 succeeded in founding the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. The researchers at the institute would be called upon in the future to help with other medically-related Rockefeller projects, such as the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease in 1909. Thus, the Rockefellers sought to build an institution that would help eradicate endemic diseases affecting people all over the world. With the founding of the Rockefeller Institute, the Rockefeller family’s shift to philanthropy for the “well-being of mankind” was complete. Nearly all future philanthropy from the Rockefellers would be funneled through any one of the foundations and institutes they began to create in the early twentieth century.

The Rockefellers’ Philanthropic Foundations

The early years of Rockefeller philanthropy, while large-scale, adequately addressed just a single mission at a time. The educational institutions Rockefeller Sr. began to create in the early twentieth century.

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123 As a comparison on this matter of government funding of scientific and medical research, the National Institutes of Health had its roots in the 1880s but wasn’t given substantial funding until well into the twentieth century. The National Cancer Institute was not founded until 1937 and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention until 1946. Thus, the Rockefellers were changing the role of philanthropy in civil society an entire generation prior to equally large-scale government intervention in similar areas. The example of Rockefeller University epitomizes the shift from small-scale charity to large-scale philanthropy that benefited all people.

124 Rose and Stapleton (1992), 547.

125 Rose and Stapleton (1992), 547. In fact, many of the divisions of the Rockefeller foundations worked closely with one another and at times even shared majorities of members among their boards. An example of collaborative relationship across foundations can be found in Buxton, William (2009), *Patronizing the Public American Philanthropy’s Transformation of Culture, Communication, and the Humanities*, 66 n.6.
helped to create had thrived, but he felt that his growing fortune was not helping a broader swath of society and tackling more of the root causes of society’s ills. Gates came up with the idea of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1905 at a time when several other wealthy elite individuals were also creating foundations and funds to effectively utilize their vast fortunes. By 1913, the New York State legislature granted a charter to create the Rockefeller Foundation. The Foundation’s mission was the promotion of “the well-being of mankind throughout the world.” The mission statement highlights the final shift in philanthropy in the early twentieth century away from individual charity, either on a small or large scale, toward the embrace of corporate foundations that distributed funds to programs that sought to eliminate the very root causes of society’s problems and thereby improve the quality of life for everyone.

Medicine and health programs dominated the first decade of the Rockefeller Foundation’s program of giving. This was a natural continuation of the previous work the Rockefellers had funded in medical research, especially in light of the creation of the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. Furthermore, Gates was a vocal advocate for this type of funding. Gates was Rockefeller Sr.’s advisor until Gates’ retirement in

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126 Rose and Stapleton (1992), 549. Other funds created at this time include the Milbank Memorial fund in 1905, the Russell Sage Foundation in 1907, and the Carnegie Corporation in 1911.

127 Rose and Stapleton (1992), 549. Rockefeller Sr. initially sought a congressional charter because the General Education Board had successfully been voted one. He failed to achieve a favorable vote for the Foundation when politicians who were against the charter linked the future foundation to the current business dealings of Standard Oil. This accounts for the delay from 1905 to 1913. This also demonstrates that the Rockefeller name at this point in time was still closely associated with Standard Oil. Rockefeller Jr. would work to change that perception.

128 Rose and Stapleton (1992), 549.

129 Fosdick (1952), The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation, 10. The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission was founded in 1909 and sought to eradicate hookworm disease in the South. It was by all accounts very successful.
1912. Gates, however, remained a vocal trustee of many of the Rockefeller foundations for several more years.\textsuperscript{130}

As was already evident, Rockefeller Sr. also had a passion for education, and his educational philanthropy continued in the early twentieth century, but now conformed to this new corporate philanthropy model under development. In 1903, he founded the General Education Board (GEB), to promote the betterment of education for blacks and whites in the South. The GEB was incorporated by an act of Congress.\textsuperscript{131} Later, in 1923, Rockefeller Jr. incorporated the International Education Board (IEB) to carry out much of the GEB’s educational work on an international scale. This was necessary because the congressional charter limited the GEB’s activities to the United States, but board members felt their work could be done internationally as well. As I will discuss below, both the GEB and IEB funded classical initiatives.

The Rockefeller philanthropic boards were the vanguard in this new corporate philanthropy. From the beginning, the composition of their trustee boards and staff was one of the most important indicators of the Rockefellers’ desire to distribute their money with as much thoughtful consideration as possible.\textsuperscript{132} This was philanthropy not a business. Thus, the early boards of the RF, GEB, IEB and other Rockefeller foundations were staffed with men of professional expertise, who could evaluate a grant proposal. Rockefeller Sr. believed that such men would also best understand societal needs in terms of what direction to take the foundations in order to develop a cohesive program of

\textsuperscript{130} Gates (1977), 245-248. Gates remembers staying on as GEB chairman for five more years, and several board posts for at least a dozen more.
\textsuperscript{131} Fosdick (1952), 8-9.
\textsuperscript{132} Fosdick (1952), 11.
giving.\textsuperscript{133} This was most directly expressed in a statement read by Rockefeller Sr.’s lawyer at a congressional hearing to charter the Rockefeller Foundation. It reads:

\begin{quote}
The charities of the fourteenth century are not the charities of the twentieth century. The charities of the twentieth century will not be the charities of the twenty-first century, and it is eminently desirable...that the dead hand should be removed from charitable bequests and that the power to determine to what specific objects they should be applied should be left in the hands of living men who can judge of the necessities and of the needs in light of the knowledge which they have as contemporaries, and not that they shall find their hands tied by the will of the man who is long years dead.\textsuperscript{134}
\end{quote}

Rockefeller Sr. did not want the principles of giving of the nineteenth century, the “dead hand” of the benefactor, to continue to hold sway in his case. The creation of these foundations was meant to alleviate the stress and pressure with which his wealth encumbered him, by shifting the task of giving it away to others, namely experts.

The final important consideration in looking at the early history of the Rockefeller philanthropic foundations is to investigate to what extent the Rockefellers made decisions. At the very beginning of the Rockefeller Foundation, for example, Rockefeller Sr. reserved the right to designate the organization or project for which his financial gifts were to be used. Raymond Fosdick, the president of the Foundation from 1936 to 1948 and its first historian, states as much in his history of the Foundation, and says only that

\textsuperscript{133} While many today would still view this belief as patriarchal and patronizing, nonetheless, at the time, the shift to a technocratic elite dispensing the funds instead of the single wealthy individual still represented a significant shift in philanthropy towards bringing more expert knowledge to bare on decisions.

\textsuperscript{134} Fosdick (1952), 16-17.
at a certain time Rockefeller Sr. relinquished this right. Documentary evidence from the Rockefeller Foundation website sheds light on this matter. The first annual report of the Foundation, 1913-1914, records a letter from Rockefeller Sr. to the Foundation board stipulating that his current gift should be treated as an investment and go towards the principal rather than be spent down for current purposes. Rockefeller Sr., in this case, thought it wise to indicate this, but also says that the board is free to dispose of the gift as they see fit. Fosdick’s account is corroborated by a letter from Rockefeller Sr. to the board stating that: “It is a condition of this gift that from the income of the Foundation the sum of two million dollars ($2,000,000), annually, or so much thereof as I shall designate, shall be applied during my lifetime to such specific objects within the corporate purposes of the Foundation as I may from time to time direct.” Because the foundations were set up to alleviate the need for Rockefeller Sr. to respond to every single request for funds, both from individuals and large organizations or even municipalities, he nonetheless was still engaged in the personal, local charity more characteristic of the nineteenth century. The letter goes on to say that if he did not spend that amount in two years then the remainder shall transfer to the Foundation’s unrestricted income fund.

Rockefeller Sr. might have worried that in creating the Foundation he would also tie his own hand in giving, a concern since his was not a “dead hand” yet. The

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135 Fosdick (1952), 21.
137 Rockefeller Foundation, Annual Report, 1914, Rockefeller Sr. to Board of Trustees, June 27, 1913.
138 Rockefeller Foundation, Annual Report, 1914, Rockefeller Sr. to Board of Trustees, March 6, 1914.
Rockefeller Foundation website states that although Rockefeller Sr. was a trustee, he never attended a single meeting of the Foundation.\textsuperscript{139} This would seem to suggest he had little influence on the decisions of the Foundation’s board. However, the nature of his influence and involvement is made rather clear from the gift letters cited above which indicate a willingness to dictate what gifts are to be kept as principal and when they can be spent down. He even goes so far as to say that he is giving this money to the Foundation, but reserves the right to spend it as he sees fit. This might seem extraordinary but it rather benignly conforms to Rockefeller’s patterns of giving. He better than anyone else understood the monetary value of his gifts. Often dollar amounts were not trading balance sheets, but securities and stocks from various Standard Oil subsidiaries. They had a market value that could change. Furthermore, it begins to be clear that the Rockefellers also used their foundations and their expert staff to administer their personal philanthropy. So, Rockefeller Sr.’s stipulation to keep a portion of a gift reserved is not all that unusual, and in fact the Foundation goes on to report just how much of that he did spend down and which organizations received the funds and for what purpose.\textsuperscript{140} Thus, a full accounting is always made of the donations and allocations.

Rockefeller Sr. had influence over the board and used it. Furthermore, while not physically present, his letters clearly expressed his wishes, and could be bolstered if any opposition arose, which would be unlikely, by either Gates or Rockefeller Jr.\textsuperscript{141}

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{140} Rockefeller Foundation, Annual Report, 1914, “Founder’s Requisitions”, 79. Of the $2,000,000 he set aside for himself, Rockefeller Sr. spent down $858,940.27.

\end{footnotesize}
Furthermore, at this time, Rockefeller Jr. was not only a board member, but the
Foundation’s first president. The fact that father and son kept up a practice of nearly
constant correspondence with one another certainly afforded plenty of room for each one
to influence the other and make their wishes known.

Rockefeller Jr. was the first president of the Rockefeller Foundation, from 1913
until 1917. He remained on the board of trustees as chairman until 1940.\textsuperscript{142} The nature of
his involvement with regard to the Foundation’s program of giving is complicated and
hard to piece together. As president and later chairman, he certainly was involved and
knew what the Foundation was doing. Rockefeller Jr. was hands-on, and since his role in
the family was to take the lead on philanthropy, he conducted himself in this world just as
his father did in business, with research, reflection, and careful consideration from
experts or people whose advice he trusted. This was always the hallmark of Rockefeller
philanthropy and Rockefeller Jr. certainly continued in that tradition. As I will show
below, just like his father, Rockefeller Jr. had influence over the program of giving of the
Foundation and other Rockefeller philanthropic boards. This complicated relationship is
discussed below with examples drawn from the classical initiatives that Rockefeller Jr.
himself oversaw and those that several Rockefeller boards, of which he was a member,
also funded. I argue that these examples illustrate that Rockefeller Jr. could influence the
board when he wanted to and kept in close touch with them with regard to his own
personal philanthropy. The classical initiatives that he and the boards supported are
essential to this argument, because in many cases support for classical initiatives still

\textsuperscript{142} Fosdick (1952), 21. See also Rockefeller Foundation, “Our History”,
January 14, 2015.
occurred when the board had moved in a direction away from such philanthropy and thus it seems out of place. The classical initiatives are the most telling cases of Rockefeller’s influence and support for this type of philanthropy. Rockefeller’s own educational background is further evidence for his support for these initiatives.

The Rockefeller Foundation, the General Education Board, and the International Education Board’s Philanthropy of Classical Initiatives

Many of the Rockefeller foundations supported classical initiatives during the early decades of the twentieth century. The timing of support and the members of the board are important factors when analyzing the various foundations’ programs. It is important when support for a project occurred outside of the foundations’ program of giving. Support for a classical initiative often came about after conversation with Rockefeller, even if the board already believed in the value of the project. Occasionally, support came after initial rejection or controversy. Lastly, support might occur to supplement the private funding of Rockefeller. In this situation, Rockefeller and the many foundations he helped set up worked in concert on a specific project. Thus, whenever possible, it is important to understand the context of the Rockefeller foundations’ financial support of classical initiatives.

One of the earliest classical initiatives to receive support from the Rockefeller boards came about as a result of controversy. Trustees of the General Education Board had a series of discussions beginning in 1915 about education reform in the United
States.\textsuperscript{143} At the time leading members of the GEB included Charles W. Eliot, the former president of Harvard University, Abraham Flexner, a medical education expert, Harry Pratt Judson, then President of the University of Chicago, and Rockefeller. The four men met in the summer of 1915. Eliot led a discussion about the quality of high school education.\textsuperscript{144} Flexner also expressed his ideas about education reform and the two men were instructed to draft their own reports on the situation and how to remedy it.\textsuperscript{145} The result was one of the most controversial reports ever published by the GEB, Flexner’s report called \textit{A Modern School}.\textsuperscript{146} His modern school was to be based around the fields of science, industry, civics, and aesthetics.\textsuperscript{147} The controversy arose because he advocated for the elimination of certain subjects because they lacked utility for a modern, industrial world and were taught, in his view, solely because of tradition. His main target in this was the instruction of ancient languages.\textsuperscript{148} Flexner cites statistics from the College Entrance Examinations of 1915 that over seventy-five percent of students who took the exam failed to achieve even the mark of sixty percent in both Cicero and Vergil, which presumably they had already read.\textsuperscript{149} As a result, Flexner argues that claims that such language instruction “trains the mind” are unsubstantiated, and that “traditional esteem is

\textsuperscript{143} On the origins of the General Education Board, see Fosdick, Raymond (1962), \textit{Adventure in Giving, the Story of the General Education Board, a Foundation Established by John D. Rockefeller}.

\textsuperscript{144} Fosdick (1962), 213.

\textsuperscript{145} Fosdick (1962), 214.


\textsuperscript{148} Flexner also takes aim at Algebra and Geometry, History, and formal grammar instruction.

\textsuperscript{149} Flexner (1917), 6.
an insufficient offset to the present and future uselessness.”\textsuperscript{150} In his section “What the Curriculum Omits,” Flexner says that at his “Modern School” Latin and Greek would \textit{not} be contained in the curriculum because “stumbling and blundering through a few patches of Latin classics do not establish a contact with Latin literature.”\textsuperscript{151} Finally, Flexner argues against the claim of mental discipline by once again citing the poor showing of students on the entrance exams saying, “The only discipline that most students could get from their classical studies is a discipline in doing things as they should not be done.”\textsuperscript{152} When news of this experimental school was released publicly, it unleashed a firestorm of controversy, coming mainly in the form of newspaper editorials by Classicists who chided the elimination of Latin and Greek instruction in Flexner’s report and took umbrage at his account of ancient language instruction.\textsuperscript{153} Eliot also published a series of papers in 1917. “The Case Again Compulsory Latin” and “Latin and AB Degree” took aim at Latin instruction at the undergraduate level. Eliot argued for the removal of Latin as a mandatory subject for entrance into college, and for graduation from college, but he made it clear that he wished for ancient language instruction to remain as an elective. He went on to argue against the utility of knowledge of Latin for understanding modern literature, government and much more.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{150} Flexner (1917), 8.
\textsuperscript{151} Flexner (1917), 18.
\textsuperscript{152} Flexner (1917), 18-19. In his footnote, Flexner also says that claims that Latin and Greek increase facility with English is “unsubstantiated opinion.”
\textsuperscript{153} Fosdick (1962), 216-217.
The controversy came to a head in 1917. Classicists led by Andrew F. West of Princeton held a conference on June 2, 1917. The proceedings of this conference were soon turned into a publication, *The Value of the Classics*, which was meant to be a direct response to Flexner’s *A Modern School*. The bulk of the report was devoted to refuting the test scores that Flexner cited as evidence of the lack of utility of Latin. Public editorials continued, as did private appeals for Flexner to change his report. William V. McDuffee, a classicist from Springfield, Massachusetts, was one of the most vocal critics of Flexner’s recommendations and wrote to Flexner and the GEB repeatedly. Additionally, in 1917, other classicists published papers meant to counter Eliot’s arguments about Latin at the undergraduate level. Foremost among these was Viscount Bryce’s “The Worth of Ancient Literature to the Modern World,” and Paul Shorey’s “The Positive Case for Latin.” In addition, Flexner faced heat from within the GEB itself. Prominent philanthropist and fellow GEB trustee, Anson Phelps Stokes, wrote to Flexner arguing that future announcements on this experimental school should not come directly from the GEB but from Columbia’s Teachers College, under whose

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155 According to Davies, John D. (1978), “Andrew Fleming West,” West was Giger Professor of Latin at Princeton for over forty-five years and dean of the graduate school for twenty-seven. West was offered the presidency of Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1906, but declined it in order to remain at Princeton and help establish its graduate school.


157 Wraga (2008), 12.


auspices Flexner’s school would be made a reality.\textsuperscript{160} Stokes went on to say that he did not want “the public to think, as a large part of the intelligent public today does think, that the General Education Board is making a drive against Latin.”\textsuperscript{161} It is unclear where Rockefeller was on this matter. Fosdick’s official account of the matter focuses mostly around Flexner as the strongest advocate for this new experimental school. Flexner himself was a longtime advocate for science education,\textsuperscript{162} as was Eliot.\textsuperscript{163} The backlash came about because of the clout and influence of the GEB. Clearly there was worry among educators that Flexner’s report would find favor among progressive education reformists.\textsuperscript{164} Furthermore, the arguments Eliot and Flexner use are the same century-old arguments hurled against the humanities during the transformations of higher education in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{165} It is a rather curious discovery in private letters between Flexner and Eliot over the matter that the two express their admiration for the Classics.\textsuperscript{166}

\textsuperscript{160} Fosdick (1962), 217.
\textsuperscript{161} Fosdick (1962), 217.
\textsuperscript{162} For Flexner’s influential report on medical education see Flexner, Abraham (1910), “Medical Education in the United States and Canada: A Report to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching,” Bulletin No. 4., The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching: New York.
\textsuperscript{164} Such fears held by Classicists were correct. Many progressive reformists signed on to the Modern School. See Wraga (2008), 7-8.
\textsuperscript{165} For a detailed look at this as it pertains to classics, see Winterer, Caroline (2002), The Culture of Classicism: Ancient Greece and Rome in American Intellectual Life, 1780-191 and Pearcy, Lee (2005), The Grammar of Our Civility Classical Education America.
\textsuperscript{166} This sentiment is expressed in a letter from Flexner to Eliot discussing Viscount Bryce’s article in response to the Modern School publication by the GEB. RAC, (FA058), GEB, Series 1.2, Box 306 Folder 3190, Memo from Flexner to Eliot, October 23, 1917.
Flexner himself gives this impression in his autobiography.\textsuperscript{167} Why their personal views did not match their educational policy standpoints is not self-evident.

In response to the controversy, Flexner revised his report in 1919. In substance, however, not much changed and the controversy regarding the Latin component remained. In fact, West had done such a good job at organizing the conference and subsequent publication in 1917 that he led the charge in creating the American Classical League (ACL) in 1919 to further advocate for ancient language instruction. It was through the ACL that classicists found a revenue stream to fund their new mission. The GEB, after initially backing Flexner’s \textit{Modern School}, then seemingly made an about face in 1920 granting $2,500 to the ACL to study the disciplinary benefits of studying Latin.\textsuperscript{168} This may have been the GEB trying to seem like a neutral participant on the topic in response to the controversy. The funding continued in the following years. In 1921, the GEB granted up to $60,000 to the ACL for continuation of their study of Latin,\textsuperscript{169} and another $60,000 in 1922, of which $10,000 was set aside to assist in the publication of the findings.\textsuperscript{170} In 1924, another $5,000 was given towards further publications.\textsuperscript{171} Finally, in 1929, the GEB granted another $19,000 to the ACL for a

\textsuperscript{167} Flexner, Abraham (1960), \textit{Abraham Flexner: An Autobiography}, 24-57. Flexner discusses his own education and study of Greek and Latin and the joy it brought him intellectually. It could be that Flexner, as a matter of education policy, just did not believe ancient language instruction was practical. See also Wraga (2008), 23.
\textsuperscript{168} RAC, FA058, General Education Board, Series 1.2, Study of Classical Teaching in the United States, Box 309, Folder 3231, Memo from Flexner to West, December 23, 1920.
\textsuperscript{169} RAC, FA058, General Education Board, Series 1.2, Study of Classical Teaching in the United States, Box 309, Folder 3231, Memo from Flexner to West, March 28, 1921.
\textsuperscript{170} RAC, FA058, General Education Board, Series 1.2, Study of Classical Teaching in the United States, Box 309, Folder 3232, Memo from Flexner to West, October 15, 1922.
\textsuperscript{171} RAC, FA058, General Education Board, Series 1.2, Study of Classical Teaching in the United States, Box 309, Folder 3233, Memo from W.W. Brierley to West, November 26, 1924.
period of five years of funding.\textsuperscript{172} It was noted that this final allocation was done during the Great Depression.\textsuperscript{173} By 1934, the GEB had granted the ACL close to $150,000 towards a comprehensive national study of Latin instruction in the United States. Thus, the GEB funded the very study that sought to disprove Flexner’s claims about Latin in \textit{A Modern School}, and to substantiate their own claims about the benefit of ancient language instruction.

This controversy around Flexner’s report illustrates several desires among the trustees at the GEB. Flexner and Eliot were long hostile to classical studies as mandatory in education. They were now in a position to push for more science education at the expense of language instruction and the humanities more generally. Their defense of education as utility was long a claim used by so-called reformers to enact policy that sought to change the status quo in education. During the 1920s, this effort coincided with the Progressive education reform movement. Thus, Flexner and Eliot used their position and the GEB’s clout to achieve their goals. Flexner’s ideas were put into action when the Lincoln School opened in New York City in 1917. There was no Latin instruction at the Lincoln School. The school’s effect on education policy nationally seems to have been limited.

In the midst of the controversy surrounding the GEB and Flexner’s report, the International Education Board (IEB),\textsuperscript{174} its sister organization, had moved in a different

\textsuperscript{172} RAC, FA058, General Education Board, Series 1.2, American Classical League, Box 310, Folder 3236, Memo from W.W. Brierley to Magoffin, President of ACL, November 29, 1929.
\textsuperscript{173} Wraga (2008), 21.
\textsuperscript{174} The IEB was founded in 1923 by John D. Rockefeller Jr. to do the work of the GEB on an international scale. The organization operated until December 31, 1938 when its operations were absorbed by the Rockefeller Foundation in a reorganization of the
direction entirely. In 1927, the IEB gave $1,000,000 to the American Academy in Rome to supplement its endowment, future construction, equipment, and the improvement of the grounds.\textsuperscript{175} That same year, the IEB also gave $500,000 to the American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA) to go towards its endowment, construction costs, a residence hall, and their publications fund.\textsuperscript{176} As I will show below, both organizations were already the recipients of financial support from both Rockefellers. Thus, the IEB was acting to supplement the personal giving of the Rockefellers, in particular the giving of Rockefeller Jr. Like the GEB, the IEB carried out a program of giving that focused heavily on the sciences and medical education. This was the expertise of IEB President Wickliffe Rose and the expertise of many of the Rockefeller boards. But Rockefeller, as I will discuss below, was beginning to be regarded as a man of cultural appreciation. The Rockefeller boards may have been focused on the well-being of man in their physical health, but Rockefeller showed himself equally concerned with the need to appreciate art, architecture, cultural heritage, and beauty. So if the IEB was to depart from their scientific program of giving, it makes sense that they would fund projects in which Rockefeller had a personal interest. Such actions, however, further blurred the lines between the Rockefellers and their foundations. The example of the IEB’s funding of the AAR and the ASCSA bolsters any claim that the Rockefellers exerted a considerable

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\textsuperscript{175} RAC, (FA386), AAR, Series Italy 751, Reel 1, Frame 1. See also RAC, (FA062), IEB, Box 38, Folder 531 for a letter from Brierley to Mead on June 10, 1927 informing him that AAR was granted $1,000,000.

\textsuperscript{176} RAC, (FA386), RF, Box 3 Folder 29. “The Rockefeller Boards’ Appropriations (1927-1937) to ASCSA.”
degree of control and influence over the decisions of their boards when they wanted to. Lastly, the type of contribution given by the IEB is important. The contributions given to the AAR and ASCSA were for institutional endowments. They were investments in the institutions themselves, not just funding for a specific project that would eventually have an ending point. Thus, this type of giving, rare among philanthropies, is further evidence of the positive view held by IEB of both recipient organizations.

The Rockefeller Foundation also supported classical initiatives in its earlier history. Like the GEB and IEB, it too was focused primarily on health programs and medical research. During the 1920s, Edwin Embree, a trustee of the Foundation, was a leading voice to push the Foundation toward embracing a funding program for the humanities and social sciences. In a speech to the boards of both the Foundation and the GEB in 1924 he asked, “Of what good is it to keep people alive and healthy if their lives are not to be touched increasingly with something of beauty?” The speech must have struck a nerve since by 1928, the Foundation formally expanded into these areas with the creation of a Division of Humanities and a Division of Social Sciences. The Rockefeller Foundation supported a series of major humanities initiatives during the 1920s and 1930s. For example, in 1929 it commenced a decade-long program of fellowships to the ASCSA. In 1932, it gave funds to support the Thesaurus Linguae Latinae (TLL), and also supported several classical scholars fleeing Europe as refugees before and during World

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In the 1930s, the Foundation also expanded its archaeology program to include the Ancient Near East.

The early efforts of the Rockefeller Foundation in the area of the humanities focused around traditional humanities subjects, such as the arts, archaeology, and comparative philology. Their aim was to support the advancement of knowledge. Much of this early work engaged with the ancient world and classicism in some form. Interestingly, many of the early projects that received support from the Foundation were also receiving private support from Rockefeller.

The American School of Classical Studies at Athens (ASCSA) was one of the earliest humanities institutions to receive funding from the Rockefeller Foundation’s newly created Division of Humanities. In 1929, an appropriation of $20,200 was made for fellowships to support the training of classical archaeologists. Part of the rationale for such fellowships was the hope that the recipients would later fill faculty positions at universities and themselves conduct future excavations. This was a large amount for fellowships, and is in keeping with the Foundation’s earlier efforts in medical fellowships. Foundation officials considered fellowships a great return on investment because they addressed gaps in training in the present and helped ease that concern for the future. In their training of future scholars and researchers, these fellowships acted as indirect forms of support to universities in the United States. The case of the fellowships

for the ASCSA is important because it is an example of Rockefeller and the Foundation working in tandem. As I will discuss in detail below, Rockefeller had begun to personally and secretly fund a large excavation project in Athens. Thus, with these fellowships the Foundation was supporting Rockefeller’s personal philanthropy. This confluence of interests blurs the lines between donor and foundation.

During a ten-year period, the Rockefeller Foundation continued to fund the ASCSA fellowship program through 1940. In 1935, the Foundation made a one-time additional grant of $6,000 to aid the fellows in filing a report. By 1939, the Foundation had given $106,800 to the ASCSA in support of the fellows. In 1940, a final grant to the fellowship program was made in the amount of $8,800. The Foundation also funded several other projects that all came forth from the excavations at the Agora funded by Rockefeller. For example, in 1932 the Foundation granted $14,000 to the ASCSA for the building of a museum of antiquities on the island of Lesbos to house excavation

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183 There are conflicting numbers. The Foundation’s Annual Reports total comes to $131,800, $25,000 more than the Foundation’s records in the RAC. This discrepancy could be because files never made it into the archive, however, I’m inclined to believe in the numbers from the Annual Reports since those are made public. The amount of the difference is also equal to an extra allocation, since for many years $25,000 was the amount the Foundation granted to the ASCSA. The archival documents and the Annual Reports agree about the amount of funds granted to ASCSA for projects other than the fellowship program.
finds. A grant of $3,000 was made directly to the ASCSA to help Dr. Konstantinos Kourouniotis, then chief of the Archaeological Bureau of the Greek Ministry of Education, finish his excavations at Eleusis. A grant of $5,000 was also made in 1935 to Prof. Edward Capps toward publication expenses in association with his research at the excavation. A final grant of $150,000 was made in 1937 to the ASCSA for the construction of a museum to house the finds from the Agora excavation.

The support to the ASCSA for such a long duration is no doubt due in part to the ongoing excavations that Rockefeller was himself funding. By the mid 1930s the Foundation had already moved away from its archaeology program and was moving their humanities division in a direction that had more immediate contemporary benefits to society. The contradiction then between the direction of the division of humanities and their continued funding of the ASCSA needs explanation. First, Rockefeller philanthropy

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186 RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 749.R Greece, Box 4 Folder 34.


189 It should be noted that the Foundation clearly viewed archaeology as part of the humanities. “Science” for the Rockefeller foundations was more akin to modern notions of the “bench” sciences, Chemistry, Physics, and Biology and not contemporary ideas of STEM fields.
was rarely a one-time donation. Once invested in a project, the Rockefellers felt obligated either to see it through to completion or to ensure the recipient was capable of raising matching funds from other sources. This practice sought to ensure that they would not become the sole source of funds for certain institutions, and that if they did that their initial donation would not be in vain. The Rockefeller foundations continued with this practice. Their overall programs of giving, however, restricted such continuous donations to the same project. A change of leadership could also bring about such shifts in giving. The continuous funding of the ASCSA occurred during a change of leadership, the creation of a new division, and the shift in a broader vision for the humanities division away from classical projects. Yet, funding for the ASCSA endured. The only explanation that makes sense is that the funding of the ASCSA was in large part due entirely to Rockefeller’s personal interest in the school’s activities and his own grants to the school.

The back-channeling that occurred between associates of Rockefeller and the Foundation’s trustees further indicates that despite a unanimous agreement that the projects under the auspices of the ASCSA were merited, the Foundation at times declined funding. The reasons cited by administrators lend support to the argument that it was Rockefeller’s involvement and interest in ASCSA activities that led the Foundation to fund it in the first place and then later to continue its funding despite having moved to other humanities programs. During the early 1920s, the GEB and the Foundation both declined grants to the ASCSA. In 1920, the GEB and the Foundation declined funding because such a project was not in line with their current policy. The GEB’s declination is not surprising since their charter prevented them from funding internationally. In 1922,

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190 RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 749.R Greece, Box 3 Folder 27 “Record of declination of requests for aid.”
the Foundation declined the ASCSA’s requests for a second time, this time citing the
Foundation’s focus on health and medicine. The declinations are in line with the
Foundation’s actions towards other projects. The division of humanities did not exist yet
and Rockefeller had not involved himself closely yet with the Agora excavation. The
situation changed in 1927 when Rockefeller took an interest in the Agora excavation
being conducted by the ASCSA. The division for humanities began in 1928, and some of
their first grants were to the ASCSA in 1929 to support a fellowship program for young
archaeologists. This timing of the shift to fund the ASCSA directly synchronizes with the
start of Rockefeller’s personal funding of the excavation and supports the connection
between the Foundation and Rockefeller’s personal interests.

Related projects of the ASCSA struggled to find funds. An excavation of Eleusis
was ongoing in 1930. It is apparent from a letter to Rockefeller from Arthur Woods, one
of his associates, that the ASCSA sought funds for the Eleusis project from the
Rockefeller Foundation, but Woods states that the Foundation was not yet ready to take
up individual projects like an excavation. As a result, Woods recommended for
Rockefeller to fund this project.\footnote{RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 749.R Greece, Box 125 Folder 942, Memo from Woods to Rockefellor Jr., February 11, 1930.} The humanities division was still relatively new in an
organization dominated by science and medical expertise; it is not surprising then that
they hesitated to fund an excavation halfway around the world. The Foundation’s
entrance into humanities programs first sought out fellowship opportunities in which
Foundation officials were experienced. The distinctions occurring in the funding are
important because there was no lack of support from Foundation trustees for the Agora
excavation and the fellowship program they were currently funding. It should be noted
that Abraham Flexner, a Foundation trustee who had recently explained why Latin and Greek instruction would be omitted in his proposed experimental school, praised the work of the Agora excavation in a letter to Woods in 1931. Flexner writes that large chapters of Greek history and art will be re-written. He hoped that Wilamowitz would be proud and says that the excavation will infuse “into classical and humanistic studies the new life, which laboratories of physics and chemistry are continually pouring into science.”

Flexner goes on to say that he hopes Rockefeller will permit his name to be attached to this historic excavation, and that his name like Lord Elgin to the Elgin marbles can be given to the Agora. Aside from demonstrating Flexner’s personal support for classical archaeology, this letter also indicates an important back-channeling between Foundation officials and Rockefeller’s personal assistants. For one, the letter demonstrates that both sets of officials were in close contact with one another. More importantly, Flexner’s letter indicates that he and probably other Foundation trustees were aware that Rockefeller was the anonymous donor to the Agora excavation, which lends further support to the claim that the Foundation and Rockefeller acted in concert on this project.

The enthusiasm for the Agora project among Foundation trustees was apparently so great that there was even discussion in 1932 that the Foundation might take up funding of the excavation in place of Rockefeller. Further information is found in the Foundation’s archival materials. Here, we learn that despite feeling that the Agora

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192 RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 749.R Greece, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from Flexner to Woods, December 3, 1931.
193 RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 749.R Greece, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from Flexner to Woods, December 3, 1931.
194 RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 749.R Greece, Box 3 Folder 28, “Excerpt from Diary of Thomas B. Appleget,” January 18 and 20, 1932.
excavation was merited, Foundation officials felt that the funding of such an enterprise was an all or nothing proposition and the subsequent amount needed to finish the excavation was too large a single grant for the Foundation to make at that time, since it would hamper their other programs of giving. As with previous declinations to the ASCSA, here again the very structure of the Foundation and philanthropy more broadly hampered such individual giving. These archived memos further underscore the awareness of Foundation officials that Rockefeller was the anonymous donor who had been funding the Agora excavation up to that point.

The Rockefeller Foundation also supported other established institutions related to Greco-Roman antiquity. For example, in 1932 the Foundation granted $35,000 to the Munich, Germany based Thesaurus Linguae Latinae (TLL). This was for a period of five years and it is mentioned that Georg Dittmann was the Director at this time. The description in the Foundation’s annual report notes that this grant was intended to support the TLL during the German economic depression. The grant to the TLL represents the continuation of a history of grants to philological projects. In 1929, the Foundation gave $50,000 to the University of Chicago for a period of five years in equal installments in support of studies in comparative philology. The description in the Foundation’s annual report notes that the project at Chicago engaged with Greek lexical material and would

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broaden our understanding of language formation.\textsuperscript{197} In 1930, Johns Hopkins University was granted $100,000 in support of a four-volume work on the Roman economy.\textsuperscript{198} Together, these grants to universities and institutes demonstrate Foundation support for the humanities and Classics in particular during the 1930s. These grants are also contemporary with the fellowship program for the ASCSA. Unlike the grants to the ASCSA, however, there is no obvious connection between the Foundation and the recipients of the grants. The only connecting thread in any of this is Rockefeller’s personal interest in antiquity.

The Foundation’s support of ancient archaeology did not stop with the excavation of the Athenian Agora conducted by the ASCSA. Throughout the early years of the Division of the Humanities at the Foundation, several other excavation projects and institutions were granted funding. For example, the Foundation gave generously to the American Schools of Oriental Research in Jerusalem and Baghdad. Each school seems to have received $250,000 towards their endowments and future buildings, however, this amount was contingent upon finding matching funds from other sources.\textsuperscript{199} This amount is in line with the amount given to the AAR and ASCSA from the IEB that also went towards their endowments. Furthermore, there is a personal connection between

Rockefeller and Ancient Near Eastern studies, which I will discuss in detail in the final section of this chapter.

In 1931, the Foundation also expanded their archaeology program. The Foundation granted $22,500 to the University of Pennsylvania towards their excavations of Ur at the Chaldees. The grant was to be paid out over a period of four years. That same year, the Foundation granted Yale University $30,000 for their excavations at Jerash and Dura-Europos. The grant was to be paid out over two years and the report notes that the excavations were led by M.I. Rostovtzeff. An additional grant was made for the Dura-Europos excavation in 1935 for $30,000.

In 1932, the Foundation granted $35,000 to the University of Michigan towards the completion of their excavations at Karanis, Egypt. The Foundation report notes that this site is comparable in importance to Dura-Europos, which they funded the year prior, and has already yielded considerable papyri, ostraka, coins, and glass. The report notes that the site is important for the Greco-Roman period from 260 BCE to 450 CE. In 1934, the Foundation granted an additional $25,000 for the excavations as Karanis. It

is important to note that the excavations supported during these years were all very important archaeological sites. These were the big digs that carried the most prestige.

Assessed in the larger context of Rockefeller family philanthropy, the Rockefeller Foundation, the General Education Board, and the International Education Board all acted in concert with Rockefeller’s personal philanthropy. At times, this connection was made all the more apparent when the Foundation’s program of giving had turned in a different direction away from classical initiatives, for example, the case with the Rockefeller Foundation’s ASCSA fellowship program. Indeed, all three foundations supported various classical initiatives all of which had some connection to Rockefeller’s personal philanthropy.

John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s Personal Philanthropy of Classical Initiatives

The purpose of the Rockefeller foundations was not to funnel all of the Rockefeller wealth into large-scale philanthropic organizations. A significant portion of John D. Rockefeller’s wealth was given away to these foundations, but he also continued to give directly on a smaller scale to a variety of recipients, both individuals and institutions. After graduating from Brown University, Rockefeller increasingly was given the task of managing his father’s philanthropy. Upon his father’s retirement from business, philanthropy would become one of Rockefeller’s major priorities. He too would give substantial sums of his father’s fortune away to the foundations they set up. He would also continue his father’s tradition of direct philanthropy. It is difficult to calculate a percentage of his direct philanthropy related to the classical world, nor would this information help one determine the scale of classicism’s influence on Rockefeller.
Rather, what seems the most important factor in looking at Rockefeller’s personal philanthropy is to notice that some of his largest scale projects during the peak years of his giving, roughly 1920-1940, engaged with the Greco-Roman and Near Eastern civilizations through their art, archaeology, and their continued importance for the modern world. His giving to the American Academy at Rome and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens are the most important examples of his direct philanthropy of classical initiatives during this period. His interest in the archaeology of the ancient world is evident from his personal connection to the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, which led to a series of museum projects. Finally, his philanthropy of large-scale restoration projects, notably Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles, engaged with the classical past in a variety of ways that influenced his thinking as he embarked on his final large-scale project, Rockefeller Center.

