

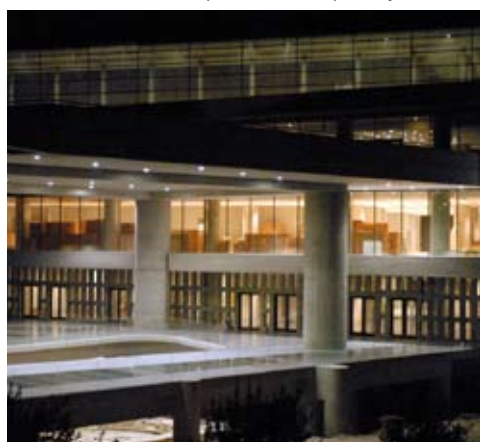


September 2008

The opening of the New Acropolis Museum

Matthew Taylor - Architect & Treasurer, Marbles Reunited

The New Acropolis Museum will open later this year, over thirty years after its construction was first proposed. Its inauguration marks a new chapter in Greece's campaign for the return of the Parthenon sculptures, completely remov-



The entrance of the New Acropolis Museum by night

ing one of the British Museum's arguments for retention (that Greece has nowhere to display the Marbles). A carefully orchestrated relay of cranes has transferred all the sculptures from the existing museum on the Acropolis and the building is now complete, except for the final arrangement of the exhibitions within it.

The Museum's architect, Bernard Tschumi has created an exceptional design, unique to

the site and its contents, meaning that there is no better place for the display of the surviving Parthenon sculptures. Creating a building that must relate in some way to the Parthenon presents the architect with the challenge of how they must interact with what is one of the World's most iconic buildings. Tschumi's building takes the approach whereby what happens within the building dictates its form, allowing the exterior to form a simple minimalist shell avoiding any accusations that it competes with the Parthenon.

Within the building, everything is defined by the Acropolis that it sits in the shadow of. Visitors will move three dimensionally through various historic periods in an architectural procession culminating with the Parthenon Gallery on the top floor. This space is the one designed for the Parthenon's sculptures and its form mirrors that of the Parthenon, in orientation and scale. Whereas in the British Museum, the frieze is facing inwards, split into segments that do not relate to their original positions, in the Parthenon Gallery, the positioning and orientation exactly replicates their locations on the Parthenon. A side effect of this is that it rapidly becomes apparent to every visitor exactly which of the panels are located in London.

The New Acropolis Museum will become the logical location for the display of all the surviving Parthenon sculptures. The question is no longer whether the Marbles return – but when. ■



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The alignment and dimensions of the Parthenon Gallery in the New Acropolis Museum (bottom) perfectly match those of the Parthenon on the Acropolis (top)

'I am absolutely convinced that the Marbles will come back'

Bernard Tschumi, Architect of the New Acropolis Museum; quoted in Wallpaper magazine - August 2008

Obituary: Zisis Bruce Blades, Head of the New Zealand Committee

Zisis Bruce Evengelos Blades: Born Wellington, 8 September 1937; married in 1967 to Kathy Papadimitriou; died Wellington, 26 June 2008, aged 70.

A civil engineer whose skills extended to sports field strategies and diplomacy.

His orbit of interests was wider than many people would shoulder, though to his family and his professional colleagues they were par for the course. For example, in May last year, Parliament decided that the Elgin Marbles, housed in the British Museum, belonged to Greece. The impetus for such recognition was the result of a petition from Mr Blades (wearing the hat of chairman of the New Zealand Parthenon Marbles Committee), and 1020 others.

Author of *Wellington's Hellenic Mile* detailing the history of Wellington's Greek-owned eateries, he wrote the book as a tribute to his father and elder brother Basil, whose toils, notably at the original Astoria restaurant, had helped pay for the university education of himself and his siblings.

He was awarded a Queens Service Medal in 2004 in recognition of his services to the community. Bruce Blades died as result of a heart attack while playing golf. He is survived by his wife, their son and daughter, and five grandchildren.

From: The Dominion Post, 12 July 2008, by Peter Kitchen.

Read the full obituary at:

<http://www.marblesreunited.org.uk/url/ssyp140> ■

Motion in New Zealand Parliament

On 24 May 2007 the Parliament of New Zealand unanimously passed the following motion:

"That this House joins its voice to that of other countries throughout the world and urges the British Government to support the return of the Parthenon (Elgin) Marbles to Greece, stressing the need for the collections of marbles in different locations to be reunited so the world can see them in their original context in relation to the Temple of Parthenon as an act of respect to one of the most significant monuments of Western heritage."