**The American Academy in Rome**

The American Academy in Rome was one of the earliest recipients of the Rockefeller Jr.’s philanthropy of classical initiatives. Initially, in 1906, Rockefeller Sr. was approached to help with expenses at the American Academy in Rome. He agreed to give them $4,000 towards their expenses. This seems to have been a goodwill gesture, since that same year Rockefeller Sr. was approached a second time to become one of the principal founders of the new American Academy in Rome through a donation of

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205 An example of Rockefeller’s interest in this area prior to the 1920s is his commissioning of Francis Newton for a series of four Pompeian panels for the music room in his house on 17 West Fifty-Fourth Street. The fact is reported in *American Art News* (1914), “For a Rockefeller Music Room,” Vol. XII No.31, 9 May: page 3.

206 RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 751 Italy 1912-1962, Reel 1 Frame 1.
$100,000. The new American Academy in Rome was to be the result of a merger between the School of Classical Studies in Rome and the American Academy in Rome, then a school for Fine Arts and Architecture. Charles F. McKim was seeking funds from private sources to endow this new combined institution.\textsuperscript{207} Rockefeller Sr. agreed, but with a stipulation. Rockefeller Sr. would give the funds in the name of the University of Chicago, and only if the university had a representative on the Board of Trustees of the Academy in perpetuity.\textsuperscript{208} This must have proven too much for McKim, and a sticking point for Rockefeller Sr., since by at least 1911 it seems that Rockefeller Sr. had withdrawn his pledge.\textsuperscript{209}

Academy officials also approached Rockefeller Jr. for funds as early as 1907. He declined to support their efforts, however, because he was aware of his father’s donation and pledge and felt that that pledge was representative of the entire family.\textsuperscript{210} By 1907, the Rockefellers were just embarking on large-scale, corporate philanthropy. Furthermore, the majority of Rockefeller philanthropy was at this time still controlled by Rockefeller Sr. Thus, it was entirely appropriate for Rockefeller Jr. to have declined support in 1907. Correspondence again resumed between the Academy and Rockefeller Jr. in 1912. Then executive head of the Academy, Jesse B. Carter, wrote to Rockefeller

\textsuperscript{207} Charles McKim was one of the three partners of the famous beaux-art architectural firm in the early twentieth century, McKim, Mead, and White. For more information on McKim, see Broderick, Mosette (2010), Triumvirate, McKim, Mead & White.

\textsuperscript{208} RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Education Interests, Foreign Colleges, American Academy in Rome Italy 1905-1909, Box 124 Folder 935, Memo from Gates to McKim, April 7, 1906.

\textsuperscript{209} RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 751 Italy 1912-1962, Reel 1 Frame 1. The summary in the files seems to suggest that by the school’s founding in 1911, Rockefeller Sr.’s pledge had already been withdrawn. Furthermore, by 1912, the Academy approached Rockefeller Jr. with the same request.

\textsuperscript{210} RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 751 Italy 1912-1962, Reel 1 Frame 1, Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to William A. Delano, March 26, 1907.
Jr. seeking $100,000. The timing of this request coincides with the merger of the School of Classical Studies in Rome and the American Academy in Rome.\textsuperscript{211} It is unclear exactly what Rockefeller’s response was to this request, but it must have been favorable. He was inclined to give at this time because his father had withdrawn his own pledge a few years prior. It is most likely that response was delayed until the founding of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913. One of the first grants the Foundation issued on January 21, 1914 was to the American Academy in Rome. The Foundation pledged $10,000 per year for a period of ten years, or $100,000.\textsuperscript{212} It is rather remarkable that the Foundation agreed to such a donation at this time. The Foundation, as I discussed above, was focused solely on medical and health research, and the trustees’ interest in the humanities was rather limited. The Foundation was still decades away from creating a division of the humanities. The request, then, from Carter to Rockefeller, and the subsequent pledge from the Foundation, only make sense if Rockefeller encouraged the Foundation to consider this request. Furthermore, the plaque of Founders at the Academy lists Rockefeller’s name, not the Rockefeller Foundation, which leads one to conclude that either Rockefeller pledged the money, but the funds were issued through the Foundation, or the Foundation paid in the name of Rockefeller. Rockefeller’s fondness for the classics is clearly evident in his support for the Academy at this time.

\textsuperscript{211} The two institutions were officially merged effective on the final day of 1912. See Archives of American Art, American Academy in Rome, Finding Aid, \texttt{<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/american-academy-rome-records-6320/more>}, accessed March 17, 2015.

Support for the American Academy in Rome did not wane after this initial pledge. Rockefeller gave generously throughout the 1900s to pay for the institutional membership fees of Brown University in the Academy.\footnote{RAC, (FA386), RF, Series 751 Italy 1912-1962, Reel 1 Frame 1, “The Rockefeller Boards’ appropriations.” The summary file records that Rockefeller gave generously to Brown University’s membership in the then American School of Classical Studies in Rome. Dollar amounts are not recorded in connection with this donation.} This fondness for his alma mater and in particular the many classical courses he took while in attendance is another piece of evidence of Rockefeller’s enduring fondness for and interest in Greco-Roman civilization. In 1922, Rockefeller gave another $200,000 toward the Academy’s endowment. As I noted previously, in 1927 the Rockefeller-funded IEB donated $1,000,000 to the Academy towards their endowment. Few other institutions received such generous and sustained funding from the Rockefellers and their foundations.

The American School of Classical Studies at Athens

Rockefeller’s enduring interest in Greco-Roman civilization manifested itself a second time in his funding of the excavation of the Athenian Agora conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. This was one of the longest projects ever undertaken by Rockefeller. The story of Rockefeller’s involvement reveals several important aspects of his personal philanthropic interests and how those influenced the philanthropy of the Rockefeller foundations. Of the many projects that have records in the archives, few have as detailed a record as Rockefeller’s support for the American School and its excavation of the Athenian Agora. Rockefeller’s contributions to the American School were undertaken in three distinct periods. The first phase involved both individual contributions and joint contributions from both Rockefellers in the early
decades of the 1900s. The second phase, from 1927-1937, coincides with the initial excavation of the Agora. The third and final phase, from 1950-1959, continued contributions towards the Agora excavation as well as the construction of the Stoa of Attalos.

The earliest known contact between the Rockefellers and the American School was in 1902. Then, Rockefeller Sr. and Jr. jointly gave $1,250 towards Brown University’s permanent association with the school.214 It was during this same time period that Rockefeller Jr. also gave to the American Academy in Rome for similar purposes. These early donations occurred during the first few years that Rockefeller began working in his father’s office and began to work with Frederick Gates managing his father’s philanthropy. The closeness in time to his graduation from Brown University in 1897 no doubt influenced such decisions. That his donations on behalf of his alma mater were related to Classics, further underscores his fondness for his classical education. The next record in the archives jumps to 1922. By then, Rockefeller had come into his own in terms of philanthropy and had devoted his life to philanthropy. He also had more control over his father’s immense fortune, and he would again turn to supporting Classics. In 1922, Rockefeller gave $100,000 to the American School after a careful review of the school’s activities.215 It was this same year that Rockefeller also gave to the American Academy in Rome. It is important to note that any international giving could only have come directly from Rockefeller or the Rockefeller Foundation.

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214 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, Memo from William Carey Poland to Rockefeller Sr. and Jr.
215 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, Memo from Fosdick to Edward Capps, June 19, 1922.
The GEB was limited to giving inside the United States and Rockefeller had yet to found the IEB. 216 Although all of these foundations would eventually support classical initiatives, they rarely did so on the scale of Rockefeller’s private philanthropy. A gift to the school’s endowment was both in keeping with the practice of giving set up by Rockefeller Sr. and characteristic of their methodology in giving away funds only after careful investigation of the health of the recipient institution. 217 The 1920s marked the beginning of Rockefeller’s personal philanthropy on a larger scale than before, and that many of his first big donations were to classical schools shows the continued fascination with the ancient world and his view that the discipline should continue to thrive.

The second phase of Rockefeller’s contributions to the American School began in 1927 and lasted until 1937. During this decade he was one of the chief funders for the school’s excavation of the Athenian Agora, if not its sole financier. The negotiations between donor and recipient were focused on specific details and stipulations. One aspect that stands out from the abundance of archival evidence is that Rockefeller wished to be kept well-informed about this venture, more so than is expressed with other archaeological digs that he funded. He also wished to remain anonymous, mostly because he feared that his name attached to such a project would inhibit the school’s ability to find new donors. All of his early communications with American School officials were done mostly through Arthur Woods. It was Woods who, in 1927, wrote back to Edward Capps, chairman of the Managing Committee of the American School, and one of the

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216 The International Education Board was founded in 1923.
217 That Classical institutions received funds after such careful scrutiny demonstrates from a different perspective that these institutions were still viewed as a vital part of society, culture and learning.
guiding spirits behind the project,\textsuperscript{218} stating that he would represent the anonymous
donor.\textsuperscript{219} The American School came asking for large sums of money to support the
excavation of the Athenian Agora. Rockefeller at this early stage was cautious but willing
to move forward. He had never taken on such a large project before in his personal
philanthropy. Furthermore, there were several complications. For one, Rockefeller
insisted that the funds were to be transferred to the American School and not the Greek
government. He granted $225,000 for the initial phase of excavations. There was no
promise of future funds but the door was left open if things went well, and he wanted to
be kept well informed about the excavation’s progress. By 1928, the necessary laws were
passed in Greece that assuaged Rockefeller’s concerns, and funds were transferred over
to the school’s treasury.\textsuperscript{220}

One of the few side projects that Rockefeller funded in association with the
excavation of the Agora was the excavation of Eleusis, also being conducted under the
auspices of the American School. As I noted above, the Rockefeller Foundation took up
the funding for this excavation in 1933. But in 1930, Capps asked Woods if the donor
would be willing to give $10,000 towards the excavation at Eleusis, being overseen by
Konstantinos Kourouniotis. To apply pressure to the donor, Capps mentioned in his letter

\textsuperscript{218} The American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Athenian Agora Excavation,
“The Excavations,” \textltt{http://www.agathe.gr/overview/the_excavations.html}, accessed
March 17, 2015.
\textsuperscript{219} RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of
Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 942, Memo from Woods to Capps, March 15,
1927.
\textsuperscript{220} RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of
Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 942, Memo from Woods to Robert W.
Gumbel, November 12, 1928.
to Woods that Kourouniotis had helped greatly with the excavation of the Agora. After his investigation of the excavation of Eleusis, as is typical of any Rockefeller grant project, Woods eventually made the recommendation to Rockefeller to support this side project. Furthermore, Woods looked into whether the Rockefeller Foundation would fund this project, but reported back to Rockefeller that the Foundation could not take on individual projects like an excavation. Rockefeller pledged $2,500 every year for four years, or the full $10,000 that was asked for. The funding of the excavation of Eleusis demonstrates that Rockefeller and the Rockefeller Foundation were in close contact with one another, each influencing the other. It also demonstrates that Rockefeller was willing to fund additional classical excavations, mostly based on the good reports he was hearing of the American School’s handling of the excavation of the Agora.

The American School’s conduct during the first phase of excavation of the Agora inspired confidence in Rockefeller. He was receiving reports from Capps and also had sent surrogates to investigate the situation on the ground in Athens and report back to him. We know that Capps sent Rockefeller a book in 1930. One of those surrogates

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221 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 942, Memo from Woods to Rockefeller Jr., February 11, 1930. In this memo, Woods relays to Rockefeller Jr. this information from Capps, whose initial letter to Woods is not preserved.

222 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 942, Memo from Woods to Rockefeller Jr., February 11, 1930.

223 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 942, Memo from Woods to W. Rodman Peabody, March 6, 1930.

224 This was the same method Rockefeller Sr. employed in his business dealings and personal philanthropy and shows the influence and continuation of Rockefeller Sr.’s style of personal philanthropy in those of Rockefeller Jr.

225 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, Internal Memo, May 1930.
who happened to be traveling through Athens was Abraham Flexner. Although Rockefeller was publicly still an anonymous donor, privately, his own staff and Foundation staff clearly knew he was the donor. Flexner, seemingly aware of Rockefeller’s role, wrote to Woods in 1931 after a visit to the Agora excavation. Flexner had read Leslie Shear’s account of the initial excavation and the finds already catalogued. Flexner boldly states that large chapters of Greek history and the history of Greek art will be rewritten as a result of the finds of this excavation. Furthermore, he says that he hopes that Gilbert Murray and Wilamowitz would be proud, because the excavation will infuse “into classical and humanistic studies the new life, which laboratories of physics and chemistry are continually pouring into science.” He concludes by saying that he hopes that Rockefeller will permit his name to be attached to this historic excavation so that Rockefeller’s name, like Lord Elgin to the Elgin marbles, can be given to the Agora. Such praise for the excavation coming from a man who omitted ancient language instruction from the curriculum for his proposed experimental school at first seems contradictory. But it seems less contradictory when taking his entire statement in perspective with the changes that education underwent in the United States during his lifetime. We know that Classics, or more accurately, philology in particular, was criticized as lacking utility in a modern world. Classical Archaeology, however, always enjoyed the benefit of contributing something new in the form of new finds that contributed to our overall knowledge of the ancient world. Whatever his own internal

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226 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from Flexner to Woods, December 3, 1931.
227 Leslie Shear was the first field director of the excavations.
contradictions may have been, Flexner’s ringing endorsement of the ongoing excavation certainly helped incite Rockefeller to future giving.

In 1932, Leslie Shear, still field director of the excavations, returned to the United States and gave a slide lecture on the finds of the first phase of the excavation.\(^{228}\) Rockefeller was made aware of this lecture. In that same year, the excavation also received good press coverage.\(^{229}\) In February 1932, Capps sent Rockefeller his final report on the first phase of excavation. As a result of all of this private communication, surrogate reports, and the detailed and thorough excavation reports, Rockefeller pledged another $300,000 for 1933-1935, to be distributed in equal installments each year.\(^{230}\) Tellingly, Rockefeller left the door open once again for future funds at the close of this next three-year funding cycle.

Just as before, Rockefeller was kept well-informed during this second campaign of excavation. On May 4, 1933, Rockefeller wrote to Woods saying that he had “read all of the articles about the excavation work with the greatest interest and my enthusiasm in regard to the undertaking is only increased thereby. I said to Mrs. Rockefeller last night that I was very eager to go to Athens.” He also expressed his thanks to Capps for the

\(^{228}\) RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to Flexner, November 15, 1932. It appears that Flexner’s original letter to Rockefeller Jr. informing him of Shear’s lecture is not preserved.

\(^{229}\) RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, “Treasure in the Earth”, July 8, 1932.

\(^{230}\) RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 942, Memo from Woods to Capps, February 29, 1932.
bronze replica bust from the Agora.\textsuperscript{231} To date, these are the most positive words yet about the excavation and Rockefeller’s own role in it. Considering his knowledge of the language and culture of the ancient Greco-Roman world, such a visit to the excavation site would reinforce the historic importance of the excavation and no doubt spur additional funds.\textsuperscript{232} In 1934, Woods sent Rockefeller a memo on the funds dispensed thus far.\textsuperscript{233} The memo details all of the funds allocated to the project to date, the actual payments made \textit{per annum}, and a summary of communications and agreements. Occasionally, memos also contain recommendations on future giving. Such memos are typical of the way Rockefeller and his close associates communicated about his personal philanthropy, especially in the cases of projects already underway. The memos and letters between Rockefeller and Woods also show that Rockefeller was kept well-informed regarding the status of the project, the finds, and how much money had been spent thus far. This was only typical of large projects or projects in which he had a personal interest, as in the case of the excavation of the Agora.

On November 20, 1934, Woods sent a second memo to Rockefeller this time suggesting that he make a third three year pledge of $300,000 to be dispensed annually. The second pledge was still in effect and it seems Rockefeller was still waiting to see the final report from the excavations before making a decision. It certainly helped that his son Laurance Rockefeller wrote a memo to his father a year later updating him on the

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\textsuperscript{231} RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to Woods, May 4, 1933.
\textsuperscript{232} This trip never occurred.
\textsuperscript{233} RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from Woods to Rockefeller Jr., November 20, 1934.
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status of the excavations. Laurance’s letter is particularly informative because it sheds light on the link between Rockefeller’s personal philanthropy and the corporate philanthropy of the Rockefeller Foundation. Laurance informs his father that the Foundation looked into taking over his interest in the excavation in 1932, but they turned down the project “not on its merits,” but because the amount then requested by Capps to finish out the excavation was simply too large a sum for the Foundation to pledge in light of the rest of their program of giving. Laurance ends his letter by recommending that Rockefeller make a new pledge and continue to fund the project. Aside from the break in correspondence from Woods (Laurance must have been taking a more active role in his father’s philanthropy at this time), the letter highlights the backchannels that operated in Rockefeller philanthropy. The personal and the corporate philanthropy could often work in tandem, even on the same or complementary projects. In this instance, each side was kept informed of decisions of the other, and then planned for the future accordingly.

Thus, while Rockefeller was the anonymous donor to the American School and to the public, privately, it was a rather open secret that he was the donor.

The recommendations from Woods and Laurance Rockefeller, coupled with the detailed excavation reports he had been reading led Rockefeller to make a third $300,000

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234 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from Laurance Rockefeller to Rockefeller Jr., November 18, 1935. For more information on Laurance, see Winks, Robin (1997), Laurance S. Rockefeller: Catalyst for Conservation. Laurance graduated from Princeton in 1932, attended Harvard Law School for two years. By 1934, Laurance became more involved in his father’s philanthropy and business. He was involved with Rockefeller Center’s development in the latter half of the 1930s. He was also involved with the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. His passion for conservation earned him the Congressional Gold Medal in 1991.

235 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from Laurance Rockefeller to Rockefeller Jr., November 18, 1935.
three-year pledge on December 9, 1935. On September 15, 1936, Rockefeller was made aware that the sixth dig was on track and going well. On October 16, 1936, the State Department contacted Ken Chorley, another one of Rockefeller’s associates, saying that they wanted to announce Rockefeller as the donor for the excavations of the Agora. Up to this time, Rockefeller had held fast to his principle that he would remain anonymous. With the State Department wanting to announce, however, and with his third pledge coming to an end, it seems that he was slowly becoming willing to publicly announce his donations. In November 1936, Laurance wrote to his father with a final accounting of funds given to date. Later that same month, Fosdick wrote to Rockefeller saying that the piece revealing his identity as the donor would come out in *Fortune* magazine. Throughout 1936, Laurance and Shear were in close contact with one another. Laurance Rockefeller requested a detailed agenda of what was left to do in the excavation, how much of the funds were left and a budget for future projects. A year

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236 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to Woods, December 9, 1935.
237 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, Memo from Laurance Rockefeller to Rockefeller Jr., September 15, 1936.
238 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from State Department to Ken Chorley, October 16, 1936.
239 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 944, Memo from Laurance Rockefeller to Rockefeller Jr., November 12, 1936.
240 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 944, Memo from Fosdick to Rockefeller Jr., November 23, 1936.
241 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, Memo from Laurance Rockefeller to Rockefeller Jr., September 15, 1936 and Memo from Shear to Laurance Rockefeller, November 9, 1936.
later, in 1937, Rockefeller wrote to Woods saying that he kept up funding of this project
during the Great Depression, even when other philanthropists had stopped their giving.
He says that he and Laurance will meet with Capps and Shear in person to discuss a final
gift. After their meeting, on January 5, 1937, Rockefeller wrote to Capps thanking him
for meeting with him and stating that to date he had given $823,299.71 through
“prolonged [financial] depression,” and would pledge another $350,000 as a final gift. He
also expresses that it was his great pleasure to be part of this project.  

Rockefeller’s gift in 1937 did mark the ending of the second phase of his
relationship with the American School, which had lasted nearly a decade and was
remarkable for its funding of the excavation of the Agora. Despite the final pledge in
1937, additional funds would be forthcoming after World War II, and communication
between the American School and Rockefeller would continue for several more years. A
few minor communications occurred in 1938 and 1939. In 1938, Rockefeller wrote to
Shear saying that his son David had visited Greece to tour the excavation site and
reported back positively. In 1939, Laurance was informed that excavation was halted
because of political concerns. In 1939, Rockefeller was sent a copy of the final
excavation report conducted under the auspices of his funding. He was also informed by

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242 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of
Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 941, Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to Woods,
January 4, 1936.
243 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of
Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 943, Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to Capps,
January 5, 1937.
244 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of
Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 944, Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to Shear, May
7, 1938.
245 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of
Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 944, Memo from Stevens to Laurance
Rockefeller, January 17, 1939.
Shear that he was made a member of an Honorary Society in Greece because of his consistent support for the excavation.\textsuperscript{246}

The third and final phase of Rockefeller’s relationship with the American School occurred between 1950 and 1960. Thirteen years had passed since Rockefeller’s last contribution to the American School. Rockefeller’s connection with the American School and the excavation of the Agora was one of his longest philanthropic relationships. After his meeting with Capps and Shear, Rockefeller believed that his gift in 1937 was a final one. On May 31, 1950, Homer A. Thompson, then field director of the excavation, wrote to Rockefeller requesting $200,000. This set off a flurry of letters between Rockefeller and Dana Creel,\textsuperscript{247} one of his associates. The aim of the communication was to update Rockefeller on what had been done before in relation to the American School and report on their current situation. This was no easy task for Creel to complete, because nearly all of the players that were involved with the project in the 1930s no longer were associated with the excavation.\textsuperscript{248} Thompson, who was involved with the original excavation in the 1930s, was now field director,\textsuperscript{249} but had had no contact with Rockefeller in that earlier phase. By February 23, 1951, Creel prepared a very large report for Rockefeller, in which

\textsuperscript{246} RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 944, Memo from Shear to Rockefeller Jr., January 4, 1939.

\textsuperscript{247} Dana Creel was part of the second generation of the Rockefeller inner circle. He worked mostly in philanthropy and would eventually serve as president of the Rockefeller Brothers’ Fund. For more information see, Richardson, Theresa (1999), “The Rockefeller Boards: The Organization of Philanthropy and the Origins of the Social Sciences,” in The Development of the Social Sciences in the United States and Canada: The Role of Philanthropy, ed. Theresa Richardson and Donald Fisher, 52.

\textsuperscript{248} Edward Capps was chairman from 1918-1939. Leslie Shear was the first Field Director from 1928-1945.

\textsuperscript{249} Thompson was one of the original two Agora Fellows under Leslie Shear.
he advised further funding. Creel notes in the report that the Rockefeller Foundation had given in 1937 towards the construction of a museum. It was then newly elected President of the Board of Trustees of the ASCSA, Ward M. Canaday, with whom Creel mostly corresponded in regards to the current situation with the excavation. Canaday made a very important argument towards additional Rockefeller funds, which sealed the deal in Rockefeller’s mind for additional funds. Canaday linked the phase of excavation that Rockefeller had funded with the current phase of excavation in 1950 and thereby seemingly put Rockefeller in a position of obligation for additional funds. On February 28, 1951, Creel wrote a memo stating that he had talked with Rockefeller and he had agreed to give an additional $500,000 for the final phase of excavation, which Canaday argued for, knowing that some of that money would go towards the museum, and would give an additional $500,000, if the American School raised matching funds.

These final funds from Rockefeller helped the American School finish excavation of the southern portion of the Agora, which included the excavation and then reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos, which would serve as offices and a museum. While Rockefeller was kept well-informed about the progress of the excavation and was given

250 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 945, Memo from Creel to Rockefeller Jr., February 23, 1951.  
251 This appears to be the Stoa of Attalos, but communication in the 1930s does not give it a name, but simply refers to a museum to house finds from the Agora excavation. This also demonstrates that the American school had been trying for decades to finance a museum unsuccessfully.  
252 Ward Canaday made his career at the Willys Overland Company, which was the forerunner to the Jeep automobile company, and which produced many of the vehicles used in World War II by the United States. He and his wife, who is reported to have been a classicist, were philanthropists.  
253 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 945, Memo from Creel to Files, February 28, 1951.
many books and reports from those involved, he remained nonetheless resolute to avoid too much public notoriety in this additional gift. For example, he refused to attend the dedication of the Stoa of Attalos in 1956, because he insisted once again that his presence would bring too much notoriety and give people the impression that the museum and excavation were Rockefeller projects, which would inhibit others from giving funds. He seems to have failed at remaining obscure, however, because he was decorated and honored repeatedly in this time period. Rockefeller’s final gift was actually higher than he had agreed to initially, giving a final check of $550,000 in 1957, and another $25,000 in 1958 for additional property acquisition.

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254 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 946, see Memo from Janet Warfield to Creel, October 29, 1953 for information on a Portrait Sculpture book Canaday sent to Rockefeller Jr.; see Memo from Creel to Canaday, April 6, 1954 for information on the photos of the excavation work Canaday sent to Rockefeller Jr.; see Memo “The Athenian Committee” to Rockefeller Jr., September 5, 1956 for information on an 8 inch silver statuette replica of the statue of Minerva in the Parthenon. Additional information and items gifted to Rockefeller Jr. can be found in Folder 947.

255 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 126 Folder 952, see Memo from Creel to Files, June 12, 1956. His position on anonymity is entirely in keeping with the principles of philanthropy he and his father set out nearly half a century earlier. It is important to note that had he been more inclined, he probably would not have attended anyway because he was eighty-two at the time.

256 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 944, see Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to Creel, March 1, 1955 for information on a memorial tree planted in his honor; see Box 126 Folder 953, Memo from Canaday to Creel, October 2, 1956 for information the Mayor of Athens granted Rockefeller Jr. honorary citizenship of Athens, honorary membership into the Archaeological Society of Athens, and the King decorated him with the Grand Cross of the Order of the Phoenix, the highest honor the Greek government could bestow. Folder 955 also contains information on seals and plaques placed in his honor by the ASCSA.

257 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 126 Folder 954, Memo from Rockefeller Jr. to Creel, February 25, 1957.
On May 2, 1960, Rockefeller wrote to Canaday thanking him for a booklet on Athenian citizens. Rockefeller died just a few days later on May 11, 1960. In subsequent correspondence between Canaday and Laurance Rockefeller, Canaday informed the Rockefeller family that in memory of Rockefeller’s contributions to the Stoa of Attalos, a plaque would be placed in the Stoa. In reply, Laurance wrote to Canaday saying, “it is characteristic of you to take so much interest in this matter. Father often spoke of his great satisfaction in the superb way in which you directed the restoration of the Stoa of Attalos.” Canaday replied in a letter that, “Your Father’s encouragement to me in this project is a treasured memory. I shall never forget it or cease to value it.” The exchange between Canaday and Laurance Rockefeller sums up everyone’s thoughts on the important role Rockefeller played in the American School’s excavation of the Agora. Rockefeller’s involvement with the American School, the excavation, and the restoration of the Stoa of Attalos lasted for over half a century. In his personal philanthropy, he was involved with no other project for as long a time period. I think his enduring interest in the ancient world was a large reason for his sustained support for the excavation of the Agora. Indeed, no history of the excavation of the Agora can be considered complete without mention of his support.

258 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 126 Folder 955, Memo from Creel to Canaday, July 16, 1958.
259 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 126 Folder 955, Memo from Warfield to Canaday, May 2, 1960.
260 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 947, Memo from Laurance Rockefeller to Canaday, August 31, 1961.
261 RAC, (FA316), JDR Jr., Educational Interests, Foreign Colleges American School of Classical Studies, Athens, Box 125 Folder 947, Memo from Canaday to Laurance Rockefeller, September 12, 1961.
Rockefeller’s love of archaeology extended to include the Ancient Near East. His enthusiasm for such endeavors no doubt stemmed from his acquaintance with James Henry Breasted. Breasted was an ambitious man and was one of the foremost Egyptologists in the United States by the early twentieth century. Rockefeller involvement with Near Eastern archaeology dates to 1902. It was then that Rockefeller Sr., after consultation with Gates, gave $50,000 toward archaeological field operations to be directed by Breasted under the auspices of the University of Chicago, whose first President, William Rainey Harper, was himself a scholar of the same field.262 This involvement made sense from Rockefeller Sr.’s point of view because he had founded the University of Chicago to be a premier institution and was currently still donating to its endowment. Supporting such a project that would add to the faculty’s expertise with field research and material finds was within his philanthropic line of thought.

Rockefeller Jr.’s involvement with Breasted did not begin until 1919. For some time, Breasted had been trying to develop a new Oriental Institute under the aegis of the University of Chicago.263 A first infusion of cash came from Rockefeller in 1919, who agreed to support this new institute for five years, at $10,000 per year.264 It was during this first period of funding that, thanks to a tip from the Civil Commissioner in Baghdad, Breasted and his team documented and further excavated a Roman stronghold in Salihiyah, which in antiquity was called Dura-Europos. It was subsequently discovered

263 Breasted’s Oriental Institute was one of the first institutes devoted to the Ancient Near East in the United States. It is important to note that it did not have a particular interest in biblical archaeology.
264 Breasted (1933), 33-35.
that the city was of Hellenistic origin, since Greek inscriptions were found next to the
Roman mosaics. \textsuperscript{265} Such discoveries no doubt pleased Rockefeller. More importantly, it
demonstrates that an interest in Near Eastern archaeology was in line with his classical
interests as well, since the area had a long history of both Hellenization and Roman rule
making for a rich archaeological record.

During the course of the next decade, the Institute continued to prosper with
infusions of funds from several Rockefeller entities. In 1925, the GEB gave funds
towards the institute’s endowment. \textsuperscript{266} That same year Rockefeller extended his original
pledge for another five years. \textsuperscript{267} In 1928, the IEB gave a substantial grant that helped the
Institute continue its current work and also expand upon it. \textsuperscript{268} Thus, by 1929, the Oriental
Institute had been in operation for a decade, and Rockefeller funds were instrumental to
its success. That Rockefeller philanthropies and Rockefeller’s own personal support
converged is another example of how sometimes Rockefeller philanthropic boards
aligned with Rockefeller’s personal interests. This was seen in the excavations of the
Athenian Agora and here again with the various excavations and projects of the Oriental
Institute.

The mutual admiration between Rockefeller and Breasted grew after the two
embarked on an extended trip up the Nile and back down through Palestine and Syria in
the winter of 1929. Breasted recalls that Rockefeller’s “generous and enlightened interest
profoundly affected the subsequent program of the Oriental Institute in both Egypt and

\textsuperscript{265} Breasted (1933), 49-55.
\textsuperscript{266} Breasted (1933), 72.
\textsuperscript{267} Breasted (1933), 75.
\textsuperscript{268} Breasted (1933), 81-83.
Asia.”

It was during this trip that Breasted learned of Rockefeller’s interest in Egyptian wall paintings, as a result of which Rockefeller funded three projects to preserve these ancient works of art. With Rockefeller interested, and now invested, in Breasted’s projects, Breasted was able to raise funds for permanent buildings in the field as well as begin plans for a permanent building on the campus of the University of Chicago. One of the Oriental Institute’s main goals of investigation was to collect enough data to develop a comprehensive reconstruction of the course of early human history. This course, by the 1930s, seemed to suggest to Breasted a transition of civilization from the ancient Orient to the West. This theme is emphasized in the relief sculpture that occupied the tympanum over the entrance to the Institute’s building in Chicago (Figure 2.1). The tympanum was designed by Ulric Henry Ellerhusen. The relief sculpture depicts two large figures facing each other with a central sun disk radiating rays of sunlight. The overarching theme of the tympanum relief is “East teaching the West.” The figure on the left, representing the East, is wearing Egyptian clothing, and is flanked by several notable Near Eastern kings. In the background are the columns of Persepolis, the Sphinx, and the Pyramids, which are meant to symbolize the art and architecture of the East. The figure on the right, representing the West, holds a fragment bearing the hieroglyphic words, “we

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269 Breasted (1933), 91.  
270 Breasted (1933), 91-93.  
271 Breasted (1933), 81.  
272 Breasted (1933), figures 38-40.  
behold thy beauty.” Flanking the West are Herodotus, Alexander the Great, and Augustus. Below them in a middle row are depicted a Crusader and Field Archaeologist. In the lower right corner a Museum Archaeologist is depicted. Finally, matching the symbols of the East for art and architecture, are three corresponding symbols for the West’s art and architecture, the Parthenon, the Cathedral of Notre Dame, and the Nebraska State Capital. The symbolism of the tympanum and its artistic style are striking. The theme of the progress of knowledge from civilization’s beginning in the Near East to its transition to Greece and Rome and then Modern Europe shows the progress of humankind from a Eurocentric point of view, which placed primitive beginnings in the East, and a gradual advancement as civilization moved westward. The achievements in art and architecture by this point in the 1930s have become iconic. Everyone recognizes the Sphinx and the Pyramids as technological marvels of Egyptian ingenuity. The Parthenon likewise shares in that sense of awe and technological ability, and furthermore highlights the influence of Greek art and architecture on subsequent periods. A prime example of this in the 1920s would have been the newly constructed Nebraska State Capital, which also featured a similar art program.

The theme of humankind’s progress in knowledge, art, and architecture portrayed on the Oriental Institute is an early example of what would later become part of the art program for Rockefeller Center. The cohesive theme, the iconography of relief sculpture, and the use of symbolism are common to both projects. While Rockefeller had no personal hand in the design of the tympanum of the Oriental Institute, nonetheless, he already knew of Ellerhusen’s style of artwork because Ellerhusen worked on the Rockefeller Chapel for the University of Chicago. Ellerhusen shared a style similar to
Lee Lawrie’s with whom he worked on the Rockefeller Chapel and other projects. Lee Lawrie would design the *Atlas* of Rockefeller Center. Thus, as I will discuss in Chapter Three, there were several examples of recent buildings that Rockefeller could have drawn from for inspiration in the design of Rockefeller Center. That many of the same artists worked on all of these buildings creates a sort of artistic cohesiveness among them.\textsuperscript{275}

Rockefeller’s support for Breasted’s field archaeology and his newly created Oriental Institute demonstrates Rockefeller’s enduring interest in archaeology. His support of the Oriental Institute is another example of the close association between his personal philanthropy and that of the Rockefeller boards, since many gave substantial sums to the Oriental Institute. Considering their programs were focused on health and medicine, it is unlikely they would have given to the Institute had it not been for Rockefeller’s own personal and financial support. The artistic themes and iconography used to convey the work of the Oriental Institute are also a thematic precursor to themes that would be employed on Rockefeller Center. Many of the same artists worked together on several projects that utilized this cohesive theme that drew heavily on classical motifs and ideals.

Just as Rockefeller supported archaeology through the American School and the Oriental Institute, he also supported the construction of museums which would house the archaeological finds and provide research and office space for the archaeologists. One example of this already discussed is the reconstruction of the Stoa of Attalos, which he paid for as part of his decades long support of the Agora excavation. A second example is

\textsuperscript{275} Both Lee Lawrie and Hildreth Meiere contributed artworks to the Nebraska State Capital. Both contributed to Rockefeller Center. Hartley Burr Alexander designed the theme for the Nebraska State Capital, and would also design a theme for Rockefeller Center. Furthermore, Art Deco styling is found in both buildings’ artworks.
the proposed Cairo Museum. This was another collaboration between Rockefeller and Breasted. The earliest letters on the subject date to 1924. The formal offer was made on June 6, 1925 in a letter from Rockefeller to the Egyptian King Fuad. Rockefeller was pledging $10,000,000 for the remodeling of the existing museum, the construction of a new one, and the development of a new Egyptian Archaeology Foundation. The deal would fall through, however, and the museum was never built. Perhaps as a result of the failed Cairo Museum, Breasted approached Rockefeller a second time for a new museum in Jerusalem. Rockefeller once again thought this was a good idea and pledged $2,000,000 for the Palestine Archaeology Museum. This project was more easily secured than the Cairo Museum and what became known as the Rockefeller Museum opened to the public on January 13, 1938. Both museums are further evidence of Rockefeller’s interest in and support for archaeological research. In retrospective, it is apparent that Rockefeller supported prestigious archaeological projects. Cumulatively, the archaeology and museum projects, which Rockefeller supported, were important experiences of his prior to the inception of Rockefeller Center.

276 RAC, (FA314), JDR Jr., Cultural Interests, Series E, Cairo and Jewish Museum, Box 25 Folder 258 to Box 27 Folder 272 contains all of the archived material on this matter. Of most interest are the early letters between Breasted, Fosdick and Rockefeller Jr. and an original copy of the brochure for the new building.
279 RAC, (FA314), JDR Jr., Cultural Interests, Series E, Cairo and Jewish Museum, Box 25 Folder 258 to Box 27 Folder 272.
Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles

Rockefeller’s personal taste for ancient architecture and art found other modes of expression in the 1920s in addition to his support for archaeology. Rockefeller seemed to have entered a building phase in his philanthropy. Up to this point he had supported other people and their efforts, other institutions and their programs, but he had yet to embark on his own projects from the ground up. The most well known of those projects is Rockefeller Center, which I will discuss at length in the following chapters, but there were also several important forerunners to his monumental efforts at Rockefeller Center. For example, in the late 1920s Rockefeller began construction on The Riverside Church at One Hundred Twenty-Second Street and Riverside Drive. But an even larger project began in 1926, a collaboration between W. A. R. Goodwin and Rockefeller, to restore Colonial Williamsburg, in Williamsburg, Virginia. The project continues to this day, although the bulk of the restoration work was finished by the 1940s. In 1924, Rockefeller donated funds toward the restoration of three national treasures in France, Rheims Cathedral and the palaces of Fontainebleau and Versailles. Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles are important examples of the prestigious restoration work, with which Rockefeller became involved. Colonial Williamsburg is notable for its grid layout, its creation of vistas with grand buildings and gardens. Versailles, more than any other project, exposed Rockefeller to the power of an art program designed around a theme and integrated with a series of buildings.