Athens UNESCO Conference

Thomas Dowson - Campaign Director, Marbles Reunited

In March 2008 the New Acropolis Museum in Athens hosted a two-day, international conference entitled "Return of Cultural Property to its Country of Origin", jointly organised by the Culture Sector of UNESCO and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture. This conference was the first in what is intended to be a series of such events organised by UNESCO and its Member States, with the aim of bringing together experts from around the World in the field of the return of cultural property to exchange views and experiences.

The first day was given over to presentations detailing six high profile case studies. These included the return to Zimbabwe from Germany of one of the iconic Great Zimbabwe soapstone birds, and the return of the Axum Obelisk from Italy to Ethiopia. Delegates from the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Louvre spoke of the reunification of the Neo-Sumerian statue; the head of which was once on display in New York while the body exhibited in Paris. The complete statue will move between the two institutions on a regular basis.

Sessions making up the second day were thematically focussed, covering ethical issues, mediation and cultural diplomacy, museums, sites and cultural context, and international cooperation and research. The various presentations making up these workshops were wide-ranging. An example, Colonel Matthew Bogdanos of the US Marine Corps, who led the investigation into Iraq's National Museum,

outlined his efforts to recover some of the 14,000 objects looted from the Iraq Museum in Baghdad in 2003, only 50% of which have been recovered.



Culture Minister of the Hellenic Republic; Mihalis Liapis opening the conference.

Perhaps the physical setting of the conference provided the most powerful presentation. Despite the conference's title, discussions about the reunification of the Parthenon sculptures were not included on the conference programme. But, in the New Acropolis Museum, the intended home of the reunified sculptures, at the base of the Acropolis and in sight of the Parthenon, there could only ever have been one issue on the delegates' minds. ■

Scotland and the Elgin Marbles Issue

John Huntley - Member, Marbles Reunited

Scots rarely speak about the Parthenon sculptures; even less about their repatriation. This may seem strange, considering that Elgin himself was a Scot of the finest pedigree; that the Marbles were originally destined for a Scottish location; and the passion with which the Scots pursued their 'Stone of Destiny' until its recent repatriation.

The truth is many are embarrassed; the actions of their fellow-countryman reddens their cheeks two centuries later. The extent of this was forcibly brought home to me when, on seeing my first letter to *The Scotsman* on the subject, a prominent Scottish academic chided me for it, saying that it was 'a problem for the English; it has nothing to do with us.' Hand wringing, or hand-washing?

To suggest that there is no mood in favour of repatriation in Scotland would be far from the truth. Devolution brought with it a flurry of motions in the new Parliament at Holyrood between 2000 and 2004, urging the return of the Marbles, one actually stating: "Just as the Scots received back the Stone of Destiny, so the people of Greece have the right to receive

back one of their most important artistic and cultural treasures.' A retired Scottish senior police officer, Tom Minogue has maintained a long campaign to bring the Marbles before the Scottish criminal courts.

Beyond this, the Scottish press never mentions the issue, perhaps reflecting, perhaps leading public opinion on the matter. What is depressing, however, is the stony silence on the subject from successive Scottish administrations since 1998 – including the present SNP-led administration of Mr. Salmond. I suspect that at this level, this is a reflection of more than mere national embarrassment.

Through letters and short articles in *The Scotsman* I have tried to persuade Scots that they do have an obligation, legal and moral, to determine, in the Scottish courts and under Scottish law whether or not Lord Elgin, and therefore the British Museum has ever acquired property rights over the Marbles. Since the British Museum's case for retention ultimately rests on ownership, such a determination by the Scottish courts would clear be a great advance. ■

Notes From a Marbles Reunited Member

After a lapse of several years I decided to visit Athens last summer to see the New Acropolis Museum. I was in the process of preparing a lecture about the so-called Elgin Marbles and needed some firsthand information and photographs. It was not open, but I insisted. They asked me in which capacity was I interested. I said 'I'm just a philhellene visiting from England.' And on that, every door opened!

I am half English and half Greek, an Anglo-Greek if you wish, and able to grasp both sides of the reunification argument. Through my father I am descended from a family that gave a museum, a hospital, the National Library, Athens College and much more to a newly liberated Greece. They were generous folk interested in the renaissance of Greek Culture after the long, dark Turkish night.

I am a thinker, but always a campaigner for justice, truth and fair play. Truth is important to me. I have since my very first visit to the Acropolis as a child wondered why we British refuse to admit the truth about the missing Parthenon sculptures. Artur Schoenhauer, the German philosopher, said "All truth passes through three stages. First, it is ridiculed. Second, it is violently opposed. Third, it is accepted as being self evident." My visit to the New Acropolis Museum last year and to the UNESCO Conference in March, convinced me that this truth is now absolutely self evident.

Alex Benakis -
Member, Marbles Reunited.