Colonial Williamsburg refers both to the colonial capital of Virginia Colony, which was originally located in Williamsburg, and the town Rockefeller and William

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281 The same designer also did the cloisters in the 1930s.
Archer Rutherfoord Goodwin together restored. The story of the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg begins with W.A.R. Goodwin, twice rector of the Bruton Parish Church and head of the Department of Biblical Literature and Religious Education at the College of William & Mary.\textsuperscript{282} He had developed a lifelong interest in the history of Williamsburg. In February 1924, he spoke at a Phi Beta Kappa banquet in New York City. John D. Rockefeller was in the audience. Goodwin had first approached Henry Ford in the hopes that he would be the financial benefactor for this project. The negotiations with Ford did not succeed. In March 1926, Rockefeller and his family made a visit to Williamsburg. Goodwin gave them a tour of the town. That same year, when the Phi Beta Kappa Memorial Hall at William & Mary was dedicated, Goodwin approached Rockefeller and told him of his vision for Colonial Williamsburg.\textsuperscript{283} Rockefeller bought Goodwin’s vision in its entirety and committed himself to the task, which neither individual had any idea would be ongoing for the rest of their lives.\textsuperscript{284}

Once committed, Rockefeller and Goodwin moved quickly to buy up property quietly, as much as one can buy a whole town without locals noticing. Rockefeller financed the entire project and, based on archival evidence, was intimately involved with Goodwin in day-to-day operations. Colonial Williamsburg was now as much a Rockefeller project as it was originally Goodwin’s vision. As was the case with so many of Rockefeller’s philanthropic projects, he initially remained an anonymous donor, at least publicly. Had word gotten out that Rockefeller was buying up property in

\textsuperscript{284} RAC, (FA314), JDR Jr., Cultural Interests, Series E, Colonial Williamsburg, Box 143 Folder 1250, contains correspondence between Goodwin and Rockefeller Jr.
Williamsburg, no doubt property owners would have held out selling for a higher price. The architecture firm Perry, Shaw & Hepburn was hired in 1927, and remained the lead firm for restoration and reconstruction until 1934. The firm was known for its neoclassical designs and beaux-arts training. This is a curious fact considering they were hired to restore and rebuild Colonial Williamsburg; the colonial period in American architectural history is not known for its overtly classical aesthetic in architecture.

Colonial Williamsburg was built so that “the future may learn from the past.” The project is one of the largest open-air museums in the world. But scholars have noted several aspects surrounding Colonial Williamsburg that demonstrate the ulterior motivations for embarking on such a project. First, much of Colonial Williamsburg was restored or reconstructed, not preserved. This is an important distinction because what was left of Williamsburg in the 1920s was a mixture of dilapidated relics from colonial

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288 The Official Guidebook of Colonial Williamsburg (1951), 16.
times and modern structures such as telephone wires, automobiles and gas stations.\(^{289}\) In the resulting restoration, modern elements were removed from plain view. The relatively clean slate meant a plan could be imposed and a crafted image of the colonial past was built anew. Second, the role of tourism at Colonial Williamsburg came about only slowly and some would argue begrudgingly.\(^ {290} \)

Rockefeller, Goodwin, and the architects all played an important role in the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg. Rockefeller wanted to preserve the beauty of the past. He is often quoted as saying, “the restoration of Williamsburg...offered an opportunity to restore a complete area and free it entirely from alien and inharmonious surroundings, as well as to preserve the beauty and charm of the old buildings and gardens of the city and its historic significance.”\(^ {291} \) When looking at the restored and reconstructed Colonial Williamsburg, it is quickly obvious which buildings he is referring to, namely the Wren building on the campus of the College of William & Mary, the Governor’s Palace, and the Capitol, which all date to colonial times. These three buildings are the biggest, most opulent, and most prestigious buildings from Williamsburg’s colonial past. Reconstruction of the Wren building began in 1931. The building was named in honor of Sir Christopher Wren (1632-1723), an English architect


\(^{290}\) Koch (2011), 6-10. Koch argues that tourism at the time focused on the picturesque and/or heritage tours. In restoring and reconstructing colonial buildings to “new,” Rockefeller and Goodwin removed any of the patina of history that would have appealed to visitors. Furthermore, Koch notes that a hotel was not built until 1937, over a decade after the restoration process had begun. See also Kopper, Colonial Williamsburg, 204-208, for evidence that Rockefeller wanted the hotels closed.

who brought neoclassical architecture to the Virginia Colony.\textsuperscript{292} Its central main entrance is capped with a classical pediment (Figure 2.2).\textsuperscript{293} The Capitol, dedicated February 24, 1934, is another large and impressive structure for colonial times (Figure 2.3). Finally, reconstruction of the Palace began in 1930 (Figure 2.4). It is another opulent building from colonial times and is surrounded by manicured gardens (Figure 2.5). Its rear entrance has a large pediment with ornamentation as well as alternating colored brick inlays that give the impression of columns (Figure 2.6).\textsuperscript{294}

These three buildings are at the heart of Colonial Williamsburg. Their location further reinforces their status as the most preeminent buildings of the settlement. In their remaking of Colonial Williamsburg, Rockefeller, Goodwin, and the architects also redrew the map of Williamsburg. They took what was a disorderly grid, and molded that into a grid that created impressive vistas for the buildings discussed above.\textsuperscript{295} The main artery of Williamsburg is the Duke of Gloucester Street, at either end of which the Wren building and the Capitol terminate the vista (Figure 2.7). This termination of the line of sight is reminiscent of the City Beautiful movement in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which sought to superimpose new termination points on city streets and focus the pedestrian’s attention toward grand plazas with

\textsuperscript{292} Koch (2011), 19.
\textsuperscript{293} Kopper, Philip. (1986), Colonial Williamsburg. Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers: New York, 184 shows that while the different iterations of the building have varied in their classicism, the central pediment has remained a prominent feature.
\textsuperscript{294} Koch (2011), 20.
\textsuperscript{295} On the ancient origins of the town grid, see Stanislawski, Dan (1946), “The Origin and Spread of the Grid-Pattern Town.” For a brief discussion of the grid in Colonial Williamsburg, see Koch (2011), 16-17.
neoclassical architecture.\textsuperscript{296} While the Wren building and the Capitol had always terminated the view on the Duke of Gloucester Street, nonetheless, the reconstruction of the remaining buildings on the street were made to be so mundane and devoid of architectural ornamentation that the grandeur of the Wren and Capitol buildings were thereby further showcased.\textsuperscript{297} Scholars have also noted that in the reconstruction of the Capitol, architects Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn seem to have deliberately chosen to rebuild the first iteration of the Capitol building because its architecture was more aesthetically pleasing to them than the second iteration for which they also had records.\textsuperscript{298} Lastly, the Governor’s Palace, which sits perpendicular to the Duke of Gloucester Street, likewise terminates the vista of the Palace Green, a long, rectangular garden (Figure 2.8). In fact, the Palace gardens are some of the most elaborate in all of Williamsburg. In particular, the elaborate walkways and lines of sight show a sophisticated level of garden design especially in the way that the garden relates to the main building.\textsuperscript{299} This relationship between garden and Palace is not unlike the relationship of the gardens to the Palace of Versailles, another project which Rockefeller was intimately involved with as the reconstruction of Colonial Williamsburg was underway. The sophisticated integration of garden and building will also be employed at Rockefeller Center.

In their efforts to restore and reconstruct Colonial Williamsburg, Rockefeller, Goodwin and their team of architects sought to enhance the most architecturally stunning

\textsuperscript{297} Koch (2011), 18. See also Lounsbury (1990), 389 which notes that many colonial restoration projects like Colonial Williamsburg also sought the best example of architecture rather than the mundane.
\textsuperscript{298} Lounsbury (1990), 375.
\textsuperscript{299} Kocher and Dearstyne (1966), 36-42.
buildings from colonial times by lessening the aesthetic of the surrounding builds in the town grid. The relatively mundane architecture of the remaining dwellings thus made the architecturally ornate Wren, Capitol, and Palace buildings stand out that much more. Each of these buildings is also clearly designated as important by its location, terminating a vista and street in each case. The way each building is set back from the road and surrounded by elaborate gardens enhances their grand appearance. I argue that it is not a coincidence that Rockefeller was engaged with restoration at Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles at the same time, since similarities between the two projects are evident.

Just as with the restoration work in Colonial Williamsburg, Rockefeller’s name is also closely associated with the restoration of the Palace of Versailles in France (Figure 2.9). Versailles, located twelve miles southwest of Paris, was the home of the royal court during the reign of Louis XIV (reigned 1643-1715) and subsequently until the French Revolution. Rockefeller’s involvement began in 1923 and lasted until 1936. Rockefeller visited Versailles and other French national treasures in 1923. He was so struck by the dilapidated state of these buildings with such august histories that he decided to finance their restoration. As was the case with so many of Rockefeller’s personal philanthropic interests, he did not want to become involved in a situation where he was the sole financier, and he wished to remain anonymous. In addition, the Rockefeller Foundation was also involved with Rockefeller’s efforts from the start, and as a result acted as an

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300 As I mentioned above, he visited Rheims Cathedral, and the palaces of Fountainbleau and Versailles.
301 He would announce his gift within a year however, and his name became associated with Versailles from that point on.
institutional arm with bureaucratic power to execute the donor’s wishes. The initial gift was for $1,000,000 for just one year. Rockefeller wrote to French President Raymond Poincare on May 3, 1924:

I was impressed anew with the beauty of her art, the magnificence of her architecture, and the splendor of her parks and gardens. Their influence on the art of the world will always be full of inspiration. I am moved to make this proposal, not only because of my admiration for the great outstanding products of art, the influence of which should be continued unimpaired through the centuries…

The letter went on to stipulate that a joint committee of French and American individuals would control how the donation was to be allocated, including what specific projects would be targeted for restoration. Although Rockefeller himself was never appointed to this committee he virtually controlled it through his backchannelling with William Welles Bosworth, the architect associated with Rockefeller on many projects.

Bosworth was on the committee, and made sure that Rockefeller’s wishes were the committee’s. Rockefeller emphasized the art of Versailles in his letter, because much of the art of Versailles was a mixture of antiquities and eighteenth century originals in the

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304 For more information on W.W. Bosworth, see Carlhian, Jean Paul and Margot M. Ellis (2014) *Americans in Paris, Foundations of America’s Architectural Gilded Age, Architecture Students at the Ecole Des Beaux-Arts, 1846-1946*, 158-160. Bosworth and Rockefeller had a long collaboration history. For example, the two worked together on the failed Cairo Museum project. For more information on Bosworth’s involvement with that project, see Abt, Jeffrey “The Breasted-Rockefeller Egyptian Museum Project: Philanthropy, Cultural Imperialism and National Resistance,” 553. For an extended discussion of Bosworth’s involvement with the restoration of Versailles, see Perschler (1999), chapter two.
305 Perschler (1999), 102-103.
classical mode. By 1927, a second gift was given, this time totaling 40,000,000 francs. In addition, Franco-American political relations had soured and Rockefeller felt his second gift could help bridge the divide in politics. But there was also frustration on Rockefeller’s part, since the French government had been slow to give money to the restoration efforts and as a result, the entire project ultimately did hinge on Rockefeller’s continued personal donations. This became obvious to all involved, so much so that upon Rockefeller’s second visit to Versailles, it was clear that what the committee would select for restoration completely lay with what Rockefeller himself wished or what public opinion demanded. From the outset, French authorities wanted to simply preserve the current structures of Versailles. But Rockefeller did not like the aesthetic mish-mash that resulted from later changes made subsequent to Louis XIV’s reign, and previous restoration attempts. Rockefeller wanted to first ensure the buildings were structurally sound, and then move on to restoring the original details from Louis XIV’s reign.

Rockefeller’s personal preference for the Versailles of Louis XIV is important because it was Louis XIV who had a love of all things classical, especially classical art. In addition to amassing a very large collection of ancient sculptures, Louis XIV also commissioned original paintings for the interiors of the chateau and both replicas of famous ancient sculptures and new sculptures in the classical mode. The result was that nearly every room in the chateau had neoclassical art and sculpture in it, and the vast gardens were decorated with neoclassical sculptures. The majority of the art depicted the gods of

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306 Perschler (1999), 113. This was a typical example of Rockefeller’s interest in internationalism and peace through mutual understanding. International relations would be a significant theme associated with Rockefeller Center.
308 For images of the extensive collection of sculptures in the gardens, see Girard, Jacques. (1985), Versailles Gardens Sculpture and Mythology.
Greece and Rome. Thus, just as with Colonial Williamsburg, Rockefeller’s contributions to Versailles were for restoration of grand architecture, not preservation as is commonly thought.

The palace of Versailles is a monumental estate and UNESCO world heritage site. One approaches Versailles from a series of three roads that meet at the forward court (Figure 2.10). As the three roads radiate back out in the direction one comes, they form the shape of a crow’s foot. After entering through a series of open-air court spaces, one is surrounded by the outward wings of the main chateau. The chateau and its wings are situated along a northern and southern axis, so that the breadth of the chateau faces east and west. One approaches from the east. The vast acres of gardens lie on the other side of the chateau in a very elaborate series of spaces (Figure 2.11). The most central viewing spot of the gardens from inside the chateau is the Hall of Mirrors or the Large Gallery, which is centered along an east-west axis in line with the central road and approach from the east, through the various courtyards and then with the best views of the gardens and the Grand Canal stretching to the horizon line in the west. The Hall of Mirrors was both a viewing gallery and throne room (Figure 2.12). Its long rectangular orientation has the long side face west, with views of the gardens through large arched windows. Directly opposite each window on the back wall are large arched mirrors that reflect the daylight and rays of the setting sun, and direct the viewer’s gaze back out the windows to the vista of the Grand Canal in the distance.

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310 Montclos (1991), 414-418 has the best maps of the grounds, the buildings and the forecourts.
Part of what made and what still makes Versailles such a unique place is the
grandness and overt opulence of the architecture, the gardens, and the artwork. The
chateau is layered in marble and gold, both on the exterior and interior. The gardens are
acres upon acres as far as the eye can see. The sculptures were a mixture of masterpieces
from antiquity and equally impressive eighteenth century originals. Connecting these
three elements was an overarching theme laid out by Louis XIV. The ruler perhaps most
associated with absolute monarchy fancied himself the Sun King. As a result, the theme
of the sun and Apollo were woven throughout the entire plan of the palace and park of
Architecture of the Prince,” \textit{Yale French Studies}, no. 80, Baroque Topographies, 168.}
Architecturally and physically, the chateau itself and the entire orientation
of the complex are positioned to face the sun.\footnote{Marin and Lehman (1991), 171.}
The sun rises in the east, traverses along
an east to west axis, crosses the chateau and then sets along the same axis over the
The chateau being centrally located between the forecourts to the east and the
gardens to the west thus represents the sun at its zenith in the sky (Figure 2.11). Of
course, this is meant to symbolize the absolute power of Louis XIV. In addition to the
spatial connection between the chateau and the gardens, the choice of scenes depicted in
the interior paintings and the choice of gods for the sculptures in the gardens connect
with the Apollo and sun theme and elaborate upon it. On interior paintings, allegorical
personifications were used to represent abstract ideas.\footnote{Montclos (1991), 374-376.}
This was further enhanced by
classical architectural forms such as columns and arches. For example, on the second
floor of the chateau are a series of rooms, each one being associated with a planet, each
planet represented by the name of a Roman deity.\textsuperscript{315} Furthermore, in the gardens, a series of fountains were placed along the central east-west axis along the center out toward the Grand Canal. The Latona Fountain is the first fountain reached upon leaving the chateau and entering the gardens. The Latona Terrace is just after it due west. Further along the same axis is a second fountain, the Apollo Fountain (Figure 2.13). In addition, the placement of the Seasons tetralogy in the gardens and the Apollo Fountain show an awareness of the trajectory of the sun and zodiac across the sky.\textsuperscript{316} Thus, the central theme of Apollo and the sun is carried over into the gardens, made all the more impactful because of their position in line with the setting sun.\textsuperscript{317} Various sections in the gardens also related to other aspects of the sun, including the seasons\textsuperscript{318} and concepts of abundance, often represented with an image of Dionysus.\textsuperscript{319} Thus, the allegorical representation of mythological characters and deities from antiquity was evidence of the king’s love of “scholarly allegories.”\textsuperscript{320} Chateau, gardens, art, all three were connected by the various themes of Apollo, the sun, and mythological narratives. This will not be unlike the central theme running through the artistic program of Rockefeller Center. One can see in his love of the restoration of Versailles, Rockefeller’s inspiration for using art and architecture as symbols.

\textsuperscript{315} Montclos (1991), 377. There were clear analogies between the functions of the planetary rooms and the eponymous deity.
\textsuperscript{316} The garden design called for a series of themes. Each theme was to be illustrated by four statues, creating the tetralogy. For information on the various tetralogies at Versailles, see Girard (1985), 27. The Seasons tetralogy was closely linked with the Fountain of Apollo; for information on the layout see Girard (1985), 55.
\textsuperscript{317} On the supremacy of Apollo in the gardens see Girard (1985), 189-220.
\textsuperscript{318} For the sub theme of the seasons see Girard (1985), 55-136.
\textsuperscript{319} On the sub theme of abundance and Dionysian currents see Girard (1985), 173-188.
\textsuperscript{320} Girard (1985), 137.
Versailles and Rockefeller Center also share several other characteristics, including the use of gardens, the understanding of how to incorporate the natural surroundings, and lines of sight. Gardens are a large part of the experience and beauty of Versailles. Their natural beauty was enhanced by the sculptural artwork placed purposefully throughout the gardens. The gardens also utilized terraces, ramps, and steps to create a variety of perspectives.\textsuperscript{321} So as one left the chateau and entered the gardens one descended down to the garden. This gave the chateau commanding views of the entire garden. Once in the gardens, however, views became restricted and altered because of the changes in elevation. Another aspect of the gardens was the way natural scenery was used to enhance the mythological subjects of the sculpture. Hidden and unexpected grottoes were placed in the parterres, or tree groves.\textsuperscript{322} Even the cascading water of the grand canals created the illusion of a river running through the garden. As I discussed above, one of the most important aspects of Versailles was the use of lines of sight. Just as the chateau was on an axis, the various sections of the garden were also on parallel and perpendicular axes. The central axis down the Grand Canal remained the fixed point however. The lines of sight and axis created vistas that were themselves monumental.\textsuperscript{323} The most impressive view was from the chateau looking out down the Grand Canal toward the sunset. Once in the gardens, especially the water terraces, the chateau itself with its long, horizontal façade dominated the backdrop. Inside the various bosquets, or plantings of trees, and parterres, pathways laid out on various intersecting axis would

\textsuperscript{321} Lablaude (1995), 33-36.
\textsuperscript{322} Lablaude (1995,) 33-74.
\textsuperscript{323} This is best understood from the map of Montclos (1991), 415.
delight the visitor. These pathways often featured fountains at their intersections thus creating mini vistas throughout.

The restoration of Versailles is an important influence on Rockefeller in the decade prior to the start of construction on Rockefeller Center. In particular, the thematic incorporation of mythologically-inspired art at Rockefeller Center in the spaces most closely associated with the main buildings is reminiscent of the Apollo/sun theme along the Grand Canal in relation to the palace.

On a very basic level, Colonial Williamsburg, Versailles, and Rockefeller Center, Rockefeller’s three largest philanthropic projects, all share a history in the way they were (re-)constructed. Colonial Williamsburg was virtually bulldozed except for the most elaborate architectural buildings that had symbolic meaning. This allowed Williamsburg to be re-created according to the donor’s vision. Rockefeller got to put his stamp on Colonial Williamsburg. Likewise, the history of the construction of Versailles started with a main chateau and surrounding garden under Louis XIII, but was substantially altered into the Versailles we think of today by his successor Louis XIV. It was Louis XIV who added buildings to the main chateau and bought up substantial acres of land in the surrounding valley to construct his gardens. Thus, while working off the original plot of land and orientation of the building, Louis XIV was nonetheless able to create something new from a relatively clean slate.  

Rockefeller Center was perhaps a more ideal situation since, however controversial at the time, large sections of the city were bought and the brownstones and tenement housing occupying the site were destroyed to make way for the skyscrapers of Rockefeller Center. The clean slate in midtown gave

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Rockefeller full artistic and creative control over the final product in a way that was not possible for him in the restoration and reconstruction projects of Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles. There, established histories and buildings had to be accounted for and incorporated into a final product that was both refurbished and new. If Rockefeller could exert so much control through his philanthropy, it goes without saying that he would have complete control over Rockefeller Center, something conceived of, financed, and built entirely under his direction.

Conclusion

John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s philanthropy is an important bridge to understanding the effect of his classical education on his adult activities. His first position after graduating from Brown was working in his father’s office, and he quickly was given a prominent role along with Frederick Gates in handling Rockefeller Sr.’s philanthropy. Rockefeller Sr.’s philanthropy was undergoing a shift during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries away from direct personal giving and towards a more corporate-style philanthropy administered by large foundations. Rockefeller Jr. helped set up these foundations and was an active board member of them for decades. It is clear that from investigating the context of the foundations’ support of classical initiatives one sees a strong connection to the interests and direct philanthropy of Rockefeller Jr. The Rockefeller Foundation, the General Education Board, and the International Education Board all gave money to the American Academy in Rome and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. The Rockefeller connection to these institutions spans decades. Furthermore, the communication between Rockefeller’s assistants and
administrators of the foundations reveals each was aware of what the other was doing. At times, they worked in close concert, often with the foundations bureaucratically supporting the private classical philanthropy of Rockefeller. The best example of this is the Foundation’s support of fellowships to the American School, which helped provide additional classicists for the school’s Agora excavation, funded entirely by Rockefeller. Thus, in the tradition of his father, Rockefeller also engaged in private, direct philanthropy of initiatives of interest to himself. Many of those initiatives were classical in nature and supported scholarly work in archaeology and philology of the ancient world. Indeed, a common theme throughout his personal philanthropy was the support of prestigious and monumental projects, such as his restoration of Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles. His restoration of Versailles, in particular, showed an aesthetic preference for grand architecture with classical and mythological decorative elements. Rockefeller never ceased to be a student. He learned from his previous philanthropic efforts and applied that knowledge and his own personal aesthetic to his final and greatest accomplishment: Rockefeller Center. Rockefeller Jr.’s personal and corporate philanthropy demonstrate a continued interest in the classical world, its artifacts, and its beauty.
Chapter Three - Rockefeller Center and Its Mythologically-Inspired Art

John D. Rockefeller Jr. was engaged in a period of immense philanthropy during the 1920s and 1930s. Much of this philanthropy supported big, important archaeological digs and the most prestigious American institutions abroad, such as the American Academy in Rome and the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. His education in Classics continued to manifest as an adult interest in the art and beauty of the ancient world. Some of this interest was archaeological, but other parts of his interest in the ancient world included the ways it had influenced later eras. The two best examples of this are his restoration efforts in Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles. By the 1930s, Rockefeller was deeply involved with all of these projects. He had spent his entire adult life up to this point partaking in philanthropy. Rockefeller was drawn into the effort to build a new opera house in the Midtown neighborhood of New York City, an effort that later led Rockefeller to go it alone on a dramatic business venture at the dawn of the Great Depression. That business venture was Rockefeller Center. Rockefeller was its sole financier. Thus, while a clear departure from his philanthropy, nonetheless, Rockefeller Center was still connected to Rockefeller’s philanthropy in many ways. It was also a big, prominent project and it too reflected Rockefeller’s enduring interest and admiration for the ancient world. Furthermore, the Beaux-Arts school of architecture, the City Beautiful movement, and his philanthropic efforts in Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles all influenced the development of Rockefeller Center. Finally, the art program of Rockefeller Center featured several mythologically-inspired artworks, many of which became cultural icons and remain so to this day. In this chapter, I will place Rockefeller
Center in the context of New York City and explain the origin of the project. Next, I will conduct a sweeping overview of the entire art program, with special emphasis on the mythologically-inspired artworks such as Paul Manship’s *Prometheus* and Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan’s *Atlas*. Rockefeller’s role in the art program’s dramatic use of mythologically-inspired art will be explored in depth.

The History of Rockefeller Center

Rockefeller Center is a complex of sixteen buildings, which covers twenty-one acres, in the Midtown neighborhood of Manhattan (Figure 3.1). The original eleven buildings, constructed from 1931 to 1939, encompass Forty-Eighth Street to Fifty-First Street, between Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue (Figure 3.2 and Table 1.1). John D. Rockefeller Jr. built Rockefeller Center during the Great Depression. It was “the first real estate project in the world to encompass office, retail, entertainment, and restaurants in one integrated development.” It was heralded as a “city within a city” by developers

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325 The names given to what would eventually become Rockefeller Center are too numerous to list fully. The Clippings book at the Rockefeller Center Archive Center has news articles that attest to the full range of names. “Radio City,” “Rockefeller City,” “Midtown City,” are among the names attested. The project’s name officially became “Rockefeller Center” in February 1932.

326 Nearly every document about Rockefeller Center records a different number of buildings. The immense variety of numbers partly has to do with whether one tallies actual buildings, addresses, tenants, or buildings built as part of Rockefeller Center, but no longer owned or operated under that banner. Further complication is added by the convention of the public relations office in the 1930s, which counted addresses and thus inflated the number of buildings. In this section, I have chosen to tally the number of actual buildings and include all buildings originally part of Rockefeller Center. Where appropriate and needed for clarity, I will designate further the address, major tenant, and current ownership.

and press alike. Its extensive underground network of passageways and shops known as the Concourse was dubbed the “city beneath the city.” Rockefeller Center is also recognized for the many Art Deco commissioned artworks, making the Center “one of the world’s largest indoor/outdoor ‘museums’.”

Rockefeller Center is unique because of the parcel of land on which it was built. A developer would not be able to buy out an entire three block area in today’s modern urban cityscape. Such an endeavor would be too expensive. The plot of land was originally part of the “common lands” of Manhattan in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. In 1801, Dr. David Hosack bought twenty acres and turned them into a botanical garden. He called his garden the Elgin Botanical Gardens. By 1811, the garden was in disarray and was sold to Columbia College, now Columbia University in the City of New York. The parcel of land became known as Columbia’s “Upper Estate” and remained a garden into the 1850s, by which time the land had become rundown. By 1869, in an effort to raise funds, Columbia subdivided the land into lots, sold leases, and over two hundred seventy two homes were built. By the 1920s,

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328 The phrase “city within a city” has a cryptic origin. It is not possible to definitively say who coined the phrase, but it was used prior to Rockefeller Center to refer to Grand Central Terminal. Its use in reference to Rockefeller Center probably originates with John R. Todd.
331 The “common lands” of New York City refers to the strip of land north of Twenty-Third Street up to the present Central Park Reservoir. This land was routinely rented to farmers or charitable organizations. After the Revolutionary War, the lands were sold off.
334 Loth (1966), 14
335 Loth (1966), 19.
336 Loth (1966), 21.
Columbia College looked to the Upper Estate as a possible source of funds. The Midtown neighborhood had become a fashionable residential area for many elite individuals who built their homes along Fifth Avenue and on adjoining side streets. The Vanderbilts had a home on the northwest corner of Fifty-First Street and Fifth Avenue, and the Rockefellers owned large sections of Fifty-Forth and Fifty-Third Street just off of Fifth Avenue (Figure 3.3). The Upper Estate, however, had become a home to several dozen speakeasies and other establishments, which the elite thought of as undesirable for the neighborhood. Thus, many developers sought out the Upper Estate as a home for their own redevelopment plans because of its prime location. This would be the case with a plan led by Otto Kahn to build a new opera house on the Upper Estate. Rockefeller ultimately became involved in this effort.

The City Beautiful Movement and Beaux-Arts Training

*Origins*

The City Beautiful movement peaked in popularity and influence from 1900 to 1910. The origins of the City Beautiful movement lie in the nineteenth century. Many scholars of the City Beautiful movement have noted its beginnings in landscape architecture of the nineteenth century. In particular, the principles of design established by Frederick Law Olmstead, the famous landscape architect of Central Park in New York City, influenced the City Beautiful. Olmstead above all placed value in beauty and argued for a connection between beauty and utility. A key argument about parks and their utility was the economic gain realized in increased property values around the newly

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337 For example, see Wilson (1989), *The City Beautiful Movement*, 9.
established park. The movement also came out of the village improvement efforts of the nineteenth century, which promoted things like tree-lined streets, sanitation, promenades, open grounds, ornamented rail stations, and presentable shop fronts. Municipal art societies, many of which were formed in the 1890s, discussed projects such as public squares, buildings, color in architecture, bridges, artistic street signs, and art as an educator. Furthermore, art societies emphasized in their arguments to skeptics that public art “pays” by attracting tourists and a desirable class of residents, and they echoed the argument of Olmstead about increased property values. Art societies also lamented the artlessness of American cities, especially compared to European cities, which had small-scale adornment, sculptures, murals, stained glass, and decorative facades and interiors. The connection and comparison to European cities was also evident in the works of key architects such as Daniel Burnham, Stanford White, and Frederick Law Olmstead Jr. (Olmstead’s son). For example, all three went abroad in search of ideas for the Senate Park Commission for Washington, D.C., and were particularly influenced by Versailles and Fontainebleau, French palaces restored by Rockefeller decades later. In terms of fairs and expos, two stand out as influential on the City Beautiful movement: the 1893 Columbian Exposition (also known as the Chicago World’s Fair and the White

City)\textsuperscript{344} and the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society of London. The Columbian Exposition, in particular, has been noted by many scholars as influential on the movement and a big reason why it became popular when it did.\textsuperscript{345}

\textit{City Beautiful – Goals and Aesthetic}

The City Beautiful movement advanced a way of thinking about modern, industrializing cities. City Beautiful advocates did not dislike cities, but they did want to beautify them. They did not think growth and industrialization were bad, but they did want to control economic growth. Aesthetically, they blended various forms, but overall favored neoclassical architecture.\textsuperscript{346} By 1903, the movement had reached maturity, and its key principles focused on the beauty of the city for everyone, not just for parks and boulevards. An extension of this idea was that the entire city, its civic spaces and its residential and industrial aspects could be improved for all citizens. Lastly, many City Beautiful apologists argued for the inseparability of beauty and utility.\textsuperscript{347} This emphasis on beauty found concrete manifestation in things like flower gardens, landscaping, street furniture, and single or grouped monumental public buildings.\textsuperscript{348} Furthermore, it was argued that those buildings should be judiciously colored and adorned with murals and other art.\textsuperscript{349} Principles such as proportion, harmony, symmetry, and scale were all elements that contributed to the beauty of a city.\textsuperscript{350}

\textsuperscript{344} As I mentioned in Chapter One, Rockefeller attended the 1893 Columbian Exposition.
\textsuperscript{345} Wilson (1989), 57; Scott (1969), 44.
\textsuperscript{346} Wilson (1989), 4.
\textsuperscript{347} Wilson (1989), 50.
\textsuperscript{348} Wilson (1989), 79.
\textsuperscript{349} Peterson (1976), 420.
\textsuperscript{350} Wilson (1989), 79.
movement, clustered public buildings were not only beautiful, but even promoted the efficient conduct of city business, thus adding to their utility.\textsuperscript{351} Neoclassical architecture best epitomized the ideology and aesthetic of City Beautiful advocates because it so easily harmonized with their concepts of proportion and arrangement. Furthermore, neoclassical architecture symbolized the historical, European heritage of the United States in a way no other style could, and thus spoke to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century urban elite.\textsuperscript{352} Civic centers in City Beautiful blueprints were newly-realized Roman fora.\textsuperscript{353} The City Beautiful is best summed up by one of its biggest advocates, Charles Mulford Robinson, who wrote in \textit{Modern Civic Art} in 1909: “If the end be to clothe utility with beauty and in providing the beautiful to provide also that which will add to the convenience and comfort of the citizens, we shall best find its opportunities for usefulness by studying what has been happily called the anatomy of cities.”\textsuperscript{354}

The 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago was so influential on the development of the City Beautiful movement precisely because it was a grand manifestation of many of the aesthetic principles outlined by the movement. The connection between the fair and the subsequent City Beautiful movement is best seen in the fair’s court of honor (Figure 3.4). This rectangular space, its uniform cornice line, its neoclassical architecture, and grand open space for pedestrians, is a model for the way

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{351} Wilson (1989), 82-83.
\item \textsuperscript{352} In particular, Americans looked to imperial Rome for art, architecture, and culture. For studies of the reception of Roman grandeur in America see Dyson, Stephen L. (2000), “Rome in America,” and Malamud, Margaret (2009), \textit{Ancient Rome in Modern America}, especially chapter six.
\item \textsuperscript{353} Wilson (1989), 88-92.
\item \textsuperscript{354} Robinson, Charles Mulford (1970), \textit{Modern Civic Art or The City Made Beautiful}, 29. For a discussion of Robinson’s views, see Scott (1969), 68.
\end{itemize}
City Beautiful planners wanted to group civic buildings to enhance their beauty and functionality. The White City, as the fair was called, also developed a system whereby commercial deliveries were separated from pedestrian activities, thus giving the pedestrian an uninterrupted view and occupancy of the beautiful civic space. The fair also contributed to a resurgence in the popularity of neoclassical architecture. Not surprisingly, some of the architects involved in the White City were trained at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. The school did not emphasize any one particular style, rather it emphasized logic, vigor, fine arts, as well as principles of proportion, scale, and balanced arrangement. These principles, however, taken together did favor the neoclassical style. Thus, the beauty of the Chicago Exposition of 1893 was found in its uniformity and harmony between groupings of ornamented neoclassical buildings. This was further enhanced at nighttime, with an innovative idea to light the buildings. The 1893 Columbian Exposition did not found the City Beautiful movement, but it did hasten its further development.

City Beautiful – Grand Central Terminal

Kurt Schlichting argues that Grand Central Terminal is a forgotten legacy of the City Beautiful movement because it was a private enterprise. Much of the City

357 Drexler (1977), The Architecture of Ecole Des Beaux-Arts, 61-110 has an in-depth overview of the way students were taught at the school.
Beautiful movement focused on public, civic buildings. Architects of the early twentieth century were still influenced by the movement’s principles even if it had failed to achieve all of its goals. Schlichting reminds us that the City Beautiful also encompassed city planning for transportation and the improvement of other social conditions.\(^{362}\) This is seen in Grand Central Terminal, which was designed by the architectural firms Reed & Stem and Warren and Wetmore and opened in February 1913. Whitney Warren said in “The Terminal Supplement” of \textit{The Evening Post} on February 1, 1913:

\begin{quote}
Modern cities have no portals or arches of triumph. Their real gateways are the railroad stations and the motive of the facade of this terminal is an attempt to offer a tribute to commerce. The portals depict the glory of commerce, typified by Mercury, supported by moral and mental energy - Hercules and Minerva.\(^{363}\)
\end{quote}

Warren, whose firm is mostly responsible for the exterior design of the building, overtly makes reference to the grandeur of ancient Rome. The view of Grand Central Terminal from the south was likened to the triumphal gates of ancient cities (Figure 3.5).\(^{364}\)

Furthermore, Grand Central, located in the middle of Park Avenue, terminates the vista, a hallmark of City Beautiful aesthetics.\(^{365}\) The building’s neoclassical style and Beaux Arts design perfectly fit with the architectural principles of the City Beautiful movement. The use of mythological deities as ornamentation was also frequently found. As Warren points out, however, the specific deity chosen had allegorical and metaphorical ramifications and closely matched the purpose of the building. Mercury is synonymous

\(^{362}\) Schlichting (1996), 334.
\(^{364}\) Schlichting (1996), 343.
with transportation and matches the grandeur of such a new railway terminal building. Transportation is also associated with commerce, and a grand new station would certainly contribute economically to the city. Moving to the interior, the grand concourse is a magnificent space. But it is mainly a space to pass through. Finally, Grand Central also spurred building activity in its surrounding neighborhood and thus increased property values and increased residential esteem along Park Avenue. Economic utility was an argument of many City Beautiful proposals and Grand Central fulfilled that in a major way.

Scholars have penned comparisons between Grand Central Terminal and Rockefeller Center. The comparisons center around the City Beautiful movement. Both complexes engage fundamentally in reorganizing transportation for the betterment of pedestrian and commuter traffic. Scholars in particular have likened the plaza of Rockefeller Center to the Grand Concourse of Grand Central Terminal. Both projects spurred economic development in their neighborhoods; each was a “generator of urban energy.” Each project also utilized mythologically-inspired artwork for programmatic means as a way to communicate the purpose of the project to the public. In addition,

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367 Fitch and Waite (1974), 6-7. The Chrysler building, Tudor City, and the Daily News building were all built nearby Grand Central. The influence of Grand Central is also reflected in the mythologically-inspired art on the façade of the Helmsley Building, which is the sister building to Grand Central and whose façade can be seen when looking south from Park Avenue above Forty-Second Street.
368 Schlichting (1996), 346. Fitch and Waite (1974), 15-17. These sources are the only two that I have found that explicitly mention both complexes together.
370 Fitch and Waite (1974), 15. Fitch notes the success of Grand Central and Rockefeller Center are in stark contrast to failed impact of the Empire State Building and the former Penn Station on their immediate neighborhood. Rockefeller Center single-handedly transformed the property values and economic outlook of its surrounding area.
much of that art enhances the vista each one creates in the urban cityscape. The most glaring difference, of course, is the neoclassical style of Grand Central, which is in keeping with the aesthetics of the City Beautiful movement, in contrast with Rockefeller Center, which is nominally Art Deco and was built later. Another striking difference is the way each project, each “city within a city,” envisions foot traffic. Grand Central, as noted above, was a place to pass through. Rockefeller Center has an overall layout that exerts a centripetal force on the pedestrian, enticing and then keeping them \textit{in} the Center.\footnote{Fitch and Waite (1974), 13, notes the centripetal force of Rockefeller Center, but argues the magnet is the sunken plaza. I will argue against this later in the chapter, instead placing emphasis on the overall design and the central tower at 30 Rockefeller Plaza.} Thus, the comparison with Grand Central Terminal informs us about the many principles of the City Beautiful movement that were later utilized as part of Rockefeller Center.

\textit{City Beautiful – Rockefeller Center}

The comparison of Rockefeller Center to Grand Central Terminal is important for what it can tell us about Rockefeller Center and the City Beautiful movement. The few scholars who have noted such a comparison in a larger discussion of the City Beautiful, however, make mention only of the plaza and the Grand concourse,\footnote{Schlichting (1996), 346. Fitch and Waite (1974), 13.} or emphasize that each project was a node of energy and spurred urban expansion around them.\footnote{Fitch and Waite (1974), 17. Fitch and Waite also mention Penn Station in their discussion of nodes of urban development. Many discussions of GCT also mention Penn Station. For Fitch and Waite, Penn Station is an example of a failed node of development. For a brief discussion, see Fitch and Waite (1974), 16.} Urban
development sometimes leads to a call for preservation of these unique spaces.\textsuperscript{374} What has not been made is an explicit argument linking Rockefeller Center and the City Beautiful movement itself.\textsuperscript{375} The reason for this is the thirty years or more separating the movement and Rockefeller Center. The steep decline of neoclassical architecture by the 1930s and the rise of skyscrapers that forever changed New York City and so many other cities in the modern era also account for this lack of connection. Furthermore, the City Beautiful movement ultimately failed to accomplish its goals on the grand scale it so righteously believed was needed. Only in Washington, D.C. did the movement find its truest manifestation. Rockefeller Center is an unrecognized success of the City Beautiful movement. The very reason that Rockefeller Center is so admired and is such a resounding success economically and aesthetically is because it incorporated in its design the principles of the City Beautiful movement. This was never done explicitly in the name of the City Beautiful, which by the 1930s had long been forgotten by architects making a name for themselves on the next biggest and tallest skyscraper. Instead, the movement did succeed in engraining its principles within the architectural profession.

The original principles that City Beautiful advocates argued for all found a home in the design of Rockefeller Center. The central tenet of the City Beautiful was the inseparability of utility and beauty. As Robinson put it, “to clothe utility with beauty.” John R. Todd, Executive Manager of Rockefeller Center Inc., is often quoted in source material to have explained that Rockefeller Center was to be as economically viable as

\textsuperscript{374} On the preservation of Rockefeller Center see Glancy (1992), “Preserving Rockefeller Center,” for an extended discussion.

\textsuperscript{375} Bogart, Michele H. (1989). \textit{Public Sculpture and the Civic Ideal in New York City, 1890-1930}, 309-319, makes passing mention of Rockefeller Center and the City Beautiful movement.
possible while still aesthetically pleasing. The Center also economically stimulated the surrounding neighborhood. It especially had a positive influence on the Sixth Avenue corridor, which at the time of its construction was a dark, sordid, and downtrodden central artery in midtown, mostly due to the elevated subway line. But it also dramatically changed the neighborhood single-handedly, by replacing hundreds of brownstones with a property-value-increasing development. Furthermore, thanks to the massive art program, it became a tourist destination, and tourists spend money, which spurs the local economy. Part of the magic of Rockefeller Center is its underlying symmetry, scale, and harmony among the grouped buildings. The programmatic art enhanced these City Beautiful principles even further. While there is no overt public square, a key design element of the City Beautiful, the sunken plaza at the center of Rockefeller Center, clearly harkens back to this idea and has become a gathering place for all sorts of activities. Furthermore, in traveling to that central, sunken plaza, pedestrians walk down the promenade decorated with fountains and shrubbery. Pedestrians can also visit the numerous rooftop gardens of the Center. Thus, Rockefeller Center also incorporated nature in a way that was reminiscent of the tree-lined boulevards so common in City Beautiful designs. The use of nighttime lighting dramatically heightens the powerful aesthetic of the Center, and reminds one of the innovative use of lighting first seen at the Columbian Exposition. Rockefeller Center contained one of the first skyscrapers to be lit up during nighttime. Finally, and most importantly,

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376 This injunction came from Rockefeller himself. See Balfour (1978), 13.
377 Rockefeller Center was lit up at nighttime as early as 1934. It is known from the first publication of Rockefeller Center Weekly, a weekly magazine published in-house by Rockefeller Center Inc., that 30 Rockefeller Plaza was lit up at night. By comparison, the Empire State Building did not start to light its upper floors until 1964.
Rockefeller Center is clearly designed with the pedestrian in mind and fulfills the City Beautiful principle that city spaces should be designed for its inhabitants’ enjoyment. This focus on the pedestrian, on the city dweller, goes all the way back to the roots of the City Beautiful movement and is one of the most successful features of Rockefeller Center. For example, in an echo of the 1893 Chicago fair, Rockefeller Center built underground parking and trucking delivery stations in order to keep the streets running through the complex free of loud vehicular traffic. Rockefeller Center is a magnificent and comprehensive design plan of a grouping of buildings united by the principles of the City Beautiful movement cleverly transformed into the skyscraper idiom.

Rockefeller Center – Origins

*The Metropolitan Square Company and The Opera House*

In 1928, Otto Khan, a well-known banker, was President of the Metropolitan Opera Company. He was looking for a location for a new opera house.³⁷⁸ He also needed wealthy donors to help finance the project. Columbia’s Upper Estate was occupied by over 228 brownstones at the time, but the university was eager to make a deal for the property. The Metropolitan Opera Company hired architect Benjamin W. Morris to draw up a plan for a commercial complex on the Upper Estate centered around a new opera house (Figure 3.6).³⁷⁹ With plans in hand, Khan held nighttime gatherings of New York’s wealthiest individuals, showcasing Morris’s plan. At one such gathering was Ivy Lee, a

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³⁷⁸ At the time, the opera house, later known as “the old Met,” was located at 1411 Broadway, between West Thirty-Ninth Street and West Fortieth Street.
close confidant of John D. Rockefeller.\textsuperscript{380} He conveyed the idea to Rockefeller and various meetings ensued between Rockefeller’s associates and Khan about joining with Metropolitan Opera Company to finance part of the project. How well informed Rockefeller was at this point is debatable. Rockefeller’s real estate associate, Charles Heydt, took control of the negotiations with the Metropolitan Opera Company and with Columbia. Whether Heydt believed in the financial prospects of the opera house is also unclear, but he understood that the property was valuable if the whole property could be acquired. Furthermore, the Upper Estate was just two blocks south of Fifty-Forth Street, on which was located the original Rockefeller mansion. Subsequent purchases left the Rockefellers owning much of Fifty-Forth and Fifty-Third Street in the half block that adjoined Fifth Avenue. The Upper Estate was full of speakeasies, which no doubt Rockefeller must have disliked. Heydt must have used the proximity of Rockefeller property and the shady establishments two blocks south to convince Rockefeller to sign a 99-year lease with Columbia for the Upper Estate, with favorable options to renew. The lease was signed September 6, 1928.\textsuperscript{381} The rent was to be $3,000,000 per year.\textsuperscript{382} The Metropolitan Square Company was created to manage the property’s development. Rockefeller had done his part, the land was secured for the opera house, but he was adamant about not financing the development as well. Nor did he want to acquire all the rent leases that existed on the property. Negotiations with the Metropolitan Opera Company continued into 1929, but never to either party’s satisfaction. On October 24-29,\textsuperscript{380} Balfour (1978), Rockefeller Center Architecture as Theatre, 3-8 has the most concise retelling of the early history with the opera house.\textsuperscript{381} Balfour (1978), 9.\textsuperscript{382} This was a very large rent payment for the time. The Rockefeller rent payment essentially subsidized Columbia College and constituted a major infusion of financial support to Columbia.
1929, a stock market crash occurred that marked the start of the Great Depression. By December 1929, the Metropolitan Square Company announced that the Metropolitan Opera Company was withdrawing from their partnership for the development.\footnote{Balfour (1978), 11. The Opera house remained in its location at 1411 Broadway until April 1966. That building was razed the following year. In September 1966, the Metropolitan Opera House reopened at Lincoln Center. While negotiations with Rockefeller Center did not work out, John D. Rockefeller III led the development of Lincoln Center.} At this point, Rockefeller was now left with a huge financial burden. He owed Columbia $3,000,000 per year for the Upper Estate lease, but that made Rockefeller landlord to over 228 individual townhouses located on the property, each with their own sub-leases, some of which did not expire until 1931. With the Opera company no longer part of the development, there was no idea what was to be developed in its place, a move that would require additional financial outlay to buy up all the individual leases so the land could be cleared for new construction. The cost of such an effort would be equally as high as the rent payment due to Columbia, and furthermore, Rockefeller’s economic portfolio suffered losses in the stock market crash. It was unclear if he could even pay the rent to Columbia. The alternative, equally as dire, was to collect $300,000 from the tenants and eat the loss in revenue.\footnote{Okrent (2003), \textit{Great Fortune, The Epic of Rockefeller Center}, 63.} It is out of this predicament that Rockefeller Center emerged.

\textit{The Associated Architects – Early Plans}

Charles Heydt believed in the value of the Upper Estate. He had successfully convinced Rockefeller of the same. But he was not up for the task of managing the property’s development. Instead, he brokered a meeting between Rockefeller and John R. Todd, a friend, associate, and successful manager of large construction projects. Todd
was a strong personality and had a reputation for managing projects with an iron fist. In many ways, he was perfect for managing the large-scale project Rockefeller was about to undertake, and especially so considering the context. Rockefeller would need a manager who could ensure costs would not soar out of control in the midst of the nation’s greatest economic depression in its history. The two men met at Rockefeller’s estate in Maine and after negotiations Todd signed on as the general manager and executive director of the Metropolitan Square Company. Rockefeller said to Todd that “while the prime consideration in this enterprise must be its financial success, the importance of a unified and beautiful architectural whole must constantly be kept in mind and attained, to the fullest extent possible compatible with an adequate return on investment.” After the stock market crash, however, Todd rather blatantly ignored the part about beauty, and pushed for a more financially solvent development. The first casualty of this push was that Morris, who had drafted the original design plans for the Metropolitan Opera Company, resigned after the Metropolitan Opera Company withdrew and Todd scrapped plans for a new opera house. The organizational structure of the enterprise never shifted much from the time Todd took over and all iterations of it in the archives or secondary sources demonstrate that ultimately Rockefeller himself was in charge (Figure 3.7). Below Todd, the architects had great authority on the ground. Metropolitan Square hired three architectural firms to develop the Upper Estate. These three firms,

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387 Balfour (1978), 17. Okrent (2003), 105, identifies the cause of the withdrawal of Morris as bad will between Todd and the architect. Despite deciding to not build an opera house, several early designs still feature one labeled.
388 Balfour (1978), 34. Located on Page 34, Figure 34 shows an earlier management chart with Rockefeller clearly marked at the top.
Reinhard & Hofmeister, Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray, and Hood & Fouilhoux, became known as the Associated Architects.\textsuperscript{389} From these firms, two architects stand out as important for the development of Rockefeller Center: Andrew Reinhard and Raymond Hood. Reinhard was responsible for adapting the Morris plan to something new, but nearly all the aesthetic choices were the result of Hood’s involvement.\textsuperscript{390} It is also significant to note that five of the leading architects had Beaux-Arts training, Hood among them.\textsuperscript{391}

The design plan for Rockefeller Center began with the plan Morris drafted for the Metropolitan Opera Company in May 1928 (Figure 3.6). This featured a low-profile opera theater located along Sixth Avenue and a central square of open space in front of the opera house, but was surrounded on its other three sides by large towers. Morris also drew up an alternate plan a year later with four towers instead of three (Figure 3.8). The most striking difference from his previous drawing is the addition of a road or walkway passage between the front two towers in direct view of the opera house frontage. That same year, most likely after Morris had left the project, but certainly after Todd and the Associated Architects were in place, Reinhard & Hoffmeister drew a plot plan that kept the opera house and promenade in front of it, but added a sister promenade on the plot between Fiftieth and Fifty-First Street bordering Fifth Avenue (Figure 3.9). This was

\textsuperscript{389} Rousell (2006), \textit{The Art of Rockefeller Center}, 12.
\textsuperscript{390} Balfour (1978), 30.
\textsuperscript{391} Okrent (2003), 145-146. Raymond Hood, Harvey Corbett, and Wallace Harrison were all graduates of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Andrew Reinhard had studied at the Ecole’s NY equivalent, the Beaux-Arts Society of Design, and Henry Hofmeister spent his early career at Warren & Wetmore’s architectural firm. For additional information on Hood’s time at the Ecole Des Beaux Arts, see Carlhian and Ellis (2014), \textit{Americans in Paris, Foundations of America’s Architectural Gilded Age, Architecture Students at the Ecole Des Beaux-Arts, 1846-1946}, 146-153.
modified a year later in 1930 in what became known as the G-3 plan (Figures 3.10 and 3.11). The most significant change is the replacement of the opera building in the central position of the plan with an office tower. In addition, the sister promenade was eliminated. The rendering in Figure 3.11 also provided elevation. The central tower was now going to be significantly taller than all of the other towers. Upon viewing the new G-3 plan, Rockefeller remarked that the new scheme put the high building at the center and lower buildings at the periphery, whereas Morris’s plan had the reverse. Another important feature of these plans is their lack of aesthetic detail compared to what was actually built. It is unclear if the slab designs in G-3 were what was intended or if Hood, who was responsible for the architecture of the early buildings, simply had not won his argument in favor of setbacks yet. Todd and the management also wanted G-3 improved upon, and what the architects came up with was a departure from G-3 (Figures 3.12 and 3.13). The most dramatic change was the fact that the promenade in front of the central tower was replaced with an oval building. Figure 3.12 shows the management staff, the Todds and Hugh Robertson as well as the presidents of NBC and RKO with a scale model. This model was shown to the public in March 1931. It is important to note that the central building does have some setbacks in the model. This design can only be the influence of Hood, because he was an advocate of this more aesthetic design.

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392 It is important to keep in mind that at this point in time the majority of property along Sixth Avenue was not yet under Metropolitan Square ownership. The lack of ownership is reflected in these early design plans.
393 Balfour (1978), 18.
394 Setbacks or step-backs are step-like recessions in a wall. They were used for structural reasons until the introduction of the steel frame. In dense cities, setbacks were sometimes mandated by law for better light and air circulation.
395 Okrent (2003), 178-180. Furthermore, we know that Rene Chambellan did the model, as he did for nearly all the models and drawings of just about everything to do with
The display with the model in March 1931 was the first time the public had seen such detailed plans for what the space was going to look like. Newspapers had published stories about the very large lease Rockefeller had signed with Columbia for the Upper Estate. They published about the withdrawal of the Metropolitan Opera Company, and the buying up of leases at great additional cost. Exact plans, however, were not revealed until this exhibition. The response was nearly unanimously negative, and forcefully so.

Up until the March 1931 exhibition by Todd, Robertson and Todd, John R. Todd’s firm hired by Rockefeller to manage this project, the public had very little knowledge of the design of Rockefeller Center. John Wenrich had done a few early drawings and renderings of Rockefeller Center in the early 1930s, but plans were not finalized in these drawings and they were most likely executed after the March 1931 exhibition. Visiting an exhibit with a scale model hosted by the management firm and two of its big tenants, the Presidents of NBC and RKO, was quite a spectacle. Thus, the exhibition had the air of something official, something definite, something going to happen. It was the belief in the model’s definitiveness (which it was at the time) that led to newspapers and critics alike severely criticizing the plan. The model shown was a departure from the G-3 plan. Most notably, the central promenade was replaced with an oval building (Figure 3.12). The earliest reports read like pieces written with talking points handed out by Todd. The coverage was national. For example, The Gazette & Rockefeller Center, in addition to contributing his own artwork. Chambellan and Hood had a very close relationship on the project. On the 1916 zoning laws and their influence on Rockefeller Center, see Karp (1982), 55-57.

Karp (1982), The Center: A History and Guide to Rockefeller Center, 36-40. These pages contain a series of early renderings of Rockefeller Center completed by John Wenrich. Karp also notes on page 41 that Hugh Ferriss, a prominent architect, also participated on the renderings, but left the project very early on.
Journal Herald from Delaware, Ohio ran the headline, “John D. Reveals Dreams for ‘Radio City’ to Associates.” In it, the paper wrote, “it will represent a new type of architecture – a blend of recent American skyscraper setback system, the Egyptian and the Grecian.” The New York Herald Tribune the same day ran the headline “The Dilemma of Daylight,” which discusses the concern for light as Manhattan’s skyline was changed by skyscrapers. The concern for light had been on the public’s mind since the development of skyscrapers and would be a pressing concern for the architects of Rockefeller Center, especially Raymond Hood. But soon, blistering critiques of the plan came pouring in. On March 18, 1931, in the New Republic, for example, an article begins, “The buildings of Radio City, which narrowly escaped being ‘Egyptian’ as a result of Mr. John D. Rockefeller’s trip to Egypt, are now, according to newspapers, to be in the ‘New York style.’” The article goes on, “This is the proper name to apply to the weakly conceived, reckless, romantic chaos that has been projected for this development; but it is hardly a recommendation.” It continues, “This is the New York style with a vengeance: absence of scale, super-congestion, failure to recognize civic obligations and utter inability to consider a new problem in any form except the skyscraper-stereotype.” The article’s final sentence reads, “If Radio City is the best our architects can do with

397 Rockefeller Center Archive Center (RCAC), The Gazette & Journal Herald, March 7, 1931, Clippings Book, 18. On setbacks and ziggurats in the cultural imagination, see Ferriss, Hugh (1929), The Metropolis of Tomorrow, 95-99. 398 RCAC, New York Herald Tribune, March 7, 1931, Clippings Book, 19. 399 Light reaching the ground is still a concern in contemporary New York City. For example, recent discussion about the slate of skyscraper luxury condos rising close to Central Park South has criticized the tall buildings for eventually blocking out the sun from Central Park. This is reminiscent of complaining about the very large shadow cast by 30 Rockefeller Plaza, what became known as “Rockefeller’s Shadow.”
freedom, they deserve to remain in chains.”

A reader of the *New York Evening Post* was not any kinder in a letter to the editor on March 23, 1931. Building on the growing chorus against the slab design exhibited in the model, the “New Yorker” wrote, “Naturally there is no need today for the architecture of 1880, with its overornamentation and cornices, but is it really necessary for the builders to contribute so whole-heartedly to the already rapid ‘uglification’ of the city by piling up more sixty-story packing boxes?...It seems incredible that Mr. Rockefeller who has shown such intelligent interest and given such super support to architectural beauty both in France and this county will permit the group to be built as shown in the model.”

Two trends emerge from this early sampling of newspaper articles. First, many critics directly named Rockefeller in the hopes he would do something to correct the problem. Second, there seemed to be skyscraper fatigue by 1931. The slab design of the accompanying buildings was seen as just plain ugly.

Some, however, did defend the plan. Harry Allan Jacobs wrote in the *New York Herald Tribune* on March 29, 1931, that the plan was designed to produce income for the opera house originally. He also remarked that the plan afforded good natural lighting. But even Jacobs, one of the few to defend the plan, expressed criticism when he said that the oval box should be lowered to create a better vista for the main building and plaza.

Jacobs picked up on a key component of the overall plan, the central tower and the

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402 The skyscraper trend really began to take off in the late 1920s, although there are earlier examples such as the Woolworth Building (1913). The Chrysler Building (1930) and the Empire State Building (1931) are the most important iterations of this trend prior to Rockefeller Center.
accompanying plaza. He understood this was going to be where the overall plan succeeded or failed ultimately.

The critics had not yet spilled all of their ink. The *New York Herald Tribune* published two days later one of the most scathing critiques of Rockefeller Center in their editorial section.\(^{404}\) It begins with an appeal to Rockefeller to intervene and take the criticism seriously. Its next paragraph focuses criticism on the overall design, “Of design, indeed, in the full sense of the term, Radio City reveals next to no suggestion. Something more than a coherent plan is required. To the observer with any civic instinct whatever the necessities of the case would seem irresistibly to call for an aggregation of buildings possessing unity, majesty, and a rich architectural interest. Instead, we are offered an affair of bald cubes assembled in expressionless order…we frankly protest against a set of buildings typifying the veriest negation of style.” It singles out the “elliptical edifice” of the central building facing Fifth Avenue as “conventional gashouse,” and says boldly that “Radio City is ugly.” The article continues its critique this time against the architects who must clearly be of the new style type, “But the new school is under the quaint impression that any building tinctured by the tradition *ipso facto* sacrifices function to decoration. In terror of the classical orders and of such a thing as a cornice, our latter-day ‘pioneers’ lose not only all decorative sense but all grasp upon the large elements of design…. ” The editorial goes on to singly target Raymond Hood whom he quotes as saying the single most important thing was “utility.” The article asks, “But what if the exterior is *not* good looking?” It ends this section by stating that Hood and his associates have left the exterior “revoltingly dull and dreary.” This editorial gives voice quite nicely

to all of the various criticisms that were hurled at the design plan. It appealed to Rockefeller himself to step in, it acknowledged utility and function, but questioned the lack of all aesthetic elements, a flaw which it placed squarely on the architects. Like all other criticisms, it concludes that “Radio City” was just plain ugly.

By this time, nearly one month after the doors to the model showroom had opened, the architects had to respond. This shows both the seriousness with which they took the overwhelming criticism and the fact that their future sophisticated public relations machine was not yet operating. Raymond Hood wrote an editorial in the New York Sun on April 1, 1931 saying that the plans will “blossom into enchanting beauty.” Hood’s weak defense did not stem the tide of criticism. That same day, the New York Herald Tribune, ran a piece quoting notable critics of the plan. The article quoted Herbert Adams of the National Sculpture Society, who said the buildings were “ugly and a disgraceful symbol,” and that “they are absolutely lacking in beauty.” The article also quoted William Harmon Beers, of the American Institute of Architecture, who said, “The mass is not pleasing and the various buildings do not seem to bear relation to one another.” Beers went on to say, “…the baldness of the drawings which I have seen does offend me from the point of view of taste.” Again and again, critics disliked the new style, sometimes referred to as the International style or the New York style. But the

405 RCAC, New York Sun, April 1, 1931, Clippings Book 56.
407 The style of Rockefeller Center at times defies definition. For example, Reynolds (1984), The Architecture of New York City, Histories and Views of Important Structures, Sites and Symbols, 256-257 declines to give a name to the style of Rockefeller Center. I think a distinction between the clearly Art Deco artwork of the Center and its clearly more modern and International style architecture is important. The differences in artwork and architecture style is indicative of the various people involved in the process of its
public disliked it too, judging from the reader responses published by the *New York Herald Tribune* on April 2, 1931.408

Just about everyone had an opinion about the plans being exhibited. Critical responses continued to be published by established architects and architectural critics. The noted Gothic practitioner, Ralph Adams Cram said of the plans in a July 1931 article in *The American Mercury*: “Quadrangle prisms, casually disposed, towering incontinently and sliced off at a certain height not for any considerations of design or proportion, but perhaps—there is no other obvious reason—because the stock of modeling clay gave out. Some of them are tall, some short, some ziggurats out of Babylon, some aggregations of cubes out of a child’s box of building blocks….”409 Like Cram, noted critic Lewis Mumford skewered the plans in a 1931 article published in *The Nation* expressing concern for the future of the city that its “utter inability to consider a new type of problem in any form except the skyscraper stereotype.”410 In another column in December 1933 this time published with *The New Yorker*, Mumford wrote, “Architecturally, in short, Rockefeller Center is much ado about nothing…And the whole effect of the Center is mediocrity—seen through a magnifying glass.”411 Cram and Mumford were the most vocal critics of the project early on.

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410 Quoted in Balfour (1978), 215.
411 Quoted in Balfour (1978), 215.
Rockefeller Center – Reborn

The published criticisms forced a reaction from the Associated Architects. A battle had been brewing internally between Todd and his management staff, obsessed with ensuring the development was a financial success, and Hood, who primarily among the architects, desired for the buildings to be aesthetically pleasing. In the initial round, Hood had clearly lost that battle with Todd, judging from the model displayed to the public in March 1931. But, the ensuing criticism emboldened and empowered Hood with a potent weapon against Todd’s unwavering management style. How could the complex be a financial success and draw in big name tenants if it was so constantly criticized in the press? Hood used the controversy over the initial design exhibition to radically alter the plans for Rockefeller Center into what we know of it today. In short, he turned Rockefeller Center into a triumph of architectural design and urban planning.

By the summer of 1931, one of the most important changes to come about from the public criticism was the elimination of the oval building directly in front of the central tower. In its place, two low-rise buildings similar to the what was in the G-3 plan were redesigned.412 This change is significant because it reinstated the axial symmetry of the G-3 plan and set in motion some of the best design work of the architects. The symmetrical low-rise buildings with a central promenade connecting Fifth Avenue to the central plaza was in keeping with the Beaux-Arts training of many of the architects. The symmetry was further enhanced by the identical pair of buildings one block north to this

412 Okrent (2003), 183.
central grouping, which together then created a unified front of four building facades (Figure 3.14).

The second big change was the addition of the art program. Up to the time of the public exhibition in March 1931, Rockefeller seems to have played a relatively minor role in the planning. There are no intense discussion or records in any of the archives from this time period. It is known that he visited the Associated Architects offices, but not much more. After the public criticism, however, something which Rockefeller was very sensitive to having fought for years to redeem his family’s name in the public’s eye, Rockefeller took a much more active role in the planning of the grouping of buildings which would bear his name.413 One of the key elements he added was a budget line of $150,000 for original sculptures and paintings, which would add visual appeal to the buildings. In the midst of the Great Depression, this was a huge sum of money for art. He also sought to bring in an expert to draft a thematic synopsis for the art program.414 Daniel Okrent prefaces his argument that Hood signed on Hartley Burr Alexander to write the art synopsis, by stating that there is little evidence to link the two in regards to Rockefeller Center.415 Instead, at first, Okrent tries to connect the two through an intermediary; Alexander did the thematic synopsis for the Nebraska State Capitol, the architect for which was Bertram Goodhue, who was Hood’s first employer. Okrent then directly links Alexander and Hood as part of a committee in 1930 planning the 1933 Century of Progress fair in Chicago, which Hood was organizing. Lastly, Okrent admits

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413 The name for the development was in flux for quite a few years. The press often used “Radio City” or “Rockefeller City.” “Rockefeller Center” as an official name occurs around February 1932. The RCAC Clippings Books are a great resource on the variability of the name associated with the development.
414 Okrent (2003), 183.
415 Okrent (2003), 183-184 argues it was Hood who signed on the thematic expert.
that Hood did not have an interest in art \emph{per se}, but nonetheless understood that
Alexander had the panache to pitch the idea to Rockefeller better than anyone else.
Okrent’s strongest evidence is that the two worked together on a committee, he cites no
evidence that Hood hired Alexander, which he was certainly in a position to do. I think it
is more likely that it was Rockefeller who led the effort to include art as part of
Rockefeller Center. Rockefeller had a history from his philanthropy of bringing in and
relying on experts to do a specific task. Furthermore, the money came from him, and he
did have a passion for art and was deeply engaged with the restoration of Versailles at the
time, so it makes the most sense that he would have enthusiastically sought the addition
of art to the buildings. Furthermore, Hood was quoted in newspaper coverage saying that
he felt a well-designed building was beauty enough, with no need for additional
decoration.\textsuperscript{416} And it should not be forgotten that Rockefeller, from the beginning, had
the beauty of the complex in mind when he told Todd upon hiring him to make it as
beautiful as possible while still financially solvent.

In addition to the changes made in the plan to the buildings facing Fifth Avenue,
Hood also fought for a series of aesthetic changes focusing around the central tower.
First, he wanted an enlarged, sunken plaza in the middle of the complex of buildings. He
also wanted rooftop gardens on all of the buildings. His most expensive changes were for
increased setbacks on the central tower and the use of limestone facing on all of the
buildings.\textsuperscript{417} Despite public criticism, Todd had to be convinced such changes were worth

\textsuperscript{416} RCAC Clippings Book 59.
\textsuperscript{417} Karp (1982), 29. See also Roussel, Christine (2006), \textit{The Art of Rockefeller Center},
13.
On the issue of rooftop gardens, Hood argued “to landscape those roofs like the hanging gardens of Babylon” would bring in more rental revenue per square foot from tenants. The increase in rent pricing, perhaps a precursor to modern day premium pricing for Central Park views, for example, was justified because the view was enhanced for tenants whose windows overlooked the rooftops of neighboring building’s and the setbacks along the central tower. Those tenants would be able to gaze upon the beautiful garden in the city. Hood’s argument for setbacks added to the central tower also hinged on rental income. Hood understood that to get Todd to agree to any changes he would have to appeal on the basis of an economic argument. Hood had pushed for the so-called twenty-seven foot rule. The twenty-seven foot rule was a design principle whereby office space could be located no more than twenty-seven feet from a window, in order to allow for natural lighting of the space. This principle also led to other design innovations, such as placing the elevator banks in the middle of the building. As each setback occurred, the architects could cap off the elevator bank, thereby gaining usable office space above each section of setbacks. But nearly all of the other architects argued the central elevator banks meant they could build a slab structure with the building going straight up with no setbacks. Among the architects, Wallace

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418 The setbacks in particular are more complex to build and slow the construction timeline thus costing more money.
419 Okrent (2003), 157. See also Reinhard & Hofmeister to Todd & Brown Inc., Memo, July 11, 1932, “Re: Building #1 and 9,” which refers Todd & Brown to speak with Hood about the gardens since he was involved with the layout of them more than any other architect.
420 Rockefeller Center was far ahead of its time in the idea of putting gardens on rooftops. This idea has gained wider acceptance as a way cities can help head off climate change. A “Guide to Green Roofs” on The Cooper Union website lists “increased property value” and “tenant amenity” as two reasons for greening roofs. http://www.cooper.edu/isd/projects/green-nyc/green-roofs. Accessed January 22, 2016.
421 Karp (1982), 57.
Harrison championed this slab design. But Hood argued that the setbacks would give the façade a dramatic view from Fifth Avenue, and would afford more usable office space at every level of the tower, preserving the twenty-seven foot rule throughout, a major selling feature to future tenants. Hood cleverly got around Todd’s emphasis on financial reasoning for the building design by proposing purely aesthetic projects as something commercial necessary. In the end, Hood won on every proposal and was clearly the most successful of the Associated Architects in implementing his design goals.

Rockefeller Center – Key Features

Two key features already mentioned, the rooftop gardens and the influence of Beaux-Arts principles on the design plan, also illustrate an important development, perhaps the most important development, in the history of Rockefeller Center. That is the passing of Raymond Hood in August 1934. Without Hood, many of Rockefeller Center’s most iconic features would not have been developed. In his absence, much changed.

An example of the presence and absence of Raymond Hood is felt in the design of the rooftop gardens. The idea for the gardens originated with Hood and under his leadership the proposed design for the gardens became more and more complex (Figure 3.15). As shown in Figure 3.15, the gardens were to interconnect via sky bridges. The gardens atop the International buildings continued the symmetry of their ensemble with similarly looking garden designs. These gardens were to be relatively simple and did not deviate from the axial symmetry they and their buildings had with the central tower.

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422 Karp (1982), 58.
423 Karp (1982), 45.
visitor in those gardens would feel situated in line with the main building, which would terminate the vista. The gardens planned for the buildings of the northern and southern blocks of the project had more roofing space to develop and coordinately the gardens were more complex. This complexity is evident in the geometric designs and long pathways so reminiscent of the gardens of Versailles. Hood had wanted them to be a new Hanging Gardens of Babylon, and the plans look sumptuous enough to be considered so.

After Hood’s death, however, Rockefeller’s hand is more clearly seen regarding the gardens. The Hanging Gardens were replaced with a “Gardens of the Nations,” a series of gardens inspired by those found in the gardens of a selection of world powers, England, Holland, France, Italy, Spain, and Japan (Figure 3.16). A “Garden of Nations” is completely in line with Rockefeller’s views of internationalism, which would also find a home in the buildings along Fifth Avenue, which will be discussed later. Furthermore, no doubt from Todd’s perspective, the gardens were a way to lure tenants with views of attractive rooftops below their office windows. Once realized, they became yet another opportunity to monetize the Upper Estate via tourist income. Because the gardens never succeeded financially, they were never as filled with greenery and such variety of flowers as when they first opened to the public. What was actually built was significantly toned down in complexity from what Hood had envisioned for the space. It is likely, as with the case of the art program, that the Gardens were implemented because Rockefeller was pleased with the idea. Shown a plan of the gardens in January 1934, Rockefeller said that he thought the plan was “extremely interesting” and liked the idea of having several kinds

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424 Balfour (1978), 51.
of exhibitions for statuary and glass hosted in the gardens.\textsuperscript{425} The idea of using the gardens to host art was fulfilled as early as 1935 for example and then again in 1937. Memos from these years attest to sculptures being exhibited in the gardens, some seemingly permanent and under the maintenance of the Center Corporation because the memo asks the Center’s colorist, Leon V. Solon, to attend to them.\textsuperscript{426} In 1937, the Center contracted with the National Sculpture Society for an exhibition of their sculpture in the gardens.\textsuperscript{427} For Rockefeller, who was restoring Versailles at this time, the idea of having a garden space to showcase sculpture is likely another example of his work on Versailles influencing the development of Rockefeller Center.

The idea of gardens being part of the urban landscape goes back to the long tradition in the United States of city improvement plans, and particularly to the work of Frederick Law Olmstead. His work in the nineteenth century arguing for the creation of parks and boulevards influenced the Worlds Fair Exposition in 1983 and the City Beautiful movement. It is easy to see how Hood was also influenced by Olmstead’s legacy,\textsuperscript{428} and that of the City Beautiful movement. Both argued that public parks enriched the neighborhood metaphorically and literally. Rockefeller himself remarked in a letter to Todd sent April 10, 1933 that the gardens would be good for tenants,

\textsuperscript{425} RCAC, Architects Meetings/Notes 1934, Architects’ Office, January 25, 1934, “Gardens Roof #9 Building.”
\textsuperscript{426} RCAC, Meetings-Architects 1935, Planning Committee, November 22, 1935, Sculpture on rooftops of International buildings. As a colorist, Solon’s role primarily dealt with working out color schemes for important spaces in Rockefeller Center. He especially took a lead role in determining the color for the architectural sculpture.
\textsuperscript{427} RCAC, Untitled Memos 1933-1937, Schley to W.B. Todd, April 30, 1937, “Re: Sculpture Exhibit.”
\textsuperscript{428} Balfour (1987), 49.
sightseers, and the general public.\textsuperscript{429} The deep integration of gardens and the new skyscraper style was, however, completely novel. Rockefeller Center used gardens on the street level and rooftops.\textsuperscript{430} The Channel Gardens in the promenade between the British and French buildings led people down to the sunken plaza, the metaphoric heart of the Center. The gardens then enhanced the vista created by the architecture in a way reminiscent of Versailles. The Versailles connection is even more apparent because in connection to the gardens Rockefeller sought the assistance of Welles Bosworth, the family architect whom he tasked as his point man for the restoration of Versailles, Fountainebleau, and Rheims.\textsuperscript{431} The rooftop gardens themselves created gardens in the sky, and translated rural landscape gardens to the skyscraper idiom. The gardens, just like the architecture of the Center, were laid out on axial and symmetrical lines, two principles basic to the Beaux-Arts training of many of the Associated Architects. In Hood’s absence, symmetry was downplayed if not outright ignored in the post-World War II expansion of Rockefeller Center. At that time, financial concerns once again were given more weight, and while gardens were built for the Sixth Avenue expansion, they completely lacked any of the complexity of those of the original Center.\textsuperscript{432} The axial layout of Rockefeller Center and the gardens designs, which mirrored that symmetry,

\textsuperscript{429} Quoted in Balfour (1987), 50.
\textsuperscript{430} Balfour (1987), 52 mentions Rockefeller Center was an early attempt at greening rooftops. In the twenty-first century, in the crisis of anthropogenic climate change, the greening of roofs is considered a viable way to improve urban landscapes and demonstrates how Rockefeller Center pioneered in this remarkable use of space.
\textsuperscript{432} Harrison was the lead architect after Hood’s death and his own preferences for the International and New York style is most clearly evident in the four buildings that made up the Rockefeller Center extension to the west side of Sixth Avenue after World War II.
ensured that the central tower would be the jewel of the complex.\textsuperscript{433} This is also evident in the location of the Gardens of the Nations on the central tower setbacks and not on the rooftops of the four low-rise International buildings fronting Fifth Avenue, which featured less elaborate garden spaces. The layout of Rockefeller Center, the focus on the central tower and the sunken plaza are all hallmarks of City Beautiful urban planning. The City Beautiful influence, as well as the influence of Versailles, on the design of Rockefeller Center is also evident in the ways that art was integrated into the complex.

The Rockefeller Center Art Program

Rockefeller Center was unique in its time for the way it made use of mythologically-inspired art.\textsuperscript{434} Other large buildings of the era occasionally made use of art, but many did so only in the interior entryways. Few did so on the exterior of their buildings, and even fewer in any sort of meaningful way. Grand Central Terminal is an exception and it certainly influenced Rockefeller Center. I noted earlier how Grand Central Terminal and Rockefeller Center differ in their use of space, the first to usher people through, the second to draw people in. Another difference that illuminates an important aspect of the art program of Rockefeller Center is that while Grand Central Terminal did make use of mythologically-inspired art in a significant way, namely the central sculptural group above the exterior clock facing Park Avenue, nonetheless the grouping seems tacked on (Figure 3.17). For example, it is not above a central entrance. The grouping, however, does relate to the purpose of the building as a transportation

\textsuperscript{433} Krinsky (1978), Rockefeller Center, 52.
\textsuperscript{434} For more information about the entire art program of Rockefeller Center, see Roussel (2006), The Art of Rockefeller Center.
depot, since Mercury, the central god in the group, represents transportation and commerce, two things that Grand Central epitomizes. The grouping also enhances the vista of Grand Central when viewed from Park Avenue below Forty-Second Street. Rockefeller Center also incorporates mythologically-inspired art, but it relates to the purpose of the buildings and space in a more meaningful way. Both developments position art in such a way as to enhance the vista. The scale and integration of the art program of Rockefeller Center, however, is in keeping with precedent, including, for example, the use of mythologically-inspired art at Versailles. It is the sheer scale and preponderance of mythologically-inspired art that points to Rockefeller as the ultimate source for such an undertaking. The architects were already on record as caring little for art in their designs. The International style in architecture had moved dramatically away from such an aesthetic. Even Hood had remarked that his buildings do not need artistic decoration. But something clearly shifted after the terrible public reception of the design plans in 1931. Hood gained more influence among the Associated Architects and was able to enact his vision for an axial design with gardens and setbacks. His influence was primarily over the physical space. But Rockefeller himself also seems to have asserted his authority over the entire operation more and more after the negative press. After 1931, everyone involved was on the same page that some decorative elements were needed. A public relations expert, Merle Crowell, was brought in to craft the messaging to the public as the buildings were being constructed, and Hartley Burr Alexander was commissioned to develop a thematic synopsis for the complex. In

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435 RCAC Clippings Book 59.
436 Karp (1982), 63.
addition, Rockefeller allocated $150,000 for the art program.\textsuperscript{437} No other philanthropist than Rockefeller would have spent so much money on beauty and art during the Great Depression. He was passionate about this. He was undertaking extensive restoration work at Versailles, and now he had the opportunity to create something brand new.

One of the most important individuals for the art program was Alexander. Alexander was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California. He was hired in late 1931 to develop a theme for the art program.\textsuperscript{438} Alexander had recently made a name for himself developing art programs and thematic synopses for new building developments.\textsuperscript{439} Interestingly, he had previously worked with several of the artists who would also be commissioned for Rockefeller Center. For example, he worked with Lee Lawrie and Hildreth Meiere on the Nebraska State Capitol building.\textsuperscript{440}

\textsuperscript{437} Karp (1982), 64.
\textsuperscript{438} Okrent (2003), 183. Hood was on record saying the buildings were already beautiful and artistic decoration was not needed. More likely, it was Todd who hired him. As the manager he was ultimately responsible for everything and answered only to Rockefeller, who must have been calling him for sure after the negative press. Archival evidence supports Todd making the call here to hire Alexander since Todd is listed as in charge of “Art program and architecture” among the managing firms three partners. Hood was certainly aware of Alexander from Alexander’s Nebraska capitol work, and may have put in his name to Todd. See Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Business Interests 1.2, FA312, Box 78, Folder 585, “Allocation of Responsibilities.”
\textsuperscript{439} Okrent (2003), 183-184. In this case, a synopsis would be an outline or summary of the main themes in the proposed art program, the location of the art, and various considerations about the art itself.
\textsuperscript{440} Buxton (2009), 30, argues in part that Lawrie was following Alexander’s ideas for the capitol and Rockefeller Center. Roussel (2006), 35, notes that Hildreth Meiere designed the tile and marble mosaics for the rotunda of the capitol building, and it too also contained mythic creatures and was developed in conjunction with Alexander. Of significant interest is that Lawrie and Meiere also worked together previously on the Rockefeller Chapel for the University of Chicago. Both the Chapel and the capitol were designed by Bertram Goodhue. Lawrie also worked with Ulric Ellerhusen on the Chapel, and it was Ellerhusen who did the tympanum piece for the Oriental Institute. This demonstrates the sometimes tight network in the art world and the high profile of the artists that Rockefeller was able to commission for his buildings.
theme he developed for Rockefeller Center was titled “Homo Faber” or “Man the Builder.”  Alexander states in simple terms that the symbolism and features of the art should relate directly to the function of the building. Brightly colored decorations should be at pavement level with more architectural decoration higher up. The plaza and other points of interchange should have the most eye-holding ornament, as well as the entrances and façade of Building #1 and any entrance onto the plaza. In the theme of “Homo Faber” he also seems to be talking about Rockefeller and his role as a builder, as a creator of taste, and as an influencer. Alexander’s discussion of particular locations and their desired ornamentation is at times very specific. He outlined that the core of the art program would be associated with the plaza, the entrance to Building #1, the lobby of Building #1, the Sixth Avenue entrance to Building #9 and the two theaters. For each of these locations, Alexander developed names, themes, and discussed the overall iconography and symbolism. For example, for the proposed Opera house, which was never built but still in plans at this point, Alexander proposed for the foyer theme “Mystery Drama of Eleusis,” in which the stories of the rape of Persesphone

441 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, “Rockefeller City: Thematic Synopsis.”
442 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, “Rockefeller City: Thematic Synopsis,” pg. 1.
443 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, “Rockefeller City: Thematic Synopsis,” pg. 1.
444 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, “Rockefeller City: Thematic Synopsis,” pg. 2.
445 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, “Rockefeller City: Thematic Synopsis,” pg. 4-5.
446 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, “Rockefeller City: Thematic Synopsis,” pg. 2.
and the mission of Triptolemos figured importantly.\footnote{RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, “Rockefeller City: Thematic Synopsis,” pg. 21.} Alexander goes on to link the tragic festival in honor of Dionysus with the development of opera in Italy, thus arguing that his theme was appropriate for the foyer of an opera house. Therefore, for Alexander, Greco-Roman myths were a significant aspect to his theme for Rockefeller Center. Along with the larger thematic symbolism of prosperity for the future and the coming together of civilizations, the mythic symbolism continued into the art program of Rockefeller Center. Furthermore, the example of the opera house demonstrates how the choice of art was deeply symbolic of the function of the building and interior space. For whatever reason, however, upon completion and submission of his thematic synopsis, Alexander was pushed out. He soon left New York. Daniel Okrent speculates that it was Todd who pushed Alexander out and that then the publicity office of Merle Crowell took over the thematic planning.\footnote{Okrent (2003), 185. Again, I think Okrent is speculating here. He cites a story from Kilham 125-126, for which Kilham suggests he was an eye witness.} The archival evidence nearly erases Alexander from ever having been involved in the project,\footnote{For example, the RAC archives barely mention Alexander’s initial involvement with the theme. Instead, those who put forth successor themes seem to be better recorded.} so a disagreement may have occurred. Nonetheless, it is evident that his initial thematic synopsis held considerable influence over what several artists actually produced for their commissions and also for the subsequent synopses.

The ultimate reason for Alexander’s dismissal may actually lie with Rockefeller himself. Although no archival evidence directly supports that assertion, it is known that in 1932, soon after Alexander was let go, Rockefeller solicited additional opinions on the theme for Rockefeller Center from several of his associates.\footnote{Balfour (1987), 138.} It may have been the case
that Alexander’s “Homo Fabor” theme, and the inclusion of a religious-themed chamber\textsuperscript{451} did not sit well with Rockefeller. Rockefeller did not like the spotlight on himself, and it would be too obvious to equate the “man” in Alexander’s theme with Rockefeller. Furthermore, Rockefeller was adamant, despite being a devout Baptist, that there be a separation between the commercial and the religious. He was financing a commercial enterprise, and it was in poor taste to have religious elements intermixed.\textsuperscript{452}

After Alexander’s synopsis, Rockefeller solicited three additional synopses from close associates and noted professionals. He asked for opinions from Dr. E.M. Hopkins, President of Dartmouth; George E. Vincent, President of the Rockefeller Foundation; and Prof. Michael Pupin, Physicist at Columbia University.\textsuperscript{453} Archives preserve just the reports of Vincent and Pupin. Vincent agrees that a unifying theme is important and a good idea for the complex, but warns specifically about limitations. He mentions themes might constrain imaginative artists, and thus only a very vague theme would allow for great artists to work creatively. Presciently, Vincent warns that some ideas involve contention, such as “Capital and Labor.”\textsuperscript{454} Vincent’s favored theme was “America in the pageant of civilizations.”\textsuperscript{455} Rockefeller seems to have taken a liking to Vincent’s

\textsuperscript{451} RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, “Rockefeller City: Thematic Synopsis,” pg. 14-16. Here Alexander explicitly calls for a “chapel” to be added to the design of the Center, which he argues has not attended to the spiritual needs of its future tenants.

\textsuperscript{452} A similar tension arose with Frank Brangwyn, one of the muralists commissioned for 30 Rockefeller Plaza. For a discussion see Roussel (2006), 118-125.

\textsuperscript{453} Balfour (1987), 138.

\textsuperscript{454} RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 107, Folder 803, “A Decorative Scheme for Rockefeller Center,” pg. 1.

\textsuperscript{455} RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 107, Folder 803, “A Decorative Scheme for Rockefeller Center,” pg. 2-3.
Pupin’s proposal focused on the creative powers of civilization, namely industry and commerce. He gave a synopsis of only the interior decoration of Building #1. Merle Crowell seems to have synthesized these proposals together into a coherent theme of “New Frontiers and the March of Civilization.” This final theme understood Rockefeller Center as an architectural monument unto itself, and similarly predicted its importance for shifting the culture of cities and urban planning. The theme also very much looked forward to the new technology changing society at the time, such as radio and television. This forward looking vision for the art program and the desire to have a cohesive theme integrating the artwork was at its core designed to make Rockefeller Center both more beautiful and more intelligible to the visitor. It is all the more striking then, that when all the dust settled on the planning phase, so much mythologically-inspired art was put in place. Just as with the architects, Rockefeller increasingly oversaw this most important feature of his complex. Soliciting additional opinions on the theme was one measure he took. Another was the creation of an art committee.

The Art Advisory Committee was set up in March 1932. The fallout from Alexander’s dismissal and the fine tuning from Vincent and others left the Metropolitan Square Corporation once again realizing that “aesthetic judgment was a complex, highly visible, and vulnerable area of decision making.” There was clearly an uneasy air surrounding the art program, which Rockefeller was all but insisting upon. It is unclear

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458 Balfour (1987), 138-139.
459 Balfour (1987), 137, cites Crowell Memo on the Theme.
who made the decision to put together an art committee, but archival evidence suggests it was Rockefeller who made the call to each potential member, and judging from their distinguished pedigree, they would have answered only if Rockefeller was calling. The committee consisted of Edward Waldo Forbes, Director of the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard; Everett V. Meeks, Dean of the Yale School of Fine Arts; Fiske Kimball, Director of the Philadelphia Museum of Art; Paul J. Sachs, Trustee of the Boston Museum of Fine Art; and Herbert E. Winlock, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.\(^{461}\) All five were distinguished members of the art world. Okrent describes them collectively as a “blue-ribbon” committee.\(^{462}\) Some have argued that they represented the conservative wing of the art world in the 1930s and the resulting art was correspondingly conservative and academic.\(^{463}\) This is going too far and gives too much power to this admittedly advisory committee. As the archival evidence demonstrates, final decisions still rested with the architects and ultimately with Rockefeller himself. The committee’s mandate was “to deal with the artistic aspects of the project in such areas as murals, sculpture, garden landscaping, and decorative floors, ceilings, and pavements.”\(^{464}\) The committee’s actual role in making decisions seems highly limited. Archival evidence points to Kimball and Winlock as the most vocal members who occasionally exercised criticism of the art, but others seem to have barely been active at all.\(^{465}\) The committee also existed for just two years. A memo dated August 10, 1934 from Rockefeller to the Art Advisory Committee says in part, “As a result of your helpful cooperation, the

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\(^{461}\) Balfour (1987), 148.
\(^{462}\) Okrent (2003), 290-291.
\(^{463}\) Balfour (1987), 148.
\(^{465}\) Okrent (2003), 290-291.
important art problems connected with the main buildings in Rockefeller Center have
been solved in such a way that we feel there has been a maximum of public approval and
a minimum of criticism.” This letter dissolving the committee thus demonstrates the
real reason it was set up in the first place: to try to limit the amount of future bad press
associated with Rockefeller Center. After the stinging public rebuke of the overall design
plans, and the cry for additional aesthetic elements, Rockefeller did not want to take any
chances. He certainly still had the utmost faith in his architects and Todd’s management,
but also realized that in the world of art a different set of eyes needed to give critiques
too, if the project was ultimately going to be successful. Finally, a memo from 1936
reveals that some letters between Rockefeller and the committee were destroyed at
Rockefeller’s request.467

Overall, the art program grew out of the controversy and negative press
surrounding the publicly displayed design for Rockefeller Center in March 1931. As a
result, Raymond Hood gained increased sway among the Associated Architects and was
able to get several of the resulting Center’s key features passed through, such as an axial
design, and increased aesthetic appeal of the central tower with setbacks. Hood succeeded
in creating a cohesive group of buildings. Another result was the development of an art
program. Initially, Hartley Burr Alexander came up with the dominant themes and
recognized the spaces within the design that would be heightened by the presence of art
and in turn would heighten the artwork. Through various additional inputs, the final
theme of New Frontiers and the March of Civilization came into being and Rockefeller

466 RAC, Rockefeller Center, Inc., Theme and Decoration, 1934-1960, Box 93 Folder
705, Rockefeller Jr. to Rockefeller Center Art Advisory Committee, August 10, 1934.
467 RAC, Rockefeller Center, Inc., Theme and Decoration, Memo, September 1936, Box
93, Folder 705.
ended up spending roughly $1,000,000 on the art program. This was far more than the original $150,000 he put down in the budget and speaks to how much he believed in the art program and was involved with its minutiae. An art committee was set up for a period of roughly two years, but the art program lasted for much longer than this and the committee seems to have existed just to calm everyone’s nerves about additional bad press. Nonetheless, as I will show in the next section, Rockefeller became increasingly involved in nearly every facet of the construction of Rockefeller Center, especially the art program. Archival evidence strongly suggests that he was making decisions about the art, talking with the artists, visiting their studios, and expressing displeasure or satisfaction as he saw fit.

The Mythologically-Inspired Art of Rockefeller Center

By the end of construction in 1939, nearly forty artists and over one hundred artworks were part of Rockefeller Center. In many cases, the artists followed the themes and locations Hartley Burr Alexander set out. While the themes of New Frontiers and the March of Civilization had ostensibly nothing to do with the ancient world in any way, nor Greco-Roman culture, nonetheless, some of the most significant artworks depict deities or characters from classical mythology. Many of these also happen to occupy prime locations in the complex. Rockefeller was especially concerned with the large artworks he would see on a daily basis, and was concerned not only about his own reaction, but also the reaction of fellow tenants and even visitors. Who came up with the original idea for each individual artwork is in all likelihood impossible to reconstruct. Archival evidence does reveal, however, the artworks with which Rockefeller was most concerned
and most satisfied. This final section will discuss some of the most overtly mythologically-inspired art of Rockefeller Center including, Paul Manship’s *Prometheus*, Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan’s *Atlas*, Lee Lawrie’s *Wisdom*, and several artworks of Mercury. This section concludes with a discussion of the Center Theater. The discussion will focus on the artists, their connections to Rockefeller, Rockefeller’s involvement with the details of the art program, and the artworks’ symbolism in relation to Rockefeller Center.468

Prometheus

By the 1930s, Paul Manship was one of the most sought after sculptors in the United States. He had received mentoring from the Beaux-Arts trained Herman MacNeil and Solon Borglum, and later won the 1909 fellowship to the American Academy in Rome. There, he befriended Barry Faulkner.469 Almost all of his work from this time is heavily influenced by classical art. In 1912, he traveled to Greece and credits the trip with discovering the beauty of early Greek sculpture. He admired the Hermes of Praxiteles and the Charioteer of Delphi, especially the latter’s hair.470 Archival evidence does not account for why Manship was commissioned for the most important outdoor artwork of Rockefeller Center. Manship had several connections with the Rockefeller family, which makes it likely that Rockefeller played a part in Manship’s commission. First, Manship was good friends with William Welles Bosworth, the Rockefeller family architect and close associate of Rockefeller’s in the restoration of Versailles. The two had worked

468 A more formal discussion of the specific style and iconography of *Prometheus* and *Atlas*, in particular, will be conducted in Chapter Four.
together on several projects before, including a Rockefeller family residence.\textsuperscript{471}

Furthermore, Manship was commissioned to sculpt a portrait of Rockefeller Sr.\textsuperscript{472} Paul Sachs, curator at the Fogg Museum in Boston, was a great admirer of Manship’s work. Sachs was also a member of the Art Committee for Rockefeller Center. Lastly, Manship was just one of two American artists to have been exhibited at the 1925 Art Deco expo in France. Thus, Manship, known for his mythological public sculpture and architectural sculpture, was also well-connected to the Rockefeller family.

Manship’s biographer, his son, John Manship, records that Hartley Burr Alexander had proposed the idea of Prometheus for the sculpture for the central fountain in the sunken plaza of Rockefeller Center. Manship himself had proposed a colossal group of figures forty feet tall, but the idea was dismissed because the architects had concerns that the artworks would be too heavy for the underneath concourse to support them. He then proposed a sea god.\textsuperscript{473} Others say that he wanted a piece that dealt with time, space, and the elements.\textsuperscript{474} Whoever ultimately chose Prometheus as the subject for the fountain remains unknown. The conflicting evidence does seem to demonstrate that decisions were arrived at after collaborative discussion.

\textsuperscript{471} Manship (1989), 54-55. Bosworth commissioned Manship to complete six terracotta flower boxes for the West Fifty-Fourth Street residence of the Rockefeller family. He also asked Manship to do much of the ornamentation for the AT&T building at Broadway and Fulton. Bosworth also took Manship and Faulkner with him on his trip to Egypt to investigate the possible Egyptian Museum Rockefeller was going to fund.

\textsuperscript{472} Manship (1989), 83. Manship acquired this commission through his friend and noted painter John Singer Sargent, who was at the time completing a painting portrait of Rockefeller Sr. Bosworth is said to have been the go-between in securing the commission.

\textsuperscript{473} Manship (1989), 130-131.

\textsuperscript{474} Roussel (2006), 203.
The sculpture produced was in the style for which Manship was known (Figure 3.18). Prometheus descends from Olympus, shown as a mountain in the background and passes through a zodiac ring.\(^{475}\) The pool created by the fountain thus becomes the ocean below. His downward gaze and flowing drapery emphasize the descent. Most importantly, he holds fire in his right hand. The piece as it is seen now is not how it first appeared. Installed in January 1934, the sculpture was initially left as uncoated bronze. It was first gilded in 1937, and has since been re-gilded seven times.\(^{476}\) Furthermore, Manship also placed two figures next to Prometheus in nooks to the left and right of the fountain (Figure 3.19). These youths, a maiden and a boy, represented the humans to whom Prometheus gifted the knowledge of fire.\(^{477}\) Finally, an inscription, most likely inspired from lines 107-111 of Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, was placed behind the fountain, “Prometheus, teacher in every art, brought the fire that hath proved to mortals a means to mighty ends.”\(^{478}\) It is known that Rockefeller approved of the inscription.\(^{479}\) Taken together, the sculpture, the fountain, the symbolism of fire, the humans, and the inscription refer to the famous myth where Prometheus steals fire from Zeus’s lightning bolt and teaches the art to humans. This trickster and rebellious Prometheus is also thus a

\(^{475}\) The zodiac ring is often used to symbolize that the gods live above the Earth. It can also carry a connotation of astrology and learnedness. The zodiac will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

\(^{476}\) Roussel (2006), 204-207. There seems to have been some debate about whether to gild it or not. The gilding, however, does make the piece fit with the gilding used on many of the architectural sculpture pieces.

\(^{477}\) Roussel (2006), 208. RCAC, Design and Planning, Minutes from Architects’ Office, February 18, 1936, records that Todd and Architects discussed removing the two figures and that Manship was consulted on the decision. They were first moved to the British building roof, and then later to the stairs leading down to the fountain. A discussion of the boy and maiden as they relate to the Prometheus myth can be found in Chapter Four.

\(^{478}\) Roussel (2006), 204 records that Manship proposed the quote.

\(^{479}\) RCAC, Architects Meetings/Notes 1934, Minutes from Architects’ Office, June 13, 1934, “Inscription Manship Fountain.”
savior figure to humans, and that part of the story is the most emphasized in the ensemble. So much of Rockefeller Center is commercial. There are corporations that rent office space, and there is the underground Concourse which houses retail shops and restaurants. The art program is also influenced by this commercial bent. In particular, the New Frontiers theme is mostly about electricity, radio and television, new technologies (and the corporations that brought them to the mass market) that were radically changing everyday culture in the 1930s. Prometheus, and in particular, the Prometheus who gives fire to mankind, figuratively represents that spark of innovation that led to the new technologies on display at Rockefeller Center. Thus, the choice of god and its position at the center of the complex directly relate to the overall theme and ideology of Rockefeller Center. It is integral to the architectural design of the complex despite being a free-standing public sculpture. Its success as a piece of art and as part of the larger art program is evident in the fact that Prometheus has become one of the most photographed artworks in the United States.\footnote{Roussel (2006), 207-208.}

\textit{Atlas}

Another prominent piece of the art program at Rockefeller Center is the heroic sized statue of Atlas completed collaboratively by Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan (Figure 3.20). \textit{Atlas} is located in the forecourt of the International Building. The two artists were commissioned for the piece in 1934, the same year Prometheus was dedicated.\footnote{Roussel (2006), 230.} That timing is probably not a coincidence since the two spaces are some of the most important based on the design of Rockefeller Center and their location in it, and
both called for dramatic artistic treatment. Furthermore, the choice of Atlas, Prometheus’
brother, deepens the cohesiveness of the program and raises the importance of mythology
for conveying the overall symbolism of the art program. The collaboration between the
two artists is no surprise since of all the artists who worked on Rockefeller Center,
Lawrie received the most individual commissions and Chambellan was the architects’ go-
to man for any architectural modeling and his studio did just about any modeling that
needed to be done for the Center.\footnote{Roussel (2006), 195. Roussel is indeed correct in giving Chambellan his due credit. His contributions to Rockefeller Center have been overlooked by not only several historians but even the Landmarks Preservation report on Rockefeller Center, which on page 253 most egregiously describes him as an “artistic handyman.”} For Atlas, Lawrie conceived of the design and
Chambellan modeled it.\footnote{Roussel (2006), 233.}

Just as with Paul Manship, Lawrie and Chambellan had previous connections to
individuals related to the Rockefeller Center enterprise. Lawrie in particular was close
friends with Hartley Burr Alexander. The two had worked together on the Nebraska State
57, 183.} Lawrie was brought in early to work on Rockefeller Center’s main building
entrance in 1932. It is entirely possible that Lawrie was the source for recommending that
Alexander be brought in to write a synopsis. Lawrie wrote a letter to Nelson Rockefeller
in 1932 and sent along the synopsis Alexander had done for the Nebraska State
Capitol.\footnote{Garvey (1980), 183, as cited: Box 46, File 6, Nelson to Lawrie, October 15, 1931,
“Boy Wanted.”} Furthermore, Lawrie knew of Harrison from his time working with Goodhue’s
architectural firm, had been acquaintances with Hood from the collaborative work Hood
did with Goodhue’s firm, and also had worked with Corbett during the Chicago Century

\footnote{Roussel (2006), 195. Roussel is indeed correct in giving Chambellan his due credit. His contributions to Rockefeller Center have been overlooked by not only several historians but even the Landmarks Preservation report on Rockefeller Center, which on page 253 most egregiously describes him as an “artistic handyman.”}

\footnote{Roussel (2006), 233.}

57, 183.}

\footnote{Garvey (1980), 183, as cited: Box 46, File 6, Nelson to Lawrie, October 15, 1931,
“Boy Wanted.”}
Lawrie also had more direct connections to Rockefeller himself. Lawrie was previously commissioned to do figural sculptures for the Rockefeller Chapel on the campus of the University of Chicago in the early 1920s, and he created sculptural portraits for Riverside Church in the late 1920s. Like Lawrie, Chambellan also had an inside connection with Rockefeller Center associates. Chief among them was Raymond Hood, the lead architect among the Associated Architects for the project, with whom he had worked collaboratively for decades, long before Hood had become successful. Together, Lawrie and Chambellan worked on various pieces for Rockefeller Center. *Atlas* was their greatest collaboration.

In the development of *Atlas*, Rockefeller was very much involved with the progression from idea to reified object. For example, he inspected the rough model and requested that the placement not be too close to the Fifth Avenue line. In another meeting of the architects, at which Rockefeller was present, they voted unanimously in favor of going ahead with the sculpture. Rockefeller and some architects visited Lawrie’s studio often during this time period in the summer of 1935. The memos simply record who was present, where they went, and the outcome of the visit. Often the outcome was the go-ahead for the artist to proceed with slight modifications, but the

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486 Garvey (1980), 181-182. Lawrie had worked on several Goodhue projects including the Nebraska State Capitol and the Rockefeller Chapel.
487 Both churches were financed by John D. Rockefeller Jr. Rockefeller Chapel was completed in 1928 and Riverside Church in 1930. For Lawrie’s involvement with Riverside Church, see Krinsky (1978), 144.
488 Okrent (2003), 154-155.
modifications are rarely recorded in detail.\textsuperscript{491} In one such visit, it is reported that Rockefeller was so pleased with the maquette (rough molding) of the statue that he authorized the cast be in bronze rather than the cheaper aluminum.\textsuperscript{492} Overall, these memos demonstrate that Rockefeller was deeply involved with the day-to-day progress of Rockefeller Center, including its art program.

The statue that Lawrie created was a heroic-sized version of Atlas. That Atlas was chosen after Prometheus was installed three years prior is no coincidence. In the choice of Prometheus and Atlas, the planners of Rockefeller Center selected a series of mythological deities who could easily represent a variety of abstract concepts that were integral to themes of the art program and the complex at large. Rockefeller Center had been defined largely by the corporate tenants who occupied its office space. Prometheus, at the sunken plaza in the center of the space, represented the core idea for the complex, innovation. Similarly, Atlas, located in the forecourt of the International Building, was to represent “internationalism.”\textsuperscript{493} The powerful location of the statue mirrors the location of Prometheus. Both are positioned before large towers (Figure 3.1).

Lawrie depicted Atlas as a muscled Titan. His knees are bent and his brow furrowed as he carries the weight of an openwork armillary sphere on his upper back and shoulders (Figure 3.21). Armillary spheres are models of objects in the sky that consist of a spherical network of rings that represents longitude and latitude lines as well as

\textsuperscript{491} RCAC, 1935 Meetings Architects/Engineers, Architects’ Office Minutes, June 22, 1935, “Regarding Building 4ab6” and June 27, 1935, “Regarding Building 4ab6”.
\textsuperscript{492} Okrent (2003), 376.
\textsuperscript{493} Roussel (2006), 230.
important ecliptic lines. In the case of Lawrie’s Atlas, the most prominent ring represents the ecliptic or the apparent path of the sun in the sky. The symbols of the zodiac are also represented on this ring. The second ring represents the celestial equator intersecting at the constellation Ares. The third ring is the equinoctial colure and the fourth ring is marked by a fleur-de-lis and represents the solstitial colure and marks the winter and summer solstices. The cradle resting on Atlas’ shoulders has the signs of the planets. The axis of the sphere points to the North Star. At forty-five feet above pavement level, it is the largest statue at Rockefeller Center and towers over the pedestrians on the sidewalk. The original pedestal, which entirely supports the seven tons of the statue and sphere, had lower tiers of planter boxes added at a later time, which has since altered the effect of the statue. Originally, Atlas seemed almost teetering on the edge of a pedestal clearly too small for his colossal size and the weight on his back (Figure 3.22). The addition of low planting boxes with shrubbery has significantly weakened the dramatic effect of the statue as seen both up close and from across the street. He seems much closer to the ground and seems to have a much better control of the sphere than he did originally.

495 It is not a coincidence that zodiac symbols are featured in the sculptures of both Prometheus and Atlas. A fuller discussion of this specific iconography will be conducted in Chapter Four.
496 Colure is a term from astronomy which refers to one of the two principal meridians.
499 Roussel (2006), 236-238.
Atlas, like Manship’s Prometheus, is another use of a mythological deity to brand and represent the space of Rockefeller Center. Such deities would have been widely known by the public and visitors during the 1930s. On one level, it is no surprise they would be used in this way. Mythological deities had been part of art and architecture in the United States for decades and as recently as the construction of Grand Central Terminal. But art and architecture had already taken a turn away from the use of architectural sculpture and specifically neoclassical designs for architecture by the 1930s. Thus, their use in the most important spaces of Rockefeller Center, and their use to represent the larger purpose of the Center, is incongruous to their time of production. Rockefeller’s keen interest in such matters and his very active role in the art program represent one possible source, and at the very least represent a source of advocacy for such artwork in a planning committee filled with architects outwardly hostile to its inclusion. The only person with enough sway to get his way in the face of such opposition was the man signing everyone’s paychecks. Prometheus and his symbolism of the spark of innovation, directly parallels Atlas’ representation of internationalism. Atlas anchors the Fifth Avenue side of Rockefeller Center, which was thematically associated with internationalism and peace through mutual understanding and cooperation, hallmarks of Rockefeller’s philanthropy. A statue to represent internationalism is particularly relevant for the forecourt of the International Building which housed one of the largest post offices of its time, an official U.S. Passport Agency office, as well as headquarters and offices of several of the leading tourist ocean liner companies. Together, Atlas and Prometheus’ location in front of the buildings whose occupants’

pursuits they embody represent a deep integration of the art program with Rockefeller Center. Their axial placement in line with the architectural space around them further enhances their symbolism and leads everyone, tenant and visitor alike, to conclude their importance is of first rate.

**Wisdom**

While *Prometheus* and *Atlas* are the only exterior freestanding sculptures of Rockefeller Center, Lee Lawrie’s *Wisdom with Light and Sound* is perhaps one of the most important architectural sculptures of the complex (Figure 3.23). It is located above the main entrance to 30 Rockefeller Plaza, the central tower of the complex. Hartley Burr Alexander had marked out this entrance as one of the most important in the entire complex. Lawrie, for whatever reason, largely followed Alexander’s synopsis for this work in terms of his thematic treatment, but made significant changes which make the piece his own.

*Wisdom* features three figurative characters, each on the lintel over an entranceway, each at an acute angle. The central figure, Wisdom, is depicted as an old man with a long flowing beard (Figure 3.24). He wears a crown on his head and parts the clouds with his left hand. In his right hand he holds a compass. He is larger than the other two figures, and even too big for the space above the doorway. His head and crown also encroach upon part of the limestone façade of the building. Below him is the statement, “Wisdom And Knowledge Shall Be The Stability Of Thy Times,” which comes from the

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502 For example, Lawrie moved the location of Wisdom from the piers to the lintels. See Cross (1932), “The Sculpture of Rockefeller Center,” 1.
Bible, Isaiah 33:6 (Figure 3.24). Below the inscription is a panel of large glass blocks, which feature the cosmic forces drawn by his compass radiating outward in large ellipses.\textsuperscript{503} The figure on the left lintel represents \textit{Sound}, shown as a man shouting something with both hands cupped around his mouth. The sound waves are symbolically depicted with concentric circles (Figure 3.25). The figure on the right represents \textit{Light}, who holds her hands up in the air and rays of light shoot out from all around her (Figure 3.26). Both Sound and Light also emerge from the clouds. All three figures seem to speak directly to the pedestrian on the street and impose themselves upon anyone entering the building because of their acute angle on the lintel. The central figure of Wisdom, in particular, is so large and at such an acute angle that its monumentality is dramatically enhanced as a result. Collectively, the group alludes to the dissemination of information through radio and the telephone (sound) and television (light). These were the key industries represented by NBC and RCA, two of the largest corporate tenants of Rockefeller Center. Thus, \textit{Wisdom}, like \textit{Prometheus} and \textit{Atlas}, symbolically represents in the art program the technologically advanced products of the corporate tenants and an overall belief in the technology of the future.

Among the Associated Architects and Rockefeller, two internal controversies arose over Lawrie’s \textit{Wisdom}. This is not surprising considering the space is one of the most important for the art program and the artwork would not be able to be removed as easily as freestanding sculpture. The first surrounded Rockefeller’s understanding of \textit{Wisdom}. Upon seeing Lawrie’s sketches, Todd commented that wisdom was feminine.

\textsuperscript{503} Roussel (2006), 86.
and not masculine, as Lawrie had made him. In reply to him, Rockefeller agreed with Todd that wisdom was feminine. No doubt the two men were thinking of the Latin *sapientia*, which is indeed feminine. Rockefeller also suggested the figure be thought of as Father Time instead. His suggestion of Father Time is rather interesting, because it shows Lawrie’s use of iconography in this composition can lead to misdirection. The clouds, the beard, and the seemingly divine status of the central figure all suggest a Zeus-like or Cronos-like figure, at least in terms of the iconography associated with these characters in classical mythology. The gilded compass could even be misconstrued as a lightning bolt, which would further the Zeus symbolism. Alternatively, the compass was also sometimes used as a symbol for Cronos. As leader of the Titans, Cronos would have been an apt choice for the entranceway, since he would have most clearly connected thematically to *Prometheus* and *Atlas*, also Titans. Furthermore, Cronos later became associated with time. Todd and Rockefeller’s concern with Wisdom’s gender change and their misidentification of the figure because of the gender demonstrate that the figure is hard to understand on its own.

The confusion over the figure’s identification and iconography led everyone involved to desire an inscription that would explain the composition more clearly. The architects, Rockefeller, and Lawrie rejected collectively over fifty-six inscriptions before settling on Isaiah 33:6. There is ample archival evidence that covers the length of the

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504 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, Letter from Todd to Rockefeller Jr., March 8, 1933.
505 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, Letter from Rockefeller Jr. to Todd, March 9, 1933.
506 Balfour (1978), 144. Father Time is usually meant to symbolize the outgoing old year. He is often depicted as a robed, bearded old man with a scythe or hourglass.
discussions held about the inscription. The majority of the suggested inscriptions were biblical in origin. This would seem to suggest a contradiction in the philosophy of Rockefeller, who disliked any religious symbolism to be part of Rockefeller Center. In the end, while the quote chosen is from the Bible, it is not cited as such on the building and thus the viewer is left to know the source of the quote, or just take it as a stock statement. Some suggestions for the inscription were from Ovid’s *Tristia*, but these were rejected as too focused on sound and light and not appropriate for a composition with the central figure of wisdom. The discussion over the inscription got to the point in the summer of 1934 that Rockefeller quipped he would rather see the space blank than have something there that had no real meaning. Ultimately, the chosen quotation reflects the composition with proper emphasis on Wisdom and expresses the idea that through Wisdom stability is generated. Furthermore, the biblical quote is entirely secularized in its context on what was originally called the RCA Building. While wisdom and knowledge in the biblical sense would be the teachings of Jesus and Christianity as a religion, in the corporate, capitalist context of Rockefeller Center, the pair emphasizes the role of corporations in driving technological innovation.

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508 RCAC, Architects and Engineers Meetings – 1933 and 1934, Memo, December 11, 1933.
509 RAC, Business Interests 1.2, Series C, Box 93, Folder 704, Letter from Rockefeller to Woods, February 27, 1933. See also Letter from Woods to Rockefeller, February 23, 1933 which suggests Todd and Lawrie preferred the Ovid quotation at this time.
510 RCAC, Architects Meetings/Notes 1934, Architects’ Office Memo, August 21, 1934. The decision over the quotation is discussed again below in relation to the Diego Rivera controversy. Significantly, the quotation controversy occurred immediately after the Rivera controversy.
Mercury

The iconography of Mercury appears in at least three places in the art program of Rockefeller Center. Two instances are overt figurative images of Mercury himself. The third utilizes his iconography only. The fact that imagery of Mercury repeats in a relatively small art program demonstrates the importance of that imagery for conveying the overall theme of the art program. Furthermore, the two figurative images appear in the mythological corridor, the promenade and sunken plaza. Thus, like Prometheus, Atlas, and Wisdom, Mercury is another important appropriation of mythological iconography for public consumption.

The first representation of Mercury is Lee Lawrie’s *Mercury with Blazing Sun* (Figure 3.27) This artwork was carved in sunken relief or intaglio relief, meaning it was carved into the building’s stone. It was then filled in with gold leaf, which was the most common coloring for the exterior artworks of Rockefeller Center. It appears on the south side of the British building and overlooks the Channel Gardens (Figure 3.28). Thus, as one enters the promenade, Mercury appears on the right-hand side. Mercury swiftly moves above the waves, ushering the guest along the promenade down to the sunken plaza. He holds his characteristic caduceus in his right hand. He wears his winged sandals and winged hat, also known as a *petasus*. He is unclothed except for a sash caught in the nook of his left arm. A blazing sun appears behind him. Mercury, in this instance, represents the economic power of Great Britain and the sun reflects the old adage “the sun never sets on the British Empire.”511 While a visitor might associate Mercury with the British building, on which he appears, Mercury is also one the first artworks seen by a

511 Roussel (2006), 169.
visitor entering Rockefeller Center from Fifth Avenue and heading down the Channel Gardens. Mercury then reprises his role as herald and doubly announces the larger theme of progress and technology. As a symbol for swiftness and ubiquity, he elegantly introduces to the visitor the concept of technological innovation at Rockefeller Center. Radio and television, two modes of communication epitomized by the corporate tenants of Rockefeller Center, RCA and NBC, together represented the new era of communication. This technology allowed news to be distributed around the world, in such a way that the sun truly could never set on it. Furthermore, industry and commerce were at the heart of Rockefeller Center as a business enterprise. Mercury allegorically represents commerce. In this role, Lawrie’s Mercury directly echoes the Mercury of Grand Central Terminal, which also symbolically represented commerce and specifically transportation. In this way, one sees a tradition of business interests appropriating Mercury as a symbol of their own daily activities and contributions, especially on the façades of their large buildings.

Mercury also appears on the International Building’s south façade overlooking the sunken plaza. Once again, Lee Lawrie was commissioned for this piece, and Mercury is again featured prominently in the artwork. Titled The Purpose of the International Building or The Story of Man, the piece was installed in 1935 (Figure 3.29). Read from the bottom up, the central panels represent the four races of men, Native American, White, Asian, and Black.512 Directly above them is a massive ship sailing under the moon

512 This display of the four races is reminiscent of the four continents. For more information on the four continents, see Fleming, E. McClung (1967), “From Indian Princess to Greek Goddess the American Image: 1783-1815.”
and stars for navigation. The ship probably represents international commerce.\textsuperscript{513} Above the ship are three figures representing Art, Science, and Industry, trades common to all peoples. These three are clearly read together since despite being separate scenes in this checkerboard pattern, the limestone façade does not intersect them as it does many of the other scenes. In this way, read together, this central panel represents the world’s peoples coming together for economic trade and for cultural and scientific progress. Presiding over them is Mercury, who appears at the top of the central panel. He is reclining with his arms wide open, embracing all peoples.\textsuperscript{514} His characteristic winged hat and sandals are clearly marked off by the gilded coloring. At the top of the work is what some have labeled a stylized Earth in the form of a clock with radiating beams.\textsuperscript{515} The set of stars to the left and right at the top, the Big Dipper and Southern Cross, respectively would then each represent the northern and southern hemispheres of the Earth. However, the gilding, the red and orange coloring, the radiating beams, and the clock all suggest a sun to the viewer. Just as stars are shown in the central panel with the ship, both constellations were important to seafarers as a means of nighttime navigation in their respective hemispheres. The panels on the left and right-hand side of Mercury reflect the West (seagull and whale fluke) and East (two palm trees) respectively. Beneath each is architecture symbolic of the hemisphere. An Aztec temple depicts the West and a Mosque depicts the East. The lower left and right-hand panels do not immediately connect to the rest of the composition. The left-hand eagle and smoke stacks represent republics and industry,

\textsuperscript{513} Roussel (2006), 241.
\textsuperscript{514} Roussel (2006), 241.
\textsuperscript{515} Roussel (2006), 241.
while the right-hand lion and tower represent monarchy and history. \(^{516}\) Mercury is at the center of the top portion of the artwork and is a symbolic representation of the entire composition. Here, more than anywhere else, Mercury represents internationalism, a concept Rockefeller was very keen on, hence the four international buildings on Fifth Avenue, and the International Building tower, second in height only to 30 Rockefeller Plaza. The symbolism for internationalism and international trade, seen particularly in the navigational constellations of this piece, echo the navigational armillary sphere of Atlas, and the zodiac ring of Prometheus. This sub-theme of constellations and navigation and international trade and commerce underscores that all people live under the same sky, use the same methods to travel and communicate, and ultimately transmits a message of peace through understanding. This further connects back to the idea of technological innovation, since radio and television were changing the way people communicated.

The third and final representation utilizes aspects of Mercury’s iconography and is located on the International Building North. \(^{517}\) Facing Fifth Avenue, Attilio Piccirilli’s *Commerce and Industry with Caduceus*, depicts two heroic-sized figures, a male and female both classically draped (Figure 3.30). The two figures kneel beneath a caduceus. Each holds a symbol of their role, a hammer and gear wheel respectively. The wings of the caduceus are over-sized and form a protective cover over the two personifications. \(^{518}\) The artwork is in a prominent position over the main entrance to the building. In this case, while Mercury himself is not portrayed, his most recognizable iconographical

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\(^{516}\) Roussel (2006), 241.

\(^{517}\) Essentially the same building as the International Building, this is the fourth and final low-rise building on Fifth Avenue, and is part of a series of international building at Rockefeller Center.

\(^{518}\) Roussel (2006), 265.
attribute, the caduceus, is used as a proxy for him. In particular, the caduceus here again refers to Mercury as a god of commerce. Taken together with Piccirilli’s *Youth Leading Industry*, a unique glass panel artwork, which appears directly below *Commerce and Industry*, the two works portray the present and future of economic success (Figure 3.31). This message is put in an international context based on the decorative bas-reliefs in the spandrels of the building. Leo Lentelli’s *Four Continents* depicts Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas. Europe is represented with a bearded Neptune complete with trident and two fish (Figure 3.32). These artworks with classical iconography all face Fifth Avenue and thus were given prominent locations, since Fifth Avenue was then and is still today the busiest street that borders any part of Rockefeller Center.

*Center Theater*

The Center Theater was planned for in 1931 and built in 1932 (Figure 3.33). It began its existence as the RKO Roxy Theater, but soon after had its name changed because of a dispute with the Roxy Theater a few blocks away. It was situated on an awkward L-shaped lot, part of which, the marquee for the theater and main entrance hall, occupied the southeast corner of Forty-Ninth Street and Sixth Avenue. The Center Theater is the long-lost and tragically forgotten little sister of Radio City Music Hall (RCMH), whose marquee is on the northeast corner of Fiftieth Street and Sixth Avenue.

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520 The dispute came about because Samuel “Roxy” Rothafel, who was the first artistic director for Radio City Music Hall and was brought in to manage the Center’s theaters because of his fame in the theater world in the 1930s, had already built a theater with his name on it a few years prior. The Roxy Theater opened in 1927 on the corner of Fiftieth Street and Seventh Avenue.
521 Krinsky (1978), 189.
Together, the two were the theaters of Rockefeller Center and no doubt grew out of the original opera house proposal. The Center Theater, however, was demolished in 1954 to make way for a new office tower for Simon & Schuster, which had been operating a small office suite on the theater’s rooftop for some time. The three thousand five hundred seat Center Theater had seen its ticket sales undercut by Radio City Music Hall, when the latter began to show movies. It was an easy financial decision to tear it down at that point.

The Center Theater was designed by architect Edward Durell Stone, and the interior decoration was under the direction of Eugene Schoen. Schoen in particular was known for Art Deco design. The interior of the theater was not as over-the-top as RCMH. Everything was more streamlined, which created a more refined look than the busyness of RCMH. So much was misplaced, lost, and destroyed in the demolition that it is a challenge to analyze the interior design. The Rockefeller Center Archive Center has the best collection of interior photographs that I have been able to find to date. Even this collection, however, does not provide images of all the interior spaces. Inclusive of the Art Deco design, two sub-themes emerge from what evidence is preserved. First, a sense

523 Karp (1982), 96. Laurance Rockefeller seems to have had no problem tearing down the theater, which not only made way for new office space, but set off the westward expansion of Rockefeller Center across Sixth Avenue, an effort he spearheaded in the 1950s. See Balfour (1978), 98, where he suggests that it was G.S. Eysell, the artistic director of RCMH after Roxy’s tenure and later President of the Center Corporation, who brought about the Center Theater’s demise.
524 Stone also designed Radio City Music Hall. Donald Deskey was in charge of the interior design for RCMH. Deskey was the lead interior designer for both theaters, however, he was so busy with RCMH, Schoen basically had his way with the Center Theater. See Whiting (1933), “Rockefeller Center Début,” 77.
525 The carpets alone and Ezra Winter’s enormous mural alone can make for a dizzying experience inside RCMH. The interior foyer is so large that combined with the carpet’s repetitive geometric patterning the space plays tricks on a visitor’s perceptions.
of the future of technology is present in several murals that featured Amelia Earhart and other plane imagery (Figure 3.35). Second, there is a mythologically-based theme that toyed with the idea that this was the interior of a theater.

Interior art depicting mythological scenes, gods, and creatures appeared throughout the Center Theater. Some of these befit a theater and utilize iconography commonly associated with Dionysus. For example, the wallpaper for the entrance hallway of the theater was a repeating dark grape and vine motif. In isolation, the grape and vine motif would mean little, but in the context of a theater replete with mythological iconography, it added a certain background level of classicism to the space. Also in the front entrance area by the ticket booths were additional mythological scenes. Poseidon appears above a ticket booth counter. He is shown riding a chariot pulled by dolphins and holds his trident in one hand. In the same picture you can almost make out what looks like another mythological character above the second ticket booth. Thus, a patron entering the Center Theater was greeted by mythologically-inspired art and décor. This was the primary mode of decoration in the theater’s various spaces. Furthermore, it was in keeping with the larger network of mythologically-inspired art centered on Fifth Avenue and the promenade.

Elevators in the Center Theater also continued the mythological décor. The roundels, or small decorative disks, of the interior walls of the elevators seem to have featured mythological scenes or gods. In a picture of one of the elevator interiors, Artemis is shown with her hunting dogs. Unfortunately, additional pictures are not

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526 RCAC, Center Theater/RCMH/Interior Shots.
527 RCAC, Center Theater/RCMH/Interior Shots.
528 RCAC, Center Theater/RCMH/Interior Shots.
preserved for the other sides of the same elevator interior, nor for those of the other elevators so it is not possible to determine if a mythic scene was played out inside the same elevator or if additional mythic scenes were depicted in the other elevators. The roundels in RCMH are also mythological, which leads one to believe all of the elevator roundels in the Center Theater were also mythological.

As a visitor crossed into the Grand Foyer of the theater, one was greeted by additional mythological decorative motifs. Archival photos show that above three main entrances to the theater from the Grand Foyer there was a mythological scene depicted above the entranceway. Of these three, decorations above two of them can be made out. The far right entrance featured a woman seated on some sort of foliage playing what looks like a pair of flutes (Figure 3.36). Her hair flows behind her and her left leg is raised perhaps in some rhythmic combination with the flute. Because of the angle of the photograph and the glare of the foyer lights, it is hard to make out whom she is serenading. It looks like a stylized deer has reared up on its hind legs and has turned its head looking back at the woman. The far left entrance also features what looks like a two-character scene. Here, we are fortunate enough that a print out of the scene is preserved (Figure 3.37). This clearly shows a satyr chasing a fleeing nymph. Both figures have outlined musculature, which lends power to the small chase scene. The satyr’s mouth is open, as if he is saying something, and his brow is furrowed, intent on catching his prey. His left hand reaches out toward the fleeing nymph. The nymph is shown naked but for a sash in her left hand which trails behind her in the wind. Her hair also flows straight back behind her, giving an added sense of motion to the scene. She is also larger than the satyr and is taking a bigger leap than he is. Stylized foliage is shown under the
satyr and creates harmony with the foliage above the far right entrance decoration. Figure 3.36 also shows the central doorway, which has an accompanying scene. The angle of the camera shot, however, and the distance from the door prevent a clear identification of the scene. It does seem that another chase scene is shown, as the figure on the left looks like it is in a running pose. Not much more can be said. Together, these scenes pick up on the grape and vine wallpaper of the entrance hall and continue the Dionysiac theme by depicting satyrs, flutes and nymphs.\textsuperscript{529}

Upon entering the actual theater hall, the visitor would be greeted by a brilliantly lit twenty-five foot diameter chandelier that weighed over six tons.\textsuperscript{530} The chandelier was decorated with concentric rings that depicted various mythological scenes and characters (Figure 3.38). This stood out all the more in the otherwise plainly but elegantly wood-paneled interior. The chandelier was the jewel of Center Theater. The choice of mythological decorative motifs continued that decorative theme from the entrance hall, ticket booths, and Grand Foyer, into the very heart of the theater itself.

The chandelier was the work of Rene Chambellan, one of the most prolific artists for Rockefeller Center and who was known for his mythologically-inspired artwork. His collaboration with Lee Lawrie on \textit{Atlas} was discussed above. Oronzio Maldarelli is said to have collaborated with him on the chandelier.\textsuperscript{531} Three large, stepped concentric circles

\textsuperscript{529} Dionysus, a god of wine, was celebrated in the annual City Dionysia, a festival held in his honor at Athens. It was during this festival that the tragic competition took place, where poets showcased their tragedies, comedies, and satyr plays. As a result, Dionysiac iconography is aptly suited for a theater.

\textsuperscript{530} RCAC, Cosmo File, Center Theater.

\textsuperscript{531} Krinsky (1978), 191. Krinsky is the only one to attest to Maldarelli’s collaboration on this project. He is otherwise not mentioned in any other connection to Rockefeller Center in the available memos. His name, however, is shown below Chambellan’s on a few of the clay models for the mythic creatures for the Center Theater chandelier.
in low relief radiate outward around the central chandelier, effectively creating rings around the chandelier. In each ring, Chambellan carved in low relief various animals and figures. Flat disks separate each figurative image (Figures 3.39). Some of the figures are clearly identifiable as Greek gods or figures from classical mythology. Others are certainly fantastical creatures, and may bear no connection to the mythological figures next to them. Still others seem to be haphazardly chosen iconography of animals and celestial imagery. Altogether it seems a lost opportunity to have created something programmatic and with some sort of thematic cohesiveness. Pictures of the final carvings are preserved for each of the figures of the chandelier artwork.\footnote{RCAC, Center Theater loose photos collection.}

The rings around the chandelier are not an equal band all the way around, but become oblong as they radiate outward not only from the central chandelier but also in the direction opposite the stage. The outermost band is made up of flat, low profile disks. These are the same disks that separate the figurative carvings in the inner three rings. The next ring features an array of iconographical attributes and mythic creatures. Reading the entire composition centripetally, this outward-most figurative ring does clearly denote a mythological theme for the entire artwork. Beginning in the position closest to the stage and looking outward to the audience, one begins with two clouds. Moving along the ring toward the right, three dolphins appear jumping from the waves, followed by two geese flying, and culminating in a sea griffin, winged but with front legs ending in webbed feet and a hind ending in a serpent-like fish tail. Moving along the ring to the left, one meets a flock of three birds, followed by a celestial composition of crescent moon, radiate sun, and stars behind a few clouds. This direction culminates in a winged sea ram, who has the
same treatment of his lower body as the sea griffin. This iconography is eclectic. Alone, none of these elements relates to anything, together they lend themselves to mythic scenery.

If the first figurative ring is a jumbled mix of mythological iconography, the next inner ring is the most overtly mythological in its figurative elements. All but one of them is easily discernible. From their composition there emerges also the beginnings of a programmatic theme. Again, beginning in the position closest to the stage and looking outward a sea serpent occupies the central location, and rides along an ocean current. Moving to the right one encounters Poseidon (Figure 3.40). He is stretched out like the sea serpent riding along the ocean waves. He holds his trident in his right hand, and is shown with a beard and a crown. His lower body ends in a serpent-like fish tail. None of his iconography is unusual in the least. This is very clearly Poseidon. Poseidon and the sea serpent clearly pick up on the sea imagery from the outer ring. The figure to the left of the sea serpent, however, breaks from this emerging sea theme. A man is shown reclining, as if resting on top of the waves beneath him. His legs are delicately crossed, and he is naked, but for a cloth draped over his left shoulder. He holds in his left hand a disk, what could be a mirror perhaps. In his right hand he holds what could be flowers, which also appear in his hair. It is unclear who this man is supposed to be. If he is supposed to be a god, it is not immediately clear which one based on his iconography. If the disk is meant to be a mirror, the masculine but delicately posed body could be meant to depict Narcissus. Either way, he represents a break from the fledgling sea theme. The final three characters of this ring, however, do represent a cohesive narrative. To the left is Artemis, to the right Actaeon, and Apollo occupies the final position in the ring as seen
from the stage (Figure 3.39). Artemis is shown in a dynamic pose suggesting swift motion (Figure 3.41). Her hair flows behind her, the waves seem to part and whip up around her. She holds her bow in her right hand, seemingly giving direction to her two hunting dogs that are leaping into action, bodies stretched out and mouths open. Actaeon appears in the same position below the central Apollo as Artemis, thus linking them together (Figure 3.42). Actaeon is falling. He turns to look back at Artemis’ two hunting dogs nipping at his feet and about to pounce on his back. He raises his left arm in self-defense and tries to protect his head under his arm. These two figures clearly represent the story of Actaeon and Artemis. Actaeon accidentally stumbles upon Artemis bathing naked and as a result she turns him into a stag to be torn apart by his own hunting dogs. Apollo, the twin brother of Artemis, occupies the final position in the ring (Figure 3.43). He is shown riding a three-horse chariot, what must be the chariot of the sun, which blazes behind them, radiating beams of light. The drapery around him flows as the group swiftly moves across the sky. He holds in his hands his lyre, which he seemingly is playing. Apollo appears in the fattest part of the ring, furthest from the stage. He is the largest figure of the entire composition. This middle ring, while clearly relating mythological stories and gods, still lacks cohesiveness. A water theme emerges only to collapse. The male on the left is not easily identified. Artemis and Actaeon clearly relate to one another, but the culmination in Apollo is unexpected and he fits only by his kinship with Artemis. Alternatively, this ring, which features the ocean waves all around it, perhaps offers a different interpretation. While the outer ring represented the sky and ocean, this inner ring does the same more clearly with Poseidon and Apollo, representing the ocean and sky respectively. It is under their observation that Artemis bathed, Actaeon
was torn to bits, and Narcissus saw his reflection. Even so, this is a loose programmatic theme.

The innermost ring is likewise divided in its attempt to convey a cohesive message. The two positions closest to the stage feature a pair of animals each. On the left side is a pair of lionesses. One lies down with front paws crossed leisurely, while the other stands alert with mouth open. On the right side is a pair of gazelles. Like the lionesses, one is resting lying down, while the other leaps. The puffs behind it seem to suggest it has kicked up dirt. Like the birds in the outer ring, what relation these animals have to the gods is unclear. It is possible the two animal groups depict a hunt scene. Moving toward the right, past the gazelles is a woman. She holds a box in her right hand. Its lid is open. It appears that flames of some sort rise from the interior as does smoke which billows around her. She is naked, but for a drape around her right shoulder which flows behind her and coils around her right calf. Devoid of iconography but for the box, this figure is possibly Pandora or Psyche. The fire in the box, however, does not match with either of their stories. Continuing along the right side of the inner ring, the final figures are a man and a boy. Again, the pair are rather devoid of iconography making it a challenge to identify them. Both figures are naked, but for a sash as in many of the other figures on the chandelier, however the sashes in this particular case seem to get lost in one another, nor is it clear where the sash that covers the man’s genitals comes from. The boy rests his right hand on the man’s left shoulder, and holds in his left hand possibly some flowers. These are the same iconographical shapes that the man in the outer ring holds. There are possibly wings coming from the boy; if so, they seem oddly placed; if drapery, they seem rather stiff and angular. Finally, a sun shines beneath the man.
Moving on the left-hand side now, a woman and a bull appear after the pair of lionesses. This is quite possibly Pasiphae and the bull of Poseidon, the famous pairing that begets the Minotaur. She caresses the bull’s face with her hands as she reclines next to him. The final pair on the left-hand side are clearly Aphrodite and Eros (Figure 3.44). Waves are seen beneath her, as she rests on a sea shell. She is naked. Eros is shown with his wings properly placed. He holds a piece of drapery, perhaps flying in to cover his mother. This is a very nice depiction of Aphrodite being born from the sea. Overall, this interior ring is yet another mixed bag of iconography and symbolism. The left-hand side is more clear than the right-hand side, since Aphrodite and Pasiphae are easily identified. The two lionesses could be a reference to Atalanta and Hippomenes being turned into such animals in service of Cybele. Aphrodite plays a large role in their myth, so perhaps this goes with Aphrodite, but that leaves the rest of the figures completely unrelated. The gazelles and the man and boy in particular seemingly have no connection to the larger composition.

The chandelier was a masterpiece, filled with eclectic and sometimes classical iconography. The sheer size of the piece, its concentric rings of mythological and other scenery clearly gave the piece an air of classicism. This then loosely fit with the larger Dionysiac theme in the entrance and Grand Foyer leading to the theater. Thus, patrons did experience a cohesive theme of mythological splendor in the Center Theater, much more so than at RCMH. This decorative scheme could have functioned as a sort of escapism during the Great Depression. The decorative scheme for Center Theater fit in perfectly with the larger art program of Rockefeller Center, in particular the mythological core located along the axis of the promenade in front of the central tower. It also
demonstrates that the art program extended to the interior spaces of Rockefeller Center, not just the exterior.

John D. Rockefeller Jr. and the Art of Rockefeller Center

The major works discussed above represent just a fraction of the entire art collection of Rockefeller Center. Much of the interior mural work closely followed the central themes of New Frontiers and the March of Civilization. Classical symbolism and mythological iconography are largely absent from this portion of the art program, but do surface again and again especially throughout the exterior art program and at street level. For example, Pegasus, the winged horse, appears in a number of places.\(^{533}\) Also, iconography associated with the Roman Republic, notably \emph{fasces}, appear on several of the international buildings.\(^{534}\) Aside from the prestigious mural space in 30 Rockefeller Plaza, the exterior artwork would be seen by a larger percentage of the public, including visitors and tourists. The exterior artwork, more than any of the other artworks, had the potential to convey symbolism and meaning to a wide audience. Rockefeller could make his greatest statements on the walls of his buildings. In this final section, I wish to draw closer attention to the role Rockefeller played in the art program and the collaborative quality that emerged in some cases between individual artists and Rockefeller. In the hopes of determining a definitive answer to who was ultimately responsible for the art program of Rockefeller Center, and especially its mythological iconography,

\(^{533}\) For an example, see Robert Garrisons \emph{Morning, Present, Evening} located above the entrance to 1270 Avenue of the Americas.

\(^{534}\) For an example, see Rene Chambellan’s \emph{History of France} located in the spandrel of the French Building and facing Fifth Avenue.
Rockefeller’s role must be fully investigated, and has hitherto been overlooked by previous scholarship on the subject of the art program.

There is an obvious impression that Rockefeller was behind everything to do with Rockefeller Center. Despite the stern leadership of John R. Todd, the man Rockefeller put in charge of turning dream into reality (and debt into profit), and the man whom one might think controlled everything, in reality internal memos reveal the degree to which everyone worked for Rockefeller. In so many ways, Rockefeller is the only explanation that makes sense for some aspects of Rockefeller Center, especially the art program. One such memo from June 20, 1935, discusses the overall utility, beauty, and economy of Rockefeller Center stating, “In beautification there are several things to consider, some of which are hard to figure. One is the personal satisfaction and pleasure of Mr. Rockefeller.”535 This memo makes clear that in terms of the aesthetics of Rockefeller Center, Rockefeller himself was the ultimate judge. This fact is revealed time and time again in the memos. Although Rockefeller was involved in several projects in the 1930s, he clearly gave Rockefeller Center his utmost attention. According to Daniel Okrent, the most recent writer of a history of Rockefeller Center, he never missed a meeting unless he was out of town.536 Rockefeller was a “builder”—he carried a collapsible ruler with him everywhere—and funded building projects such as the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg and Versailles, as well as new construction projects such as the Riverside Church.537

535 RCAC, 1935 Meetings Architects/Engineers, Memo, June 20, 1935. The memo is untitled but presumably is from the Planning Committee because it is coupled with two other pages that are clearly labeled from that committee.
537 Okrent (2006), 100.
Regarding the art program, Rockefeller was intimately involved in its every detail. For example, a memo from July 1, 1935 demonstrates that Rockefeller asked for a complete list showing all the studies contemplated, in progress, and completed. This information was provided to him eight days later.\(^{538}\) At this point in time, Rockefeller was in complete control of Rockefeller Center’s destiny. This type of sweeping accounting is typical of how Rockefeller managed his large projects. On nearly all of the big philanthropic projects examined in Chapter Two, for example, Rockefeller asked for similar detailed accountings. In what follows, I seek to lay out that Rockefeller, while intimately involved in 1935, was not as involved early on in the development of Rockefeller Center, nor its art program, but quickly came to assert his considerable power on all aspects of the Center’s development after episodes of bad press.

Rockefeller was not as involved in Rockefeller Center in the earliest days. He thought that he was supporting the Metropolitan Opera Company, and the deal seemed a simple financial transaction. But when the Opera Company backed out after Rockefeller had signed the lease for the land, he was left with a considerable rent payment and no prospect of any tenants.\(^{539}\) At this time, Rockefeller became more involved because suddenly not only was much of his money tied up in the lease, but the doubly troubling stock market crash left the entire enterprise a giant risky investment. A man of astute financial accounting and shouldering the weight of managing the Rockefeller fortune, Rockefeller asserted his control. He hired John R. Todd and his associates to gather

\(^{538}\) RCAC, Meetings-Architects 1935, Memo, K. Bowen to H.M. Schley, July 1, 1935. The document mentions Planning Committee Minutes of June 21, 1935, and has a note that the information was provided to Rockefeller on July 8, 1935.

\(^{539}\) Preserving the hundreds of brownstones on the property was not an option since their collective rent payments would amount to barely a percentage of what Rockefeller owed to Columbia University.
together a team of architects. When that team of architects, initially led by Reinhard and Hofmeister, redesigned Morris’ Opera design into essentially what would become the design of Rockefeller Center, Rockefeller remarked that the new scheme reversed Morris’ plan by putting the tower in the center and lower buildings along the periphery.\footnote{Balfour (1978), 18.} Rockefeller understood architecture and he understood good design when he saw it. The fact that this information is preserved in a letter from Todd to Rockefeller further demonstrates that even at this early stage Rockefeller’s approval was needed for such a significant change.\footnote{Quoted in Balfour (1978), 18.}

The architects were still coming up with the designs, nonetheless, and had nearly complete control along with Todd and his staff over the design and its implementation. Rockefeller had put his trust in Todd and the architects to deliver a success. The longer this development waited, the more rent money he lost to Columbia. The stinging reception of the initial design showcase to the public in 1931 put the Rockefeller name in a bad light. Critics were calling on Rockefeller, not the architects, to remedy the situation. There was worry among the architects that they would be fired.\footnote{Okrent (2006), 181-182.} As I discussed above, the biggest criticism of the development was that the dreary slab design was devoid of any aesthetic embellishment. It was at this time that Rockefeller allocated $150,000 for original sculptures and murals and Hartley Burr Alexander was brought in to come up with a thematic synopsis for the art program.\footnote{Okrent (2006), 183.} As I discussed above, there is no documentary evidence for who ultimately came up with the idea for an art program, or who hired on Alexander, but it is clear that Rockefeller was supportive of this idea and

\footnote{Balfour (1978), 18.}
\footnote{Quoted in Balfour (1978), 18.}
\footnote{Okrent (2006), 181-182.}
\footnote{Okrent (2006), 183.}
that the idea must have had his approval. Furthermore, all signs point to Rockefeller as the source because all of the architects, with perhaps the exception of Hood, were in favor of the slab design they showcased to the public, which contained no aesthetic decorative schemes. They were all modernist architects who had even moved beyond Art Deco and were embracing the International style or New York Skyscraper style of architecture. If they had their way, Rockefeller Center would be a bunch of vertical rectangles, a criticism vociferously hurled at them by critics. The art program would be pleasing to Rockefeller. His restoration of Versailles was still underway and that could have easily served as a model for the integration of architectural sculpture, gardens, and a cohesive art program. Finally, the amount he initially allocated was a huge sum of money for art amidst the Great Depression. That the final total for the art program would exceed $1,000,000 is a testament ultimately to Rockefeller’s control of and enduring support for the art program.

Another example of increased Rockefeller involvement at this time occurred around the question of whether to have rooftop gardens or not. In response to the negative reaction by the public to the March 1931 design, Hood became an advocate among the architects, perhaps the only one, for adding rooftop gardens to the design of Rockefeller Center. Hood based his arguments with Todd about the inclusion of the gardens around the increased rental income that they would generate from tenants with a view of them.\footnote{Okrent (2006), 157. The way Rockefeller Center ultimately utilized the view as a factor in charging higher rents to their corporate tenants is one of the earliest examples of paying for the view that is so commonplace now in real estate pricing.} Rockefeller himself felt very strongly about including rooftop gardens and wrote to Todd in 1933 saying that the gardens would be good for tenants, sightseers, and in drawing the
attention of the general public to Rockefeller Center.\textsuperscript{545} Furthermore, in another sign that Rockefeller was taking control of the gardens and intended to ensure their successful implementation, he sought the help of Wells Bosworth, with whom he was currently working on the Versailles restorations.\textsuperscript{546} Rockefeller loved the gardens of Versailles and understood how architecture and landscape could relate to one another. Just as tourists visit Versailles to experience the gardens, so too they could walk among the rooftops of Rockefeller Center and experience nature in the heart of the city. Thus, the bad press of 1931 represents an important turning point for Rockefeller Center, and is the beginning of Rockefeller’s ever increasing control over the project.

Rockefeller continued to assert growing control over Rockefeller Center in 1932. Hartley Burr Alexander was brought on to compose a thematic synopsis for the new art program. Historians of Rockefeller Center make it seem like Todd or the architects were unhappy with Alexander and that is why he was let go. But, as I discussed above, it does not seem a coincidence that while Alexander was essentially fired, Rockefeller was personally writing to associates to solicit opinions on the synopsis and also began to form the Art Advisory Committee.\textsuperscript{547} In a series of memos, Rockefeller was forthcoming with his opinions on the various parts of the synopsis.\textsuperscript{548} Thus, Rockefeller had his own views on the overall art program of his buildings and was completely at ease expressing that

\textsuperscript{545} Quoted in Balfour (1978), 50.
\textsuperscript{546} Okrent (2006), 355.
\textsuperscript{547} Balfour (1978), 138.
\textsuperscript{548} RAC, Rockefeller Center, Inc., Theme and Decoration, Rockefeller to Woods, May 5, 1932, Box 93, Folder 704. Rockefeller comments on Vincent’s memo on the decorative scheme. He expressed a positive view of the Contemporary World scheme and liked the idea of America in the Pageant of Civilizations. See also RAC, Rockefeller Center Inc., Theme, Rockefeller to Woods, May 5, 1932, Box 107, Folder 803, where Rockefeller liked the suggestion of combining the suggestions that Vincent and Popin had on Alexander’s synopsis.
opinion and guiding the decision-making process at this point in time. The memos never come across as if he were issuing an edict, but it is clear that whatever he said he liked should be accomplished. The memos also demonstrate that at times these opinions were expressed not to Todd or the architects but to Rockefeller’s own inner circle of associates. Rockefeller was increasing his assertiveness in the plans for Rockefeller Center at this time, but the fact that these memos about the synopsis discussion reveal he was still working through his associates as a go-between joining his staff and the architects demonstrates he was content to exert control from afar and generally believed in and still had confidence in Todd and the architects.

This confidence that Rockefeller exerted from afar led to a disastrous consequence in 1933. As the final thematic synopsis was agreed upon, the biggest controversy of the entire Rockefeller Center art program was underway. Diego Rivera was a well-known muralist and painter in the 1930s. His work was modern and politically controversial, often depicting communist themes and iconography. He was also a favorite guest at the dinner table of Nelson Rockefeller (Rockefeller’s son), and Abby Rockefeller (Rockefeller’s wife). The choice of artists for the interior murals of 30 Rockefeller Plaza was on a par in importance with the choice of Manship for the sunken plaza fountain. The mural that would face the viewer as one entered 30 Rockefeller Plaza was the most important interior space designated for artistic treatment. Initially, Rockefeller and the architects wanted Picasso or Matisse. Rockefeller in particular thought the space needed an artist who would be a sort of “drawing card” for the public and bring prestige to the
Center. Once Picasso and Matisse were both unavailable to participate, Rivera was settled on as the artist for the main wall inside the foyer. Rockefeller said of Rivera that, “although I do not personally care for much of his work, he seems to have become very popular just now and will probably be a good drawing card.” Rivera was chosen and had nearly finished his mural before controversy erupted seemingly overnight over the inclusion of a portrait of Lenin in his painting. It had been Nelson who was primarily responsible in advocating for Rivera; Nelson wrote to Rivera requesting Lenin be removed. Rivera refused and he was summarily barred from continuing work on his painting, but was paid in full nonetheless. The mural was eventually destroyed as it had been rendered onto the plaster wall directly by Rivera. In its place, José María Sert was commissioned for the space, and produced the mural *American Progress*. As Okrent has pointed out, Rockefeller was uncharacteristically silent on this entire affair. It is my thinking that he had just begun to assert increasing control over Rockefeller Center’s development, including its art program. Up to the controversy with Rivera, he seems to have continued controlling from afar and through his associates. Furthermore, the inclusion of Rivera was the result of the direct involvement of Nelson Rockefeller. The Rivera incident, however, awakened Rockefeller to be more fully present and active in

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549 RAC, Letter from Rockefeller to Hood, October 12, 1932, as cited in Balfour (1978), 152.
550 RAC, Letter from Rockefeller to Hood, October 12, 1932, as cited in Balfour (1978), 152.
551 The initial controversy was internal. The architects and Nelson approached Rivera for changes. But once the work was covered over and Rivera was dismissed, the press, the public, and the art world protested.
552 Okrent (2006), 302-317, has a good review of the events of this controversy. Okrent also notes that Rockefeller was uncharacteristically silent on this entire affair. Despite this, Rivera decided to include a portrait of Rockefeller in his remake of the mural in Mexico City some time later as a sort of jab at his former patron.
Rockefeller Center’s development, especially in regard to the art program. From this point forward, the archival record of memos suggests that Rockefeller attended daily meetings, met directly with artists, visited their art studios, inspected artwork at every stage of production, and felt confident in himself to make artistic decisions for his buildings, no longer trusting in anyone, including the art committee, for opinions. From this point forward, Rockefeller, Todd and the architects would make all the decisions directly.

Internal memos from 1934 onward between Rockefeller and the Associated Architects, between John Todd and the architects, and Rockefeller and his associates reveal that he was intimately involved in all the decisions associated with the construction of Rockefeller Center. For example, it is known that he freely gave his opinion on the overall design of Rockefeller Center, especially the four main buildings that lined Fifth Avenue. One memo reads, “Mr. Rockefeller was very much in favor of having the Buildings 4-A and 4-B identical in their Fifth Avenue facades with Buildings 2 and 3.” The memo goes on to say that Rockefeller was also very interested in the developments with the gardens for 30 Rockefeller Plaza. The buildings mentioned refer to the four international buildings that line Fifth Avenue. All four have an identical façade, as Rockefeller suggested, and help create part of the axial symmetry of the overall design of Rockefeller Center, which is such a big part of why the space functions as well as it does and is regarded so highly as a pleasing space to be in.

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553 It also diminished Nelson’s role in Rockefeller Center temporarily.  
554 RCAC, Architects’ Meetings/Notes 1934, Architects’ Office Memo, January 25, 1934. The memo, which reads like minutes, but is not labeled as such, notes that Rockefeller was in attendance at this meeting along with several of the Associated Architects, Todd, and his management staff.
After the controversy surrounding Diego Rivera’s mural at the Center, Rockefeller also became more assertive in the art program. This was especially the case in regards to the most prominent and publicly visible artworks such as the design of entrances and the gardens. Rockefeller was kept informed every step of the way in regards to new contracts or if an artist was worried about scale. For example, Rockefeller became very involved in Manship’s efforts for the sunken plaza fountain. It is known that Rockefeller approved of the inscription to be placed behind Prometheus. A few years later, when the possibility of relocating the side statues of Man and Woman next to Prometheus was raised, Rockefeller suggested placing them in the Concourse. These memos give the impression that Rockefeller was kept well-informed about every detail in the art program. Furthermore, his permission to make a change was politely phrased as a request for an opinion.

Rockefeller was also personally involved with the development of Lee Lawrie’s Atlas. In one memo, Rockefeller is said to have found no criticism with Lawrie’s rough model, but requested that the statue be located not too close to the Fifth Avenue property line. He also agreed with the architects that bronze should be used for the final casting. This memo also makes it very clear that Rockefeller’s approval was ultimately needed for everything. The memo states, “The art program was gone over in detail. Mr. Rockefeller agreed that in his absence architects take over in supervision of artists to make sure things

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555 RAC, Business Series Rockefeller Center, Inc., FA213, Todd Robertson (Brown), Letter Todd to Rockefeller, August 2, 1933, Box 78, Folder 582.
556 RCAC, Architects’ Meetings/Notes 1934, Architects’ Office Memo, June 13, 1934, “Inscription Manship Fountain.”
stay on timeline, but that final approval of models must be obtained by Mr. Rockefeller and Mr. Todd before moving forward."\textsuperscript{559} Later in 1935, as was discussed above, Rockefeller was very involved with Lawrie’s process, visiting his studio over the course of several days and making minor suggestions.\textsuperscript{560} Lawrie’s models were inspected and slight changes were made after every visit. By the third visit, Lawrie was given the go-ahead to enlarge his model to full-size for the first time. What is clear from these memos and Rockefeller’s visits to artists’ studios is that he was involved from the very beginning in the design process. Ultimately, he had to be pleased for the commission to be a success and the artwork installed. If nothing else was learned from the Rivera controversy it was that Rockefeller was going to be a constant presence in artists’ studios from this point forward to ensure he approved of everything. While artists theoretically might balk at such patron involvement and control, it is important to keep in mind that although many of the artists commissioned for Rockefeller Center were already well-established figures in their respective fields, nonetheless, the architectural sculptors in particular (Manship, Lawrie, Chambellan), were known for mythologically-inspired art, which was quickly falling out of favor. Furthermore, the context of the Great Depression reinforces the artistic control Rockefeller exerted over artists who otherwise would be unemployed like everyone else. This is a set of circumstances unique to the building of Rockefeller Center.

As I mentioned above, an internal disagreement emerged surrounding Lawrie’s Wisdom sculptural group above the entrance to 30 Rockefeller Plaza. Like Atlas, like

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{559} RCAC, Meetings Architects/Engineers 1935, Architects’ Office Memo, March 13, 1935.\textsuperscript{560} RCAC, Meetings Architects/Engineers 1935, Architects’ Office Memo, June 21, 22, and 27, 1935, “Meeting with Sculptors.” Rockefeller is listed as present during these visits and it is clear from them that a vote was held whether the artists could proceed or not in their design.}
Rivera’s mural space, and like Manship’s *Prometheus*, this was also another important space for the art program because of its visibility to the public. First, there emerged a disagreement over the nature of the central figure of Wisdom. Lawrie had chosen a male figure, but Todd and Rockefeller both felt that Wisdom should have been a female figure.\(^{561}\) Rockefeller took it one step further, and here, importantly, demonstrated his knowledge of art history and iconography, when he said in a letter to Todd that the figure looked more like “Old Father Time” than anyone else.\(^{562}\) It indeed does look like a Zeus or Cronos figure rather than Wisdom. The inscription to accompany Wisdom was also hotly contested internally. Nearly fifty-eight quotations were discussed in memos in 1933; some of the suggestions were quotes from classical sources, some were of biblical origin. Rockefeller’s choice was the one that mattered most, but the series of memos does reveal that Lawrie and Rockefeller ultimately came to an agreement.\(^{563}\) The timing of this is also of interest. It is no surprise that Rockefeller would be so heavily involved with Lawrie’s inscription and work for 30 Rockefeller Plaza. This was to be the premier building of the complex, the central tower. The entire complex was designed to increase the grandeur of this one building and correspondingly the art program would be just as important a part of its design. At one point, Rockefeller even said that if they could not all agree on a quotation, he would rather have it left empty than have a quotation that had no real meaning.\(^{564}\) Furthermore, the discussion over the inscription choice occurred

\(^{561}\) RAC, Rockefeller Center, Inc., Theme and Decoration Letter from Todd to Rockefeller, March 8, 1933, Box 93, Folder 704.

\(^{562}\) RAC, Rockefeller Center Inc., Theme and Decoration, Letter from Rockefeller to Todd, March 9, 1933, Box 93, Folder 704.

\(^{563}\) The memo trail for discussion over the Lawrie inscription is long. The best place to start is RAC, Rockefeller Center Inc., Theme and Decoration, Box 93, Folder 704.

\(^{564}\) RCAC, Architects’ Meetings/Notes 1934, Architects’ Office Memo, August 21, 1934.
immediately after the Rivera controversy. Lastly, it probably seemed to Rockefeller that his building was being ruined by a rogue art program over which he had not exerted enough control early on. Rockefeller already disliked Leo Friedlander’s *Transmission* over the Fiftieth Street entrance to the building, calling it “gross and unbeautiful” and declared that he could never enter the building that way.565

The internal memos reveal that Todd and the architects ran seemingly every detail by Rockefeller for approval. Rockefeller inspected contracts for consultants on the decorations of the theaters,566 he gave his approval of the design of the elevator doors,567 and even “inspected in detail” all the various systems of the restaurant dining rooms.568 Even prolific artists like Chambellan had their work inspected. Rockefeller inspected the nozzles on the water fountains for the Channel Gardens.569 After a series of missteps by Todd and the architects, Rockefeller asserted greater and greater control over the building design and art program especially. The Rivera controversy served to reinforce what was already a trend of increased Rockefeller involvement. Ultimately, memos reveal that naturally he was the final word on every decision. A memo from 1935 states that no decision on building design is considered “unless and until the whole matter is put before Mr. John D. Rockefeller Jr. for his decision. Accordingly, the Rental Committee should

565 RAC, Rockefeller Center Inc., Themes and Decoration, Rockefeller to Todd, September 29, 1933, Box 94, as cited in Krinsky (1978), 144 and Okrent (2003), 288. The artwork remained, probably because it would have been too difficult to replace. *Transmission* conveyed the technologies of radio and television as sending and receiving messages.
567 RCAC, Meetings/Memos 1930-1932, Memo, July 1, 1932.
568 RCAC, Architects and Engineers Meetings 1933 and 1934, Architects’ Office Memo, December 21, 1933.
569 RCAC, Architects and Engineers Meetings 1933 and 1934, Architects’ Office Memo, December 20, 1933
make no commitments to tenants for the #7 Building until Mr. Rockefeller has been consulted as to the plan. In the past, all building plans have been submitted to him and his approval secured before committing ourselves in any way to them. At the time these problems are presented to Mr. Rockefeller, a proper presentation of the exterior appearance of the building should also be submitted to him. Mr. Rockefeller is greatly interested in the exterior architectural appearance and interior arrangement of each building as well as of the whole group."

This was Rockefeller Center after all.

Conclusion

In laying out part of the complicated history of Rockefeller Center, I have argued that a multitude of different approaches and sources are needed to fully understand anything of what we know of today as Rockefeller Center. If space dictates form, there was only so much that could be done within the three blocks that constituted the Upper Estate. The solution that Rockefeller and his architects came up with betrays their own histories of influence. The overall design was completed by architects who had moved beyond their Beaux-Arts training to embrace the new International style of architecture as it appeared in skyscrapers. Nevertheless, Hood and others clung to Beaux-Arts principles such as axial design and symmetry and harmony among groupings of buildings. These principles and the design of Rockefeller Center connected them to longer histories of the successes and failures of the City Beautiful movement in New York City. Rockefeller himself grew to assert his control over the enterprise after a series of missteps in public relations. His presence was especially felt in the art program and its appropriation of

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570 RAC, Meetings-Architects 1935, Planning Committee, Memo, July 24, 1935. Todd’s management staff and the architects are listed as present.
classicism in the form of mythologically-inspired art, reminiscent of Versailles, which he was restoring during this time. As a result, Rockefeller Center straddles the shift in urban building design that increasingly moved away from the incorporation of art of any kind in the 1930s. In the final chapter, I will analyze the reception history of the Prometheus and Atlas myths in literature and the arts. In the process, their context within that history and within the art program of Rockefeller Center will be re-evaluated.
Chapter Four - The Prometheus and Atlas Myths and Their Reception in Rockefeller Center

Up to this point, we have examined the art program of Rockefeller Center and discovered that its mythologically-inspired art is located in the most prominent spaces of the Center and represents a deep integration of the art with the function of the Center as a business enterprise. The statues of Prometheus and Atlas are themselves very interesting and deserving of more attention. They are the only large, freestanding public sculptures in the Center. They dominate the spaces where they are located. Each sculpture is recognizable and iconic largely because of its ancient sources and the impact or reception of those myths in subsequent eras. By investigating the origin and reception history of these myths, this final chapter aims to better situate their reception in the context of Rockefeller Center and reveal new aspects of their role in the Center’s art program.

*Prometheus*

Prometheus was a Titan god, the son of Iapetus, and therefore nephew to Cronos. The commonly cited derivation for his name is that it is from πρό meaning “before” and μέδομαι meaning “to be mindful of,” which together produce “foresight.”\(^{571}\)

Alternatively, the name could derive from the Vedic verb *pra math-* , meaning “to steal.”\(^{572}\) There are numerous ancient sources for the Prometheus myth.\(^{573}\) One of the

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\(^{571}\) See for example Dougherty, Carol (2006), *Prometheus*, 4. Thus, his brother, Epimetheus, is the dim-witted “afterthought.”

earliest sources is Hesiod’s *Theogony* and *Works & Days*. In the *Theogony*, mankind and the Olympians met at Mekone to negotiate man’s obligations in sacrifice to the gods. Prometheus divided an ox, hiding the meat, organs, and skin under the unappetizingly looking stomach in one pile, and in the other pile the bones covered in fat. Zeus picked the bones, and thus his enmity for mortals was kindled and he withheld the knowledge of fire from them. In turn, Prometheus stole fire to give to mankind, and Zeus subsequently punished him by chaining him to a column. Hercules later freed Prometheus. In this version of the myth, it is unclear why Prometheus helped mankind. In Hesiod’s *Works & Days*, the character of Pandora, the first woman, is added to the story. Prometheus deceived Zeus at the division of the sacrifice, fire was hidden as a punishment, Prometheus stole it from Zeus in a fennel stalk, and Zeus made Pandora to punish mankind. The addition of Pandora to the story complicates the role Prometheus plays in mankind’s fortunes. Hesiod overall makes Prometheus a trickster. The deception at Mekone and the theft of fire must be punished. But, mankind is also punished as a result of Prometheus’ actions.

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214-215, for what was at one point in time thought of as a connection between Prometheus and a Vedic hero.

573 Among the many accounts of the Prometheus myth are Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 521-616 and *Works & Days*, lines 42-105; Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*; Plato, *Protagoras*, 320c-322d; Ovid, Metamorphoses, lines 80-88; and Lucian, *Prometheus*.

574 Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 521-616, and *Works & Days*, lines 42-105. Hesiod is generally dated to the last half of the eight century and the first half of the seventh century BCE. For a discussion of these two passages, see Gantz (1993), *Early Greek Myth*, 152-165.

575 Gantz argues that lines 527-528 “freed Prometheus from anxiety” refer back to Hercules’s slaying of the eagle and not that Hercules also unchaining Prometheus. This is supported by line 616 where Hesiod says clearly that Prometheus is still chained.

The next major treatment of the myth is Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*.\(^{577}\)

Scholars believe this was part of a larger trilogy, but the other two plays are not extant, and fragments remain of just one of them. It is thought that *Prometheus Bound* began the trilogy.\(^{578}\) Aeschylus deviates from Hesiod’s accounts. There is no mention of the division of sacrifice at Mekone, nor any mention of Epimetheus and Pandora. Instead, Aeschylus begins with Prometheus being chained on the Caucasus by Hephaestus at the behest of Kratos and Bia, two of Zeus’ henchmen.

The theft of fire in Aeschylus is transformational for mankind, as it unlocks nearly all of the arts and allows for civilization to emerge. Prometheus mentions the didactic quality of the gift of fire to men on numerous occasions. For example, in lines 109-111, Prometheus claims that fire was a διδάσκαλος τέχνης πάσης, a teacher of every art, and a μέγας πόρος, a means to mighty ends.\(^{579}\) But it is in his longer speech later, in lines 436-471 and again in lines 476-506, where we learn that Prometheus taught men mathematics, literature, animal husbandry, the rising and setting of stars, medicine, all manners of prophecy, and metallurgy to name a few of his many gifts to mankind that stemmed from fire. Prometheus ends his speech with the boast that πᾶσαι τέχναι (506), all arts are from Prometheus. Thus, in Aeschylus’ account of the Prometheus myth, the original theft of

\(^{577}\) For a discussion, see Gantz (1993), 158-165. There is debate among scholars over the authorship of this play. The attribution to Aeschylus has a long history of being disputed by scholars. An up to date summary of the major arguments and relevant bibliography can be found in Lloyd-Jones, Hugh (2003), “Zeus, Prometheus, and Greek Ethics,” 53-55. For the sake of this study, I assume Aeschylean authorship. Production of the play occurred sometime in the fifth century BCE.

\(^{578}\) See Gantz (1993), 158 for the arguments for *Prometheus Bound* as the first play. Conacher, D.J. (1980), *Aeschylus’ Prometheus Bound*, 98-119 discusses the possibility of there being a trilogy, as does Griffith, Mark (1983), *Aeschylus Prometheus Bound*, 281-305.

\(^{579}\) These are some of the lines paraphrased in the quotation that appears behind *Prometheus* in Rockefeller Center. See Chapter Three of this dissertation for a discussion.
fire found in Hesiod, which brought about man’s downfall from a golden age, here, is transformed into all the arts and skills man has ever learned. Prometheus’ gift of fire has brought about the technological innovations that lead to civilization. His theft then is cast in a very positive light compared to Hesiod’s account. In this version, Aeschylus emphasizes Prometheus’ punishment and suffering, focusing on his having been chained and impaled on the Caucasus Mountains. Aeschylus, however, does not focus so much on the punishment in its graphic details, as many Renaissance artists will later, but rather makes Prometheus into a rebel, defiant against Zeus’ tyranny. Therefore, Prometheus’ punishment is an example of Zeus’ tyrannical power. In Hesiod, Prometheus is a trickster who brings about mankind’s ruin; in Aeschylus, however, he rebelliously defies Zeus at every turn, martyring himself so that man can learn every art from fire. Prometheus becomes man’s benefactor.

Another significant account of the Prometheus myth is found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. In just eight lines, 80-88 of Book I, Ovid tells the reader that Prometheus created man from mixing clay and water. Ovid’s account is one of the earliest extant sources that attest to Prometheus’ creation of man. Ovid turns Prometheus, a trickster in Hesiod’s account and a rebel in Aeschylus’, into a creator, into Prometheus

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580 The additional torture of the eagle eating out his liver is foretold in Aeschylus’ account in lines 1021-1025. The image of Prometheus bound and having his liver eaten by the eagle will become a popular motif in the reception of the myth.

581 Prometheus feels wronged all the more because he claims to have helped Zeus in the Titanomachy, see lines 199-227.

582 Because the rest of the trilogy is not fully extant, it is not known how Aeschylus may have continued to develop Prometheus as a character.

583 The work was likely published in the first decade of the first century CE, most likely prior to his exile by Augustus in 8 CE.

584 Prometheus is referred to as *satus Iapeto*, or the son of Iapetus.
While most likely not Ovid’s intent, that Prometheus created man does provide a reason for his support for mankind in the earlier tradition discussed above. Ovid’s account is very important because of its influence on the reception of Prometheus, which will be discussed below.

Another ancient account of the Prometheus myth comes from Lucian, a second century CE author and satirist who wrote in Greek. In his *Prometheus*, the Titan is once again chained to the Caucasus, this time by Hephaestus and Hermes. Prometheus is in fact being crucified on a cliff’s edge and his lower half hangs off the edge. Hermes accuses Prometheus of his crimes, which here are the distribution of the sacrifice at Mekone, the creation of man, but especially women, who are wicked, and finally the theft of fire. Prometheus spends the majority of the rest of the play refuting the charges one by one, detailing the ridiculousness of the alleged offenses and Zeus’ overreaction. Of the three charges, Prometheus spends the majority of the time refuting the crime of creation. In his sharpest rebuttal, Prometheus ridicules Zeus’ reaction to the creation of man in saying that Zeus acts as if the gods are no longer gods now that mortals walk the Earth, or that they suffer some loss of prestige by the creation of mankind. In *Prometheus*, as well as in several other works, Lucian makes comparisons of himself

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585 For a brief discussion of early accounts of Prometheus as creator or *plasticator*, see Corbeau-Parsons, Caroline (2013), *Prometheus in the Nineteenth Century From Myth to Symbol*, 13.
586 Lucian (1972), *Luciani Opera, Prometheus*, section I.
588 Lucian, *Prometheus*, section III.
589 For Prometheus’s defense of his actions at Mekone, see sections VII-X; for his defense for creating man and woman, see sections XI-XVII; for his defense for the theft of fire, see sections XVIII-XIX.
590 Lucian, *Prometheus*, section XIII.
with Prometheus. The comparisons focus on issues of the nature of plasticity and inventiveness as an aesthetic. As James Romm observes, Lucian mixes various forms, Aristophanic comedy and Platonic dialogues, just as Lucian claims Prometheus reworks Olympian forms in his creation. But there is also a reworking of the Prometheus myth in *Prometheus*. As discussed above, Ovid’s Prometheus *plasticator* is one of the most well-known ancient sources for this myth. Thus, Lucian is mixing various source materials of the myth into his own version. The punishment motif from Aeschylus is mixed with the Ovidian account of creation. The emphasis is no longer on trickery or the theft of fire as it is in Hesiod, nor on the rebel Prometheus as a savior for mankind as it is in Aeschylus, but instead Lucian’s account emphasizes the very act of creation itself. This syncretization of various myths will be a common phenomenon in the reception of the Prometheus myth.

This brief treatment of some of the most developed versions of the Prometheus myth in ancient sources demonstrates some of the key themes that artists in later historical periods used to interpret Prometheus. In the visual arts, many scholars have noted that two dominant trends emerge, focusing on either Prometheus’ punishment or his release by Hercules generations later. It is rare in either the literature or visual material that Prometheus and Atlas are together. A peculiar exception is found on a sixth century BCE Lacedaemonian kylix (Figure 4.1). In the scene, one can see Prometheus

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592 Romm (1990), 80-82.
593 Romm (1990), 82.
tied up to a pole or column, perhaps after the Hesiodic version of the tale. An eagle is perched on his lower body, eating out his liver. Blood pools beneath him. There is nothing remarkable about this iconography except that the column is clearly too small relative to the size of Prometheus. Atlas appears on the left side of the scene. He is hunched over with knees bent as he supports the weight of the world above him. A snake slithers behind him. The entire composition is unique. The viewer is clearly not meant to think that the two Titan brothers were punished together. Prometheus was chained in the Caucasus, which is located to the east, while Atlas was said to hold the vault of the sky in the west, sometimes in the Garden of the Hesperides. Instead, both are shown punished, and perhaps both are meant to be viewed as transgressors against Zeus and the Olympians. This ancient precedent is important for the present study, where Prometheus and Atlas appear in close proximity in Rockefeller Center.\textsuperscript{595} Together, literary and visual sources created this matrix for the Prometheus myth, whereby subsequent authors and artists will construct their own myth of Prometheus in selecting specific scenes from the sources discussed above or mixing them together in new ways.

From this collection of sources, Christian medieval writers and artists created their own versions of the Prometheus myth. For some, the creation story of Prometheus and that of the Biblical Adam merged, where Prometheus is at times shown creating Adam, and other times the Christian God is shown in nearly identical imagery. Thus, Prometheus was rationalized as a sort of prefiguration of the Christian God.\textsuperscript{596} Others, like Lactantius, writing in the fourth century CE, made Prometheus the first sculptor and

\textsuperscript{595} Other visual representations of Prometheus do not have the influence that the literary sources do in the reception history of the myth.

\textsuperscript{596} Raggio (1958), 48-49.
thus turned him into a father of idolatry.\footnote{Lactantius, Epitome of the Divine Institutes, 25. See Moog-Grünewald (2010), 556, for a brief discussion.} In the fifth century CE, Augustine made Prometheus into a teacher of wisdom, a sage, and importantly made Atlas into a great astrologer.\footnote{Augustine De Civitate Dei, 18.8. See Moog-Grünewald (2010), 556, for a brief discussion.} Thus, Christian writers in Late Antiquity and throughout the Middle Ages either condemned Prometheus for his inventiveness and creative powers or rationalized the very same qualities as those of a great teacher. Absent are the aspects of the myths that occupied the early Greeks, such as the sacrifice at Mekone, the theft of fire, and the punishment and torture of Prometheus. Thus, Lucian, with his focus on Prometheus \textit{plasticator}, is an important bridge between the early Greek figurations of Prometheus and the later Christian rationalizations. Furthermore, Christian interpretations of the myth retain the notion that Prometheus helps mankind, just not on the scale of that of Aeschylus.

The Prometheus myth was popular again during the Renaissance. Trends established by Christians in the Middle Ages continued, but older trends from Antiquity also re-emerged to become dominant themes. In literature, Giovanni Boccaccio composed one of the most important interpretations of the Prometheus myth since Late Antiquity.\footnote{Boccaccio was an influential and prolific author in the fourteenth century. For an introduction to Boccaccio and his works, see Kirkham, Victoria, Michael Sherberg, and Janet Levarie Smarr edd. (2013), Boccaccio A Critical Guide to the Complete Works.} Boccaccio engaged with classical mythology in several texts, and in many of them, the myth of Prometheus is central to understanding Boccaccio’s framework. In
his *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*, a fourteenth-century work in Latin, which created an entire lineage for mythological characters, Boccaccio retains the notion found primarily in Ovid that Prometheus was a creator of mankind. Boccaccio synthesized several different sources of the Prometheus myth, and comes to the conclusion that Prometheus was *duplex*, double. One Prometheus is the true God, who made men from clay, and this the ancients pretended was Prometheus; the other Prometheus is the one who was an Assyrian, who retreated to the Caucasus. After a long period of meditative thought, he discovered astrology, which he then taught to the Assyrians, thus civilizing them. Prometheus, for Boccaccio, remained a creator, but one who retreated to the Caucasus just as a master artist shuts himself off from the world. The tendency among early Christians to demonize Prometheus is replaced by Boccaccio’s rationalization of Prometheus as a wise sage who taught his wisdom and learning to others.

In the visual arts, Piero di Cosimo’s multi-paneled *Prometheus*, completed in 1515, re-engages with the ancient sources, while nonetheless continuing with the trend of Prometheus as a wise man. In the first panel, Cosimo portrays Prometheus as a creator of man (Figure 4.2). His brother, Epimetheus, is also a creator of man, but an unsuccessful one. He is shown on the lower left corner, holding his creation by the arm and shoulder while it slumps down. Prometheus, shown on the right portion of the canvas, gestures

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600 The title of Boccaccio’s work is sometimes referred to as “Genealogie” and other times as “Genealogia.” In English versions, it is often titled “Genealogy of the Pagan Gods.”
603 Moog-Grünwald (2010), 557. Marino, Lucia (1980), “Prometheus, or the Mythographer’s Self-Image in Boccaccio’s ‘Genealogie,’” 266-270, puts forth an argument that Boccaccio uses the Prometheus myth to model his own actions as a poet. This is not unlike how Romm argued Lucian figured the Prometheus myth.
triumphantly to his creation, which stands on a pedestal, as he talks to Athena who has come to admire his creation. Prometheus’ creation looks as if it is a classical nude statue. In the second panel, Prometheus again stands with this creation, again located on a pedestal (Figure 4.3). This time, his theft of fire from the chariot of the sun is shown in the background, while in the foreground he uses that spark to animate his statue. Prometheus, however, is also shown being punished on the right side of the canvas. Hermes is tying him up, while Zeus’ eagle is perched on a tree above Prometheus ready to devour his liver. Considered as a single composition, Cosimo’s two panels bring together various strands of the Prometheus myth into a cohesive whole. First, he depicts Prometheus as a creator. The sense of an intelligent creation and intelligent creator is made clear through the contrast with Epimetheus and his creation, from which gods seemingly flee in horror, while Prometheus’ creation is admired by Athena, herself associated with inventiveness and wisdom. Nonetheless, Cosimo’s Christian context is very much present in the second panel, where Prometheus is shown with his creation once again, but this time is punished all the same. Instead of the theft of fire as in the ancient Greek sources, here, Prometheus is punished for an act that only the Christian god is allowed to bring about. The theft of fire is not problematic, as such, but because fire is then used to animate, to create life. Thus, Cosimo, like Boccaccio in literature, threads various receptions of Prometheus in an attempt to reconcile the pagan origins of the Titan god and Christian religious beliefs. The re-emergence of the punishment motif, with attendant eagle, is prescient of a new trend that would soon emerge in the visual arts.

By the seventeenth century, the Prometheus myth became a favorite topic for artistic treatment. Unlike the case in previous periods however, many artists focused their
treatment entirely on the punishment of Prometheus. Peter Paul Rubens’ *Prometheus Bound*, 1611-1612, is perhaps the best example of this treatment and one of the earliest (Figure 4.4). Prometheus is shown chained to the surface of a rock cliff. His muscular body writhes in torment as Zeus’ eagle preys upon his liver. The contrast between Prometheus’ body arching upward in agony, and the downward pressure of the eagle, which appositionally holds him down with its sharp talons digging into his lower abdomen and face, is striking. In case we forgot why Prometheus is so punished, Rubens includes a stalk with the fire still aflame inside it in the lower left corner of the canvas. This singular focus on the punishment of Prometheus is graphic, yet, unlike previous portrayals of Prometheus’ punishment, especially those perpetrated by Christian apologists, who seemed to revel in his righteous punishment, here, and elsewhere in the emerging trend, one sees a re-acquaintance with the Aeschylean formulation of Prometheus. Namely, there is a strong sense that Prometheus is conspicuously martyred. And, the presence of fire makes it clear that it is his theft of fire that brought about his punishment, a feature that is prominent in Aeschylus’s treatment of the myth.

Furthermore, a certain paradox emerges that despite being punished and chained, it seems as if Prometheus is still striving for something or against something, other than the obvious eagle, his immediate tormentor. The eagle is a reminder of Zeus’ authority, and thus the authority of any State power.

Beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the Prometheus myth began to inspire writers again. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the German writer,  

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604 Rubens is himself influenced by Titian’s *Tityus*, which depicts a similar motif and represents a merging or blending of these two myths focused around the torture of the eagle, and punishment by Zeus.
began to write about Prometheus in the 1770s. Goethe’s poem, *Prometheus*, published in 1789, is cited for starting a trend of poets re-engaging with Prometheus. Goethe’s *Prometheus* to a large extent influenced Romanticist reception of the myth. Goethe’s *Prometheus* presents the Titan as boldly defiant of Zeus and the gods, confident and even proud of his self-reliance, and his creation of man. Prometheus also suffers and is full of emotion in Goethe’s poem. This strong humanization of the Titan makes Prometheus into an even better advocate for humanity. Thus, Goethe’s Prometheus is rather Aeschylean in formulation, especially in his rebellious defiance of Zeus and the gods. However, the theft of fire is absent, and instead, Goethe makes Prometheus man’s creator. As in Aeschylus’s version, Goethe has Prometheus claim that Time and Fate are everyone’s masters. Goethe’s primary contribution to the evolution of the Prometheus myth is not simply a compassionate Prometheus who cares for humanity, but one who is self-reliant, one who does not need Zeus and the gods. Furthermore, like Boccaccio and Lucian before him, Goethe also self-identifies with Prometheus.

Goethe’s Prometheus was highly influential on the later Romanticist reception of the Prometheus myth, which remained popular throughout the Romantic era.

Romanticism, a movement involving artists, poets, and intellectuals, originated in Europe

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605 For example, see Corbeau-Parsons (2013), 38-51 where she lays out how Goethe’s figuration of Prometheus influenced the Romantics.
609 Goethe, *Prometheus*, lines 43-45. Goethe uses the words Zeit and Schicksal.
611 See for example, Wutrich, Timothy (1995), *Prometheus and Faust The Promethean Revolt in Drama from Classical Antiquity to Goethe*, chapter 6.
in the late eighteenth century and lasted well into the nineteenth century. It was characterized by emotion, individualism, and an admiration for nature.\textsuperscript{612} Byron, and both Percy and Mary Shelley, engaged with the myth and transformed it in important ways.\textsuperscript{613} Furthermore, it is known that all three spent time together, and it is thought that at least Byron and Percy Shelley wrote their works on Prometheus at that time.\textsuperscript{614} Embarking from Aeschylus’s version, Byron, in his poem \textit{Prometheus}, made Prometheus an example of strength and perseverance for humanity.\textsuperscript{615} In addition, following Aeschylus, Byron sought to portray a Prometheus in rebellion against tyrannical power.\textsuperscript{616} In contrast, Percy Shelley, in \textit{Prometheus Unbound}, took a completely different view of Prometheus. He resisted the supposed conclusion to Aeschylus’s trilogy that Prometheus and Zeus have a reconciliation.\textsuperscript{617} Shelley, in its place, had Prometheus overcome Zeus’ tyranny by undergoing an internal transformation after centuries of punishment. Shelley, thus, put forth a utopian vision of Prometheus who through love for humanity is able to overcome the tyranny of Zeus.\textsuperscript{618} Both Byron and Percy Shelley, like Goethe, removed the theft of fire so prominent in Hesiod and Aeschylus. Instead, influenced by the Renaissance

\textsuperscript{612} For an introduction to Romanticism, especially as it was formulated in Europe, see Ferber, Michael ed. (2005) \textit{A Companion to European Romanticism}.
\textsuperscript{614} Dougherty (2006), \textit{Prometheus}, 99.
\textsuperscript{615} Corbeau-Parsons (2013), 62. Dougherty (2006), 96, notes that translations of Aeschylus in English were recently available, and may have helped inspire Byron.
\textsuperscript{616} Dougherty (2006), 99.
\textsuperscript{617} Dougherty (2006,) 103.
artistic treatment, which focused on Prometheus’ torment by the eagle and imprisonment on the Caucasus, the Romantics heightened the status of Prometheus, the rebel against tyranny, in an era of post-Enlightenment, post-French Revolutionary Europe.

Furthermore, like Lucian and Boccaccio before them, Goethe, Byron, and Shelley all related to Prometheus on a personal level. Each of them underwent their own retreat from society, which gave them the space to write their poetry, which would then become their vehicle to transmit to others the knowledge they had gained.

In 1818, Mary Shelley (Percy Shelley’s wife) published her novel, *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*. In it, the protagonist Victor Frankenstein creates a monster, replicating Prometheus’ creation of humanity. However, after his creation commits atrocious acts and asks for a mate to be created, Frankenstein refuses to aid his creation. Shelley has taken the original Prometheus myth and focused on the transformative act of Prometheus’ creation of humanity. Like many other Romantics, the theft of fire does not figure heavily in her story. Unlike them, however, she finds inspiration not in the punishment, torment, and rebellion of Prometheus as a model for self, but rather in his inventiveness. This is reminiscent of Lucian’s own reading of the Prometheus myth as well. Harriet Hustis notes that Mary Shelley’s modern Prometheus draws attention to the ethics, morality, and responsibility of creator to creation.619 For Hustis, as for Shelley, creation should be an associative and nurturing act.620 Others, like Carol Dougherty, argue that Shelley’s aim is also to bring attention to the obligations of artist to society.621 Shelley’s focus on the Promethean act of creation, of inspiration, is itself a sort of

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620 Hustis (2003), 855.
repudiation of so much of the myth’s reception up to that point, and brings the present
review back to Aeschylus. Prometheus, in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, highlights
again and again all the things he has done for humanity, especially the theft of fire, which
alone led to further discoveries and skills that allowed for man to live independently and
survive. Although Aeschylus does not make Prometheus the creator of the recipient of his
benefactions, nonetheless, Prometheus feels compassion for humanity.

Thus far, the Promethean theft of fire has not figured greatly in the reception of
the myth. Various artists have highlighted the redemptive qualities of the myth by
focusing on Prometheus as a rebel and as a wise sage. There have also been receptions of
the myth that negatively portray Prometheus as an idol-maker. Christian writers have
mostly been responsible for such interpretations.

In the sculptural tradition, Prometheus has been a constant presence.\textsuperscript{622} It is my
understanding, however, from a brief survey conducted utilizing the information given in
Maria Moog-Grünewald and Jane Davidson Reid’s studies, that the integration of
Prometheus at Rockefeller Center is unique. Sculptures of Prometheus are attested as
early at the seventeenth century. The majority of the sculptural representations of
Prometheus either feature him bound, being bound, or punished by the eagle’s predations.
In the early part of the twentieth century, there was a slight increase in the appearance of
Prometheus in the sculptural medium. For example, Reinhold Begas’s 1911 *Prometheus*,
features a larger than life-size Prometheus (Figure 4.5). A muscular Prometheus is
chained to a rock, and recoils at the sight of a vulture, which has landed on a rocky ledge

\textsuperscript{622} For a list of sculptures, see for example, Reid, Jane (1993), *The Oxford Guide to
Classical Mythology in the Arts 1300-1990s*, 923-937, and Moog-Grünewald (2010),
just above him. Begas’s representation does not shift much from earlier artistic or literary treatments. Also from 1911, Constantin Brancusi’s *Prometheus*, takes a completely different view of the myth (Figure 4.6). The gilded bronze head has facial features that are barely noticeable, such as a nose, eyes, and maybe a mouth or neck. The abstract work is highly modern in its treatment, and has reduced Prometheus and all that he stands for to this very simple form. Ionel Jianou interprets this ovoid shape as a statement of humanity’s awakening consciousness. Judith Bernstock notes that the downward tilt of the head indicates a despair and suffering. Not unlike the Romanticists, Brancusi’s *Prometheus* focuses acutely on the human condition, but in so doing, has nearly removed Prometheus from his own myth. Auguste Rodin completed a sculpture in 1917 titled *Prometheus and Sea Nymph*. It features a Prometheus who seems to have been crucified and recalls imagery of Christ on the cross. The nymph embraces the punished figure. Facial details and bodily forms are largely absent except for the overall suggestive shape of limbs and heads. These three sculptures constitute the most recent representations of Prometheus prior to Paul Manship’s formulation for Rockefeller Center. They largely retain previous modes of depicting Prometheus, namely Prometheus being punished. Brancusi’s modern approach is an exception.

In light of this brief review of the Prometheus myth in literature and the arts, Paul Manship’s *Prometheus* (1934) at Rockefeller Center comes into new focus (Figure

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623 The vulture substitution is not common, but nonetheless has precedents. See for example Gustave Moreau’s *Prometheus*, 1868, where the vulture substitution has significant meaning.
3.18). First, the style evokes a certain classicism. Prometheus’ body descends from Olympus having just stolen fire. He flies through the air. Thus, the first tension in the sculpture is noticed, since while its proportions and torso echo classical style, nonetheless the pose is an original aspect of the composition. He also delights in his activity, which is a dramatic shift from the punished and tortured depictions discussed above. Second, the gilding of the bronze statue is not without its own classical precedents, as recent scholarship has begun to convincingly demonstrate that classical Greek and Roman sculptures were indeed polychromatic. What does stand out then in Manship’s Prometheus is the second tension inherent in the piece, that the entire artwork, Prometheus, fire, zodiac ring, clouds and mountain, is gilded. This creates a new monochromatic effect that while attested on Roman bronzes, nonetheless is imminently reflective of Art Deco style, which did favor such gilding. Third, the sculpture is itself a fountain. In the review conducted above, the art historical record does not attest to another instance of Prometheus as the centerpiece for a fountain. Needless to say, he is

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626 Prometheus is made of gilded bronze.

627 On the topic of polychromy in sculpture, see Panzanelli, Roberta, Eike D. Schmidt, and Kenneth Lapatin edd. (2008), The Color of Life Polychromy in Sculpture from Antiquity to the Present, and Brinkmann, Vinzenz, Raimund Wünsche (2008), Gods in Color Painted Sculpture Of Classical Antiquity, which have several essays on the topic. Specifically for gilded bronzes, see Oddy, W.A., Licia Borrelli Vlad, and N.D. Meeks (1979), “The gilding of bronze statues in the Greek and Roman world.”

628 For discussions on gilding in ancient sculpture see Brinkmann (2008), “The Polychromy of Ancient Greek Sculpture,” 38, and see also Østergaard (2008), “Emerging Colors: Roman Sculptural Polychromy Revived,” 53-54. Specifically for gilded bronzes, see Oddy, W.A., Licia Borrelli Vlad, and N.D. Meeks (1979), “The gilding of bronze statues in the Greek and Roman world,” 182. Completely gilt statues are attested in antiquity, but somehow the effect here seems far more Art Deco in style, and knowledge of polychromy in ancient sculpture may not have been well known in the 1930s.
not a common subject for fountains. Fourth, the review of Prometheus in post-Antique sculpture also highlights his striking absence from use as part of architectural sculpture or monuments. These four elements serve to demonstrate that the use of the Prometheus myth at Rockefeller Center is something new and unique.

Further analysis of specific iconographical elements and overall form reveal additional innovations in the conceptualization of the Prometheus myth at Rockefeller Center. For example, Prometheus is shown holding the primordial element of fire. The sculptural tradition has tended to portray Prometheus as chained, and thus the element of fire was absent. In the painting tradition, it was shown above that the punishment scene was also very common especially after Titian’s Tityus and Rubens’ Prometheus. However, there, if fire was shown, the Hesiodic tradition of it being transported in a hollow stalk of fennel was continued. This was the case in Rubens’ painting discussed above. By contrast, here, the Rockefeller Center Prometheus directly holds the smoldering flame. The gilding of the entire sculpture perhaps diminishes the gilded flame, while if the rest of the sculpture had been treated differently, the flame might have stood out all the more and focused the viewer’s attention to the most important iconographical feature of the sculpture. Prometheus’ bare hands holding the flame aloft as he descends from Olympus underscores his divine status, and also serves to emphasize the divine nature of fire itself. Fire cannot be contained; it is itself a primal, even cosmic force, which has the potential in the hands of humanity to accomplish great things. This

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629 Poseidon, as god of the sea, is far more commonly chosen, or one of the other Olympians depending upon the context.
sentiment is further reinforced and echoed by the lines of Aeschylus quoted in gilded letters carved into the wall directly behind the sculpture.630

A second interesting iconographical feature of *Prometheus* is the pose. Prometheus is shown flying through the air. This pose is not immediately classical, like some of the other elements discussed above. This pose highlights his divine status, as he flies down from Mount Olympus shown behind him, descending through the clouds. The zodiac ring also emphasizes the cosmic and divine origin of both Prometheus and the fire he holds. This pose in the context of holding fire and descending from Olympus through the clouds and zodiac is a dramatic departure from the earlier representations of Prometheus. Gone is the Romantic focus on Prometheus as a rebel. Gone is the post-Renaissance view of Prometheus as a tortured victim, with its attending imagery of the eagle viscerally tearing at his flesh and liver. Gone is the Renaissance desire to rationalize the myth and find a harmony between it and Christian theology. Gone are the overtly negative interpretations of Prometheus in the Late Antique and Middle Ages because of the dominance of Christian theology. Instead, there is a powerful return to the ancient sources in the depiction of Prometheus.

This sculpture, however, does not blindly copy ancient source material. It is a unique representation of the Prometheus myth that combines several aspects of Prometheus found in antiquity. In review, the three main filters of Prometheus in antiquity were the Hesiodic trickster, the Aeschylean rebel, and Ovid’s creator. In various combinations, these three accounts have shaped the use and reception of the Prometheus myth from Late Antiquity to the twentieth century. In *Prometheus* at Rockefeller Center,

630 “Prometheus, teacher in every art, brought the fire that hath proved to mortals a means to mighty ends.”
the account of a trickster Prometheus defiantly stealing fire from Zeus after the initial
trick of the sacrifice at Mekone is removed. Fire is the central element of the sculpture,
but given the context, Prometheus is triumphantly descending to give fire to humanity.
Hesiod is not our source. Aeschylus would seem like the most direct source for the
composition at Rockefeller Center, since Rockefeller himself studied Greek and Latin,
and an inscription from Aeschylus is carved in gilded letters directly behind Prometheus,
which Rockefeller personally approved. In Aeschylus, however, Prometheus is
forcefully chained to the Caucasus. Here, that is not the case. The chained and impaled
Prometheus is important to the Aeschylean portrayal of Prometheus as a defiant rebel
against a tyrannical Zeus. That defiance is here translated into the celebratory nature of
his descending with fire.

Importantly, the figures of Man and Woman, two additional sculptures that were
originally located to the right and left of Prometheus have today been removed to the
staircase leading down to the sunken plaza (Figures 3.19 and 4.7). Thus, the emphasis is
placed on the fact that Prometheus’ gift was for humanity. Both genders are represented
as benefiting from his gift, an important break from the ancient sources, where in
Hesiod’s account especially, Pandora, the first woman, was created as a result of
Prometheus’ theft of fire. Whether the viewer was supposed to think that Prometheus
created the Man and Woman is not clear, and would not have changed the overall
interpretation or message. The Man and Woman are still close by and relate to
Prometheus just as well as they did in the 1930s when they were directly next to the

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631 RCAC, Architects Meetings/Notes 1934, Minutes from Architects’ Office, June 13,
1934, “Inscription Manship Fountain.”
632 Hesiod, Works and Days, lines 42-105.
sculptural fountain. Thus, the quote from Aeschylus stresses two aspects of the Prometheus myth, that Prometheus gave fire to humanity, and that in the latter’s hands, great things could be and are being accomplished. Fire is a “means to mighty ends.” While Aeschylus had Prometheus punished yet defiant, he nonetheless did have Prometheus go on at length about the many things that he taught to mortals in addition to fire. Fire was the initial spark that led to many technologies, which themselves in combinations led to civilization. Thus, in the context of Rockefeller Center, the sunken plaza, and the larger art program, Prometheus here represents that spark of innovation that led to technologies that allowed for the skyscraper ensemble of buildings known collectively as Rockefeller Center to be built. Fire led to the eventual technologies of light and sound, glorified on the entrance to 30 Rock just behind Prometheus on the street level, themselves representative of the business tenants of the Center, RCA and NBC, corporate giants at the time and leaders in the innovative use of radio and television. These technologies were changing the world rapidly, in much the same way that Prometheus’ initial teaching of fire did for humanity in antiquity. Prometheus here is a benevolent and wise teacher of arts to humanity. Prometheus monumentalizes and memorializes that gift at Rockefeller Center, while simultaneously celebrating the triumphant use of technology to construct Rockefeller Center as a beacon for the radio and television industries. The entire complex and the Prometheus sculpture forcefully attest to the triumphant use of human labor and ingenuity and philanthropy that created Rockefeller Center in the midst of the Great Depression.

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633 Aeschylus, Prometheus Bound, lines107-111.
Atlas

The next most significant artwork after *Prometheus* at Rockefeller Center, is Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan’s *Atlas*, erected in 1937. Atlas has not had a history of reception like Prometheus. For example, Moog-Grünewald’s comprehensive survey of the reception of myth does not include a stand-alone article on Atlas. Instead, one must look to the index, only to discover mention of Atlas as part of larger myths in which he was a minor character. For example, in the myths of Perseus and Hercules both Greek heroes encounter Atlas as part of their journeys. Both of those heroes have fared well in reception. Therefore, it may be that Atlas has had some value to the Post-Antique period because of his tangential association with the myths of Perseus, Hercules, and most importantly his brother, Prometheus.

Early Greek sources for the Atlas myth often give him but a few lines and mention that he holds up the sky or pillars. For example, Homer’s *Odyssey*, Book I, lines 52-54 mention Atlas as the father of Calypso, that he knows the depths of the sea, and holds the pillars (κίονας) that keep earth (γαῖαν) and heaven (οὐρανὸν) apart. In Hesiod’s *Theogony* 514-516, Zeus is said to have assigned the fate of holding up the sky to Atlas. No reason is given why Atlas was assigned this fate. Pindar also gives barely two lines to Atlas who wrestles the sky. In Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, lines 349-352, Prometheus mentions his brother Atlas, who is oppressed (τείρουσ’), and holds the pillar of heaven and earth on his shoulder, a burden not easy to bear. Thus, for the first time in

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634 For example, in Moog-Grünewald (2010), one finds Atlas under articles on “Gorgon,” “Heracles,” “Hermes,” “Perseus,” and “Zeus.”
635 See for example, Stafford (2012), *Herakles*, chapter 7.
636 For a discussion, see Gantz (1993), 154.
Aeschylus, as before with the myth of Prometheus, both Titans are cast as oppressed in some way. Like mention of Atlas’ struggle, the appearance of Io provides another example of Zeus’ tyranny. Timothy Gantz notes that accounts describing the punishment of Atlas holding up the sky must predate accounts describing whatever crime might have precipitated such punishment, since the early sources never mention why he is in the west, often at the Garden of the Hesperides, holding up the vault of the sky. 638 Aside from Calypso, the Pleiades and Hyades, constellations, are also mentioned in early sources as the daughters of Atlas. 639 Importantly, the Pleiades in particular were associated with navigation, since their rising above and dipping below the horizon line thereby signaled the beginning and end of the sailing season. 640

In the early sources, Atlas’ location in the west, perhaps where the sun sets, and his daughters’ association with the stars, may have led later authors to attest that Atlas was the first to discover astronomy, which he then taught to humanity. This is what Diodorus Siculus, the first century BCE Greek historian, writes in his rationalization of the Titan’s myth. In Bibliotheca Historica, Book III: 60, Atlas was given control over the land and coasts in the west, where he learned astrology and taught the doctrine of the sphere to humanity. It was for this reason, according to Diodorus, that people thought Atlas held up the sky on his shoulders. Later, in Book IV: 27, Diodorus says again that Atlas knew the spherical nature of the stars, and taught this knowledge to Hercules who had rescued Atlas’s daughters from pirates. It was for this reason, according to Diodorus, that people said Hercules also held the sky on his shoulders. Other writers, such as

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638 Gantz (1993), 46.
639 Gantz (1993), 218.
640 Gantz (1993), 212-213.
Hyginus, who lived in the late first century BCE and into the Augustan period, attest that Atlas was the leader of the Titans in the Titanomachy, and when they lost to Zeus and the Olympians, Zeus punished Atlas by putting the vault of the sky on his shoulders.\textsuperscript{641} This brief survey of Atlas in ancient literature points to an early history of him holding up the sky, not associated with a punishment and with no reason given. Holding up the sky in the west, journeying heroes Perseus and Hercules both encounter him. Later, mythographers rationalize these early accounts, most likely making the leap to Atlas as the first to discover astronomy because of his location in the west and his daughters’ association with constellations. Only later sources such as Hyginus attempt to link Atlas to enmity with Zeus.

The visual representations of Atlas in antiquity were fairly uniform. The most commonly treated themes of Atlas’ myth are his holding the world,\textsuperscript{642} his encounter and transformation at the hands of Perseus, and his encounter with Hercules. This directly corresponds to the sources of his story in the most canonical ancient authors. Atlas is often shown holding up the sky, knees bent under the great weight. Other times, an actual globe was depicted above his shoulders with Atlas again bent underneath its great weight (Figure 4.8). His association with Prometheus in visual culture is rare.

As mentioned before, the myth of Atlas does not have the same influential reception tradition as that of his brother Prometheus. He does appear in the visual record again and again, mostly in paintings of Perseus or Hercules. Treatments of just Atlas are

\textsuperscript{641} Hyginus, \textit{Fabulae}, 150.
\textsuperscript{642} For ancient accounts of the sphericity of the earth, see Betten, Francis S. (1923), “The Knowledge of the Sphericity of the Earth during the Earlier Middle Ages,” 74-79.
rare. More commonly, perhaps because a man holding a weight above him is reminiscent of a caryatid, Atlas is shown in architectural sculpture or sculpturally more generally. An interesting example is the work of Artus Quellinus the Elder who worked on the Town Hall of Amsterdam, which was completed in 1655. There are at least two different sculptures of Atlas. The first tops the exterior pediment and is a typical representation of Atlas with a giant globe on his back and shoulders; his knees and head are bent in effort (Figure 4.9). The second is located inside the building in the Citizens’ Hall. The treatment is nearly identical to the exterior sculpture except stars dot the globe of the interior Atlas. Both sculptures are in a classical style. In the context of the Town Hall, later named the Royal Palace, Atlas, and attending imagery such as maps of the world, which were inlaid in the floor of the Citizens’ Hall, demonstrate one of the first uses of Atlas and his myth as a metaphor for the world, and in the case of Quellinus’ work, the power and extent of the Dutch empire across the globe.

In New York City, prior to the construction of Rockefeller Center, Atlas was already a well-known figure. Atlas twice found a home as architectural sculpture for well-known entities. One of the earliest uses of Atlas was as the famous Atlas clock for Tiffany’s & Co. (Figure 4.10). The jeweler, Charles Tiffany, commissioned Henry

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643 For example, Rubens also completed a painting of Atlas, but it did not have the same influence as his Prometheus painting.
644 The survey found in Reid, Jane Davidson (1993), “Atlas,” 254-256, covers barely one page and a quarter, and ranges from the fifteenth century to the twentieth century.
645 Later known as the Royal Palace of Amsterdam.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dk_xO1ZnJ_s.
Frederick Metzler for the Atlas clock in 1853. A nearly naked Atlas stands upright, in a departure from previous traditions, which often depicted him with knees bent. The figure is painted to imitate oxidized bronze. The clock, which replaces the normal globe motif, rests on his upper back, just behind his neck, forcing Atlas’s head forward. Atlas still features outlined musculature, but not the bulging muscles one is accustomed to seeing associated with him. Since its unveiling, the Atlas clock has become a brand icon for Tiffany’s, launching a series of watches for the jewelry company. The sculpture has also moved with Tiffany’s to each of their new flagship locations in New York City since the 1850s.

The two Atlas sculptures that form part of the exterior decoration of the Ukrainian Institute of America on East Seventy-Ninth Street provide a second example of Atlas’ use in New York City prior to Rockefeller Center. The mansion was built in 1899 for Isaac Fletcher, a wealthy investor. After a string of owners it was sold to the Ukrainian Institute in 1955. The architect was Charles Pierrepont Henry Gilbert, often referenced as C.P.H. Gilbert in architectural sources. Gilbert designed the mansion in his signature over-the-top French Gothic design. Two Atlas sculptures flank the main entrance on Seventy-Ninth Street (Figure 4.11). The identical figures each hold a globe on their back. Atlas has nearly collapsed under the weight of the globe. While Tiffany’s Atlas comes close to adopting the Titan’s myth metaphorically as a symbol for the refinement and precision technology expected in Tiffany’s Atlas watch collection and jewelry, it falls short in scale

compared to Quellinus’ Atlas. Gilbert’s Atlases also seem to be more part of the realm of architectural ornament than objects that carry any significant symbolic meaning.

Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan’s *Atlas* for Rockefeller Center, erected in 1937, is strikingly different from the art-historical trend for depictions of the Titan (Figure 3.20). Just as with *Prometheus*, a close examination of the iconography points toward new interpretations in light of the review of Atlases and Prometheuses above. The most striking thing a viewer first notices is his musculature. The musculature, however, is not reminiscent of a classical style. Instead, the Art Deco style dominates here, and as a result the muscles all seem rounded in such a way as to emphasize the colossal size of the statue. Another aspect singularly important to representations of Atlas is his stance. Here, Atlas does have a bent left knee, and so it would seemingly suggest he is struggling under the weight of the sphere he holds. This is not the case. Instead, it suggests that Atlas is stepping up onto his tiny platform, with his right leg following behind. He is in perfect control of the massive sphere. To that point, a close examination of his face reveals further Art Deco stylization, especially his hair, and a face that is relatively calm considering the task at hand for him (Figure 4.12). His jaw seems clenched; his chin and lower lip are drawn in as if he is considering something. His eyebrows are noticeably arched, and his forehead shows circular stylized wrinkles. With his head turned to his right, the overall impression is that he is in complete control. His head is slightly bent forward, which is only really noticeable from a side profile (Figure 4.13), but rather than interpret this as a sign of effort, considering all of the factors in his stance, it seems like this is normal behavior for someone stepping up onto a platform to look down and then begin to straighten and lift one’s head as the step is completed. Thus, strain under the
weight of the sphere is not shown here. In this way, this is a complete departure from previous iconographical traditions of depictions of Atlas. Not only does it seem like he is stepping forward with the sphere, his massive body seems perfectly able to bear the weight, and his shoulders and upper body are all erect and not hunched over at all as if tortured by some great weight.

Another key element of the Rockefeller Center Atlas is the sphere. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this is an armillary sphere, which depicts various celestial lines. As was mentioned above, Atlas is usually shown supporting a globe, often meant to represent the Earth, either with continents drawn realistically on it or with signs of the zodiac. Armillary spheres are not commonly associated with Atlas, but there are sources prior to the Rockefeller Center Atlas that do show him with such a sphere on his back in place of a closed, solid globe. These instances of Atlas and an armillary sphere are generally found in Renaissance and post-Renaissance mathematical or astronomy texts, where reference to the celestial sphere by means of an armillary sphere is scientifically commonplace. An example is this wood cut from The Cosmographical Glasse by William Cunningham published in 1559 (Figure 4.14). In the plate, Atlas is shown holding a geocentric armillary sphere, characteristically bent down because of its massive weight. The banner reads “Caelifer Atlas” or “sky-bearing Atlas,” an epithet from Vergil’s Aeneid Book 6, l. 796. The quote beneath him is from Aeneid Book 1, ll. 742 and 744. The larger passage, ll. 740-747, tells of Iopas, a bard, who sings of Atlas who taught

him the wanderings of the moon and the labors of the sun. This passage is one of the ancient sources for Atlas as a teacher of astronomy, as was discussed above. To have those lines in particular cited beneath an image of Atlas holding an armillary sphere makes that connection explicit. Thus, a pattern emerges of generally depicting Atlas holding a globe, in reference to his more well-known myth, and a later pattern of depicting Atlas supporting an armillary sphere, referencing the rationalization that he taught humanity astronomy.

The Rockefeller Center Atlas is of the second pattern, that is, referencing Atlas as an astronomy teacher, not as the Atlas punished by Zeus to hold up the vault of the sky. It is important to remember that the particular armillary sphere at Rockefeller Center points in its axis to the North Star, which has long been an important reference star for navigation when sailing in the northern hemisphere before the advent of modern technology. Atlas at Rockefeller Center is a representation of a more triumphant Atlas than is usually depicted in visual media. This parallels the treatment of Prometheus discussed above. Both Titans are shown with their most potent iconographical symbols that display how their divine knowledge was transferred to humanity, perhaps as a form of generosity. For Atlas, the armillary sphere is that symbol, and astronomy and navigation are the benefits accrued to humanity.

Furthermore, just as Prometheus metaphorically represented the technological innovations of Rockefeller Center and its corporate tenants, Atlas is a symbol for the internationalism of the Fifth Avenue buildings (Figure 4.15). The French, British, Italian, and International Building North have four identically shaped facades facing Fifth Avenue. Each housed commercial syndicates from their representative nations. Atlas,
located in the forecourt of the International Building, itself a smaller scale 30 Rock but with less elaborate setbacks, is flanked on his left by the International Build North and on his right by the Italian Building. Rockefeller was passionate about internationalism and peace between nations. This was demonstrated in part by his philanthropy abroad, for example his restorations at Versailles. At Rockefeller Center his passion for international relations is represented in this section of the Center. Atlas symbolically anchors it. It should be noted that the imagery of Mercury also appears in conjunction with three of the international buildings as discussed in Chapter Three. Mercury, of course, was Atlas’ grandson, through his daughter Maia, who with Zeus gave birth to Mercury. Mercury, as was outlined in the previous chapter, also represented international power, trade, and commerce. Thus, just as the Titans themselves aided and taught humanity, the art program also demonstrates that their children carried on that legacy. In this way, Prometheus and Atlas at Rockefeller Center are a symbol for Rockefeller Jr. himself. In his philanthropy and in his funding of Rockefeller Center in the midst of the Great Depression, Rockefeller utilized the myths of Prometheus and Atlas, creators, teachers, and benefactors to humanity, in order to demonstrate his own good deeds. The conjunctive symbolism of Mercury in connection with Atlas, further symbolizes that for the Rockefellers such philanthropy was shared inter-generationally. Many of Rockefeller’s sons continued to support great building projects, as seen in John D. Rockefeller III’s work developing Lincoln Center, and David Rockefeller’s work on the

651 Rockefeller donated sixteen acres of land in 1946 to be the location for the United Nations headquarters.
652 In this argument, I am grateful to several scholars who have argued for representations of self especially in individual poets’ retellings of the Prometheus myth. For example, see Romm (1990), 74-84 and Marino (1980), 266-270.
original World Trade Center site. In this way, Rockefeller Center, as its name might suggest, becomes a monument to self. Visitors and critics were not off the mark when they first declared Rockefeller Center a new “forum romanum,” since in his use of Greco-Roman deities to symbolically represent himself and his own achievements, Rockefeller echoes what Augustus set out to accomplish in his new forum.

In conclusion, the historical survey of the reception of the myths of Prometheus and Atlas in literature and the arts is essential to understanding their innovative use at Rockefeller Center. Prometheus has been a popular figure in Western thought, including in antiquity where three separate themes emerged from versions of the myth, the Hesiodic trickster, the defiant rebel of Aeschylus, and Ovid’s creator. These motifs were carried on through the Middle Ages, and underwent their own transformation as a result of Christian theology. In the Renaissance, Prometheus was again discovered as a potent symbol for creation and innovation, as well as for a certain kind of artistic self-martyring. The depiction of him as a punished rebel also re-emerged. Goethe set off the Romantics and their passion for the Prometheus myth, which inspired several of the great poets of the period. Atlas, too, was known either as holding up the world or as a teacher of astronomy, but did not have the same impact after antiquity as that of Prometheus. Nonetheless, both Titans appeared again at Rockefeller Center. Exceptional in their own right as artworks and as integral pieces in the art program, each of their myths was reinterpreted to highlight their triumphant dissemination of knowledge to humanity. One is reminded of

653 The remark, attributed to an architectural student in 1942, is quoted in Loth (1966), *The City Within a City: The Romance of Rockefeller Center*, 44. Reynolds (1984), *The Architecture of New York City, Histories and Views of Important Structures, Sites and Symbols*, 256, also remarks on the similarities to the ancient forum.
the sixth century Lacedaemonian kylix mentioned earlier, which featured the rare image of the Titan brothers being punished together. At Rockefeller Center, both Titans are again featured together, but this time as metaphoric representations of the innovative technology at Rockefeller Center, radio and television, and of internationalism, world travel, and peace. Thus, for Rockefeller himself, the myths of Prometheus and Atlas became a rather uncharacteristic monument to his own accomplishments, or as he might see it, a monument to the role of philanthropy, a cause in which he passionately believed.
Conclusion

Rockefeller Center is exceptional in many ways. As a grouping of buildings in the Midtown section of New York City, it has become an example of modern, urban planning. The human factor in its design is evident everywhere: the abundant natural light, the absence of noisy delivery trucks, the sunken plaza, and a cohesive art program. The Center is a display of confidence as well as structural ingenuity, which is heightened by the context of its construction. Built in the midst of the Great Depression, Rockefeller, in choosing to move forward with this business venture, also turned the construction project into another example of his philanthropy, as Rockefeller Center kept tens of thousands of laborers out of the bread lines. Thus, the Center became a welcome distraction for New Yorkers to marvel at in the context of despair. Much of what the locals and critics alike discussed was the overall design of the Center’s buildings and its accompanying art program.

The Center is full of tensions as a result of its historical contexts and, most of all, its patron. The 1930s were a unique time, especially for the United States. The Great Depression is just one tension, by which the nation was plunged into economic ruin after the dizzying height of the roaring ‘20s; the Center was a much needed and privately funded stimulus to the local economy. As a result, the Center became aspirational for many New Yorkers, who needed something to look forward to. The 1930s is also part of the interwar period, between World War I and World War II. While Europe was increasingly showing signs of descending into conflict again and ultimately into Fascism, Rockefeller Center became another example of the westward migration of European claims over the Classical past, finding a home in the assurgent United States. The very
design of Rockefeller Center, in the new New York style or International Style of skyscrapers was itself a product of internal tensions among the architects. The majority wanted to fully embody that new design style, but when critics lampooned it as devoid of beauty, Rockefeller increasingly took control, and Raymond Hood, one of the architects, was able to impose a more elegant use of setbacks for the main tower, 30 Rock. Ultimately, the Center is a success in design planning because it was able to find a harmony among these many tensions.

The most important tension at Rockefeller Center revolves around the art program, in which Rockefeller was personally very involved. Since Art Deco took off as a design aesthetic in the mid-1920s, architects had rapidly moved away from the incorporation of figurative sculpture and architectural sculpture in their building designs. This paralleled the decline in neoclassical architecture. Yet, Rockefeller Center incorporates a robust art program of over one hundred individual artworks. Furthermore, many of them, and indeed some of the most important artworks, have echoes of a classical style or portray Greco-Roman deities. This is rather unexpected given the time of the Center’s construction and that it is a grouping of skyscrapers. Rockefeller’s personal role in this matter is essential.

Rockefeller’s own education was based on the centuries old classical curriculum. This exposed Rockefeller to Latin and Greek, as well as French and German. This afforded a young Rockefeller, attending private schools such as the Douglass, Cutler, and Browning Schools in New York City, exposure to ancient literature and material culture, as well as perhaps German scholarship. This exposure has been documented in the Rockefeller Archive Center, sometimes down to the specific texts and passages that he
read. His broad exposure to the history and rhetoric of the Greeks and Romans, was expanded to include histories of philosophy and art history when he attended Brown University. His interest in art history electives encompassed the entirety of Greco-Roman art, as well as its influences and reception in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Rockefeller enjoyed the beauty of ancient art. His education, typical for children of elite individuals in the late nineteenth century, demonstrates that private schools that catered to such children still placed significant value in a classical curriculum. Rockefeller’s heavily classical education is evidence that, at least among private schools, decline in classical curricula was not witnessed, and points the way towards future archival research that will shed light on this topic more broadly.

In agreement with the biographical approach laid out in the analysis of his education, Rockefeller’s personal philanthropy is also an important factor in understanding Rockefeller Center and many of its inherent tensions. Rockefeller graduated from Brown University and immediately went to work for his father, Rockefeller Sr. Rockefeller aided his father in his philanthropy and as a result developed a very similar perspective on it. Rockefeller Sr. supported large educational institutions like Spelman College and the University of Chicago. Rockefeller Jr., however, had a tendency to support large, culturally prestigious organizations or projects. Examples of this include his restoration projects at Colonial Williamsburg and several French locations, including Versailles. His support of archaeology and the material culture of antiquity was no better articulated than by his decades long support for the excavations of the Athenian Agora conducted under the auspices of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Rockefeller’s support for this excavation project began in the 1930s.
and lasted through the Great Depression, showing his passion for this project. The American School and the American Academy in Rome, to which he also contributed financially, were among the most prestigious American institutions abroad at the time. Rockefeller’s simultaneous support of James Henry Breasted’s Oriental Institute, based at the University of Chicago, and his support for numerous American universities’ excavations across the ancient Near East further attest to his sustained interest in antiquity since his first introduction to it in the classical curricula of the many private schools he attended in his youth. His financial support for these projects sometimes was funneled through or received contemporaneous funding from various Rockefeller foundations. The Rockefeller Foundation was the most important of these, carrying the family’s name, and supported similar efforts, such as the Agora excavation, through student fellowships, at a time when the foundation had moved away from archaeological support in its program of giving. The simultaneous funding streams from Rockefeller’s personal finances and from the Rockefeller boards, specifically for material culture projects and those dealing with the legacy of Greece and Rome, further demonstrate that Rockefeller had great influence and even control over the foundations at this time and could funnel additional resources to those projects, which he himself especially supported.

Rockefeller’s education based on classical curricula and his support of classical initiatives in his personal philanthropy demonstrate a sustained interest in the classical past. Certainly Rockefeller was not the only influence on the development of Rockefeller Center. John R. Todd, the general manager Rockefeller hired, and the team of Associated Architects, among whom Raymond Hood was a leading force, were also important.
players in the Center’s development. The interesting history of the plot of land on which Rockefeller Center was built also had a part in shaping the different possible layouts for a concentration of buildings. That early history is important because it is clear that Rockefeller was not as involved in its developments. The reveal of the design plan for the Center, featuring a 3-d scale model that was exhibited to the press and public, was a public relations disaster. One result was that Raymond Hood became the undisputed lead architect. He advocated for more setbacks on the buildings, which added aesthetic appeal (even if he positioned the argument for them in economic terms). He also advocated for rooftop gardens, another baldly aesthetic change framed based on their potentially positive economic impact. The second result was that Rockefeller himself became increasingly involved in every bit of minutiae of the design. This is perhaps the most important advent in the history of Rockefeller Center.

Rockefeller’s influence over the development of the Center that would come to bear his name is felt strongly in the art program. The art program itself came about because of the poor public showing of the design model. The public and critics alike felt some more aesthetic considerations were needed. In response, Rockefeller personally added to the budget to fund an art program. This initial amount would grow more than ten times over the course of the next few years. As was the case before, circumstances played a role in prompting Rockefeller into more control. In particular, archival evidence supports the argument that after the disastrous commissioning of Diego Rivera for the premier mural inside the foyer of 30 Rock, Rockefeller essentially took over the art program. After all, art was something he cared about greatly, and ultimately the man signing everyone’s paychecks would have his way. The art program is full of tensions as
a result of the many actors that influenced the final product. Perhaps the most interesting feature is that mythologically-inspired art was commissioned at all; it is at odds with the new International style of skyscrapers. It is also striking that such a large number of the artworks would be mythologically-inspired. Furthermore, those mythic artworks are in some of the most important spaces of the Center, and thus symbolically represent not only the art program but also the Center itself. The statues of Prometheus and Atlas are the best examples of this.

A gilded Prometheus is located at the very heart of the Center and is the main focal point of the sunken plaza. It is perhaps the most important individual artwork of Rockefeller Center, and carries much of the symbolic weight of it as a result. The art program was set to the themes of New Frontiers and the March of Civilization. These themes originally stemmed from the idea of *homo faber*, or man the builder. All three themes find resonance with an uncharacteristically youthful-looking Prometheus, which as one of the first artworks commissioned and completed, not only came to become iconic of Rockefeller Center, but also inspired the workers, planners, and everyday New Yorkers in the midst of the Great Depression. The myth of Prometheus has been prominent in Western literature and culture since antiquity. Its reception in Late Antiquity, the Middles Ages, the Renaissance, and Romantic Era attest to a rich and varied re-making of Prometheus. Later accounts drew ultimately from one of the three main ancient Greek and Roman versions. There was the Hesiodic trickster, the rebel and martyr of Aeschylus, and Ovid’s creator. In analyzing the reception history of the Prometheus myth across these versions and time periods, both in literature and the arts, one immediately recognizes yet another new version in the *Prometheus* of Rockefeller
Center. Here, Prometheus, the fire-thief, becomes a harbinger of technological
efflorescence. The fire symbolizes the spark of innovation that led to the New Frontiers,
primarily radio and television, two new technologies represented at the Center by their
major corporate tenants, RCA and NBC.

*Atlas*, the other main artwork of Rockefeller Center, like *Prometheus*, is located in
an important space. Atlas, best known for holding up the vault of the sky was often
represented iconographically with a globe on his back. In the history of Atlas’s reception,
the Titan has rarely been used symbolically as part of a building complex. At Rockefeller
Center, the statue’s location in the forecourt of several international buildings came to
represent Rockefeller’s own belief in internationalism and peace. This message could not
have been more important given the context of the interwar period. In addition, just as
many ancient and subsequent authors rationalized Atlas as a learned astrologer who
spread his knowledge to humanity, the armillary sphere, which the *Atlas* of Rockefeller
Center holds up, further re-makes Atlas into a teacher of skilled technology. That the
stars were used for navigation further reinforces the internationalist spirit of the Fifth
Avenue buildings of the Center.

Thus, together, Prometheus and Atlas represent how various tensions at
Rockefeller Center coalesced into their own Promethean innovations. The sculptures,
their iconography, their relation to each other, to the larger art program, and to the
buildings of the Center, ultimately are a reflection of Rockefeller’s own self-image. One
of the reasons the myth of Prometheus has had such a rich reception history is the facility
with which people have been able to project themselves into the Titan’s circumstances.
At Rockefeller Center, Rockefeller himself assumes a Promethean and Atlantean role as
the Center comes to symbolize his own efforts at innovation and philanthropy. His classical education continued to manifest itself throughout Rockefeller’s life. Rockefeller Center, along with its mythological deities and newfound landmark status in 1985, is the ultimate reflection of classical thinking. It is reminiscent of powerful figures from the classical past, such as Augustus, who sought to monumentalize his accomplishments in the very physical spaces of Rome with the construction of the Forum of Augustus. Fundamentally, the amalgamation of tensions inherent in Rockefeller Center and the play between past and present are an essential manifestation of reception.

Chapter Two Figures

Figure 2.1. Tympanum over the entrance to the Oriental Institute, Chicago. ([http://oihistory.blogspot.com/2008/08/tympanum-within-arch-on-doorway-to.html](http://oihistory.blogspot.com/2008/08/tympanum-within-arch-on-doorway-to.html))

Figure 2.2. Wren building, Colonial Williamsburg and College of William & Mary. ([https://www.history.org/almanack/places/hb/hbwren.cfm](https://www.history.org/almanack/places/hb/hbwren.cfm))
Figure 2.3. Capitol building, Colonial Williamsburg. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colonial_Williamsburg_Capitol_2.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Colonial_Williamsburg_Capitol_2.jpg))

Figure 2.4. Governor’s Palace, Colonial Williamsburg. (By Larry Pieniazek - Taken by uploader with Nikon Coolpix 2100, CC BY 2.5, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=710865](https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=710865))
Figure 2.5. Aerial view of Governor’s Palace, Colonial Williamsburg. (David M. Doody, Colonial Williamsburg, http://colonialwilliamsburg.photoshelter.com/image/I0000njQDv0xlMmA)

Figure 2.6. Rear entrance to Governor’s Palace, Colonial Williamsburg. (http://annewainscott.com/exploring-americas-colonial-past/)
Figure 2.7. Aerial map of Colonial Williamsburg. (https://historytech.wordpress.com/2011/04/26/15-awesome-interactive-virtual-field-trips/)

Figure 2.8. Aerial view of Palace Green, Colonial Williamsburg. (https://www.history.org/almanack/places/hb/hbpalgr.cfm)
Figure 2.9. Entrance to the Palace of Versailles. (http://en.hotel-le-versailles.fr/)

Figure 2.10. Aerial view of roads leading to Versailles. (By ToucanWings - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=28505340)
Figure 2.11. Aerial view of the Gardens of Versailles. (By Maurice Thiébaut - Geographicus link: ParisVersailles-leconte-1920s. This file was provided to Wikimedia Commons by Geographicus Rare Antique Maps, a specialist dealer in rare maps and other cartography of the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, as part of a cooperation project, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=17140071)
Figure 2.12. Hall of Mirrors, Versailles. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chateau_Versailles_Galerie_des_Glaces.jpg)

Figure 2.13. Aerial view of Gardens of Versailles, with fountains. (Modified from ToucanWings (Own work) [CC BY-SA 3.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0)], via Wikimedia Commons)
Figure 3.1. Aerial view of Rockefeller Center in 2016. (Modified from Google Earth)
Figure 3.2. Map of Rockefeller Center in 1948 showing the original eleven buildings. (From Okrent 2006)
Figure 3.3. Map of Upper Estate and Midtown. (From Okrent 2006)
Figure 3.4. Chicago World’s Fair, 1893, Court of Honor (By Nichols, H. D., 1859-1939 (artist); L. Prang & Co. (publisher) (Flickr: Chicago World's Fair 1893) [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons)
Figure 3.5. Grand Central Terminal as viewed from Park Avenue from the south. (By O’Leary, Marianne; 2009; Flickr: Summer Streets)
Figure 3.6. Morris plan from May 1928. (Weisman 1951)
Figure 3.7. Organization flow chart for Rockefeller Center. (RAC, Rockefeller Family, JDR JR., Business Interests III, Series C, FA312, Box 108, Folder 804)
Figure 3.8. Morris plan from 1929. (Weisman 1951)
Figure 3.9. Reinhard and Hofmeister plan from November 28, 1929. (Weisman 1951)
Figure 3.10. Reinhard and Hofmeister G-3 plan from January 8, 1930. (Weisman 1951)
Figure 3.11. Reinhard and Hofmeister G-3 plan January 8, 1930. (Weisman 1951)
Figure 3.12. Scale model displayed to the public in March 1931. (Balfour 1978)
Figure 3.13. Plans for Rockefeller Center displayed to the public in March 1931. (Balfour 1978)
Figure 3.14. Map showing the four identical building facades along Fifth Avenue. (Modified from Google Earth)
Figure 3.15. Color rendering of planned rooftop gardens by John Wenrich. (Karp 1982)
Figure 3.16. Aerial view of the Garden of the Nations on the rooftop of 30 Rockefeller Plaza (RCAC, Garden of the Nations, Book 1, 10-1 to End)
Figure 3.17. Grand Central Terminal exterior clock sculpture group. (By The original uploader was Purple74 at English Wikipedia [CC BY 2.5 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5)], via Wikimedia Commons)
Figure 3.18. Paul Manship's *Prometheus* in the sunken plaza of Rockefeller Center. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.19. Early 1930s photograph of Paul Manship’s *Prometheus*, along with *Man* and *Woman* in their original locations. (RCAC, Art IX, RCA)
Figure 3.20. Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan’s *Atlas* in the forecourt of the International Building at Rockefeller Center. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.21. The armillary sphere of *Atlas*. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.22. *Atlas* shown with the original pedestal. (RCAC, Art V, IB Atlas)
Figure 3.23. Lee Lawrie’s *Wisdom, Light and Sound* at the entrance to 30 Rockefeller Center. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.24. Lee Lawrie’s *Wisdom*. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.25. Lee Lawrie’s *Sound*. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.26. Lee Lawrie’s *Light*. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.27. Lee Lawrie’s *Mercury with Blazing Sun* over the southern entrance of the British Empire building. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.28. *Mercury* in the Channel Gardens. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.29. Lee Lawrie’s *The Purpose of the International Building* over the south entrance to the International Building. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.30. Attilio Piccirilli’s *Commerce and Industry with Caduceus* above the entrance to International Building North facing Fifth Avenue. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.31. Attilio Piccirilli’s *Youth Leading Industry* in context with *Commerce* above the entrance to the International Building North facing Fifth Avenue. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.32. Leo Lentelli’s *Europe* in the spandrel of the International Building North facing Fifth Avenue. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.33. The Center Theater marquee. (RCAC, Center Theater)
Figure 3.34. Radio City Music Hall marquee. (Jared Simard)
Figure 3.35. “Amelia Earhart Crossing the Atlantic,” glass mural, Center Theater interior. (Balfour 1978)
Figure 3.36. Grand Foyer of the Center Theater. (RCAC, Center Theater/RCMH/Interior Shots)
Figure 3.37. Print out of the satyr and woman scene above the far left theater entrance in the Grand Foyer. (RCAC, Center Theater/RCMH/Interior Shots)
Figure 3.38. The Center Theater chandelier. (RCAC, Center Theater/RCMH/Interior Shots)
Figure 3.39. Rene Chambellan’s clay model of the Center Theater chandelier. (RCAC, Center Theater loose photos)
Figure 3.40. Clay model for Poseidon, Center Theater chandelier. (RCAC, Center Theater loose photos)
Figure 3.41. Clay model of Artemis and hunting dogs for Center Theater chandelier. (RCAC, Center Theater loose photos)
Figure 3.42. Clay model for Actaeon and dogs for the Center Theater chandelier. (RCAC, Center Theater loose photos)
Figure 3.43. Clay model of Apollo for the Center Theater chandelier. (RCAC, Center Theater loose photos)
Figure 3.44. Clay model of Aphrodite and Eros for the Center Theater chandelier. (RCAC, Center Theater loose photos)
Figure 4.1. Kylix depicting punishment of Atlas and Prometheus. ((c) 2006, SCALA, Florence / ART RESOURCE, N.Y.)
Figure 4.2. *The Creation of Man from Clay*, Piero di Cosimo, c. 1515/1520. (public domain)
Figure 4.3. *Stealing Fire*, Piero di Cosimo, c.1515/1520. (public domain)
Figure 4.4. *Prometheus Bound*, Peter Paul Rubens, begun c. 1611-1612, completed by 1618. (public domain)
Figure 4.5. *Prometheus*, Rienhold Begas, 1911. (Copyright held by James Steakley under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license)
Figure 4.6. *Prometheus (Prométhée)*, Constantin Brancusi, 1911. (© 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris, via Artstor)
Figure 4.7. *Prometheus*, along with *Man* and *Woman*, Paul Manship, 2016. (Jared Simard)
Figure 4.8. *Atlas Farnese*, second century CE Roman copy of a Hellenistic Greek original. (Copyright held by Sailko under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license)
Figure 4.9. *Atlas*, Artus Quellinus the Elder, 1655. (Copyright held by Yair Haklai under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license)
Figure 4.10. *Atlas*, Henry Frederick Metzler, 1853. (By Mike Gifford from Ottawa, Canada [CC BY-SA 2.0 (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0)], via Wikimedia Commons)
Figure 4.11. *Atlas*, Isaac Fletcher House, now Ukrainian Institute of America, 1899. (http://www.bigapplesecrets.com/2014/08/ukrainian-institute-of-america.html)
Figure 4.12. *Atlas*, Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan, 1937. (Jared Simard)
Figure 4.13. *Atlas*, Lee Lawrie and Rene Chambellan, 1937. (Jared Simard)
Figure 4.15. *Atlas*, along Fifth Avenue. (Jared Simard)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Building #/Alternate Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Date Building Opened</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1270 Avenue of the Americas</td>
<td>RKO Building</td>
<td>1270 Avenue of the Americas</td>
<td>October 1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio City Music Hall</td>
<td></td>
<td>1260 Avenue of the Americas</td>
<td>December 1932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comcast Building</td>
<td>RCA Building, GE Building, 30 Rock, Building 1</td>
<td>30 Rockefeller Plaza</td>
<td>May 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sixth Avenue extension</td>
<td>1250 Avenue of the Americas</td>
<td>May 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Empire Building</td>
<td>British Building, Building 2</td>
<td>620 Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>May 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Maison Française</td>
<td>French Building, Building 3</td>
<td>610 Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>September 1933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palazzo D'Italia</td>
<td>Italian Building, Building 4a</td>
<td>626 Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>May 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Building</td>
<td>Building 4</td>
<td>630 Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>May 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Building North</td>
<td>Building 4b</td>
<td>636 Fifth Avenue</td>
<td>May 1935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Rockefeller Plaza</td>
<td>Time &amp; Life Building</td>
<td>9 Rockefeller Plaza</td>
<td>April 1937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Associated Press Building</td>
<td></td>
<td>50 Rockefeller Plaza</td>
<td>November 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Rockefeller Plaza</td>
<td>Eastern Airlines Building</td>
<td>35 West 48th Street</td>
<td>October 1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Rubber Building</td>
<td>Simon &amp; Schuster Building</td>
<td>1230 Avenue of the Americas</td>
<td>April 1940</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.1. Timeline of the original eleven Rockefeller Center buildings. (Jared Simard)
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