Campaign Update

Marbles Reunited have been busy in recent months on a variety of fronts.

In addition to the items mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, a successful re-launch event was held at the Houses of Parliament, attended by museum professionals, politicians & archaeologists. Guest speakers were Professor Pandermais (President of the Organisation for the Construction of the New Acropolis Museum), Dr Nigel Spivey (Cambridge University) & David Hill (Chair of the International Association for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures).

Submissions were made to the Department of Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee.

Members lectured to the Hellenic Society of Durham University.

Plans are afoot for bigger things in the coming months, including a new and updated website, further targeted events and a more focused campaign following on from the official opening of the New Acropolis Museum.

A new era for the Parthenon Marbles

Anthony Snodgrass - Chairman, BCRPM

For everyone involved with the issue of the Marbles there is now a feeling that we have reached a decisive juncture. The completion of the New Acropolis Museum is a reality. Perhaps the most important of the two-hundred-year-old debates over the sculptures is finally laid to rest: Greece at last has, beyond all argument, an exhibition space which outshines the present home of the London Marbles. The opening of the Museum will not be sprung on an unsuspecting world and left to speak for itself. No visitor can look at the building with-

There is an urgent need to revitalise the rather desultory cultural discussions between the two countries involved, Greece and Britain.

out realizing that everything about it - its location, the design of its narrative, its overriding concern with natural light - have been shaped with a clear eye on its future contents. The notion that those contents should be completed by reuniting the great masterpiece of art that will form the climax of the Museum, now has world-wide currency.

We cannot expect the event to produce immediate results. There are already signs of a tactical response from the opponents of reunification. There is an urgent need to revitalise the rather desultory cultural discussions between the two countries involved, Greece and Britain.

But meanwhile case after case has arisen, in Britain as elsewhere, where a new course has been followed, and agreement reached over the proper location for disputed artefacts or human remains through bilateral coopera-

tion, reciprocal cultural benefits or mediation: the very concept of 'ownership' of such sensitive materials is challenged. By our recruitment of the distinguished South African trial lawyer, George Bizos, to membership of the British Committee, we have acquired not only a wise counsellor, but a firm believer in these same methods.



The opening of the New Acropolis Museum will finally provide a suitable new home for the Elgin Marbles

I end with a quotation. 'What we are talking about is in which European museum of which rich European country are they [the Marbles] best displayed for maximum public benefit? That is the only question.' These are not our words, nor even those of a detached observer. They were spoken by the Director of the British Museum, Neil MacGregor in June 2003 (Financial Times Magazine). Five years later, the obvious answer to his question may no longer be the one he intended; but we can agree (for once) that that question itself is still 'the only one'. ■

Thoughts from the American Committee

Dennis Menos - Vice-President, The American Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures, Inc.

Speaking on behalf of the American Committee, I wish to assure our colleagues in Britain, that despite the arguments advanced by the British Museum, our collective efforts to ensure the reunification of the Parthenon sculptures are not, to quote the doomsday prophets, "a waste of time". We are absolutely convinced that before long, the Parthenon Sculptures now in London will be exhibited in the New Acropolis Museum alongside the sculptures Lord Elgin left behind in Athens. Reunification will happen!

Why the high level of confidence?

Simply stated: we live in a different world. The age of colonialism, when powerful nations could rob at will the art treasures of

foreign lands is long gone, and international museums, worldwide, are complying with judicial rulings directing that works of art illicitly removed be returned to their places of origin. A glorious new museum occupies the base of the Acropolis in Athens. When it formally opens its doors in the coming months, the British Museum will no longer be able to sustain its current excuses for retaining the Parthenon sculptures. Common sense will prevail, resulting not only in the return to Athens of the Parthenon sculptures and making the temple whole again, but also in the elimination of an unnecessary source of friction between the two centuries old allies, Greece and the United Kingdom. ■

Marbles With An Attitude

Wishing to add a different flavour to the ongoing reunification campaign, *Marbles with an Attitude* decided to employ a witty and humorous medium to promote further the cause. A series of light-hearted illustrations depict the characters of the Parthenon sculptures talking and expressing their feelings. The *Centaur*, for example, wants to run on the hills of Olympus, the *Caryatid* feels lonely without her sisters, *Selene's* horse is pondering where the Parthenon is. The cartoons are available on a range of merchandise: T-shirts and caps, mugs and tile coasters; the proceeds of which go towards the costs of printing leaflets for distribution at the British Museum.

HEY! THIS IS NOT THE WAY TO ATHENS



©2008 Lazaros Filippidis

Marbles with an Attitude is supported by a number of enthusiastic volunteers who regularly assist with the various activities that it undertakes. Events that have been organised so far include a number of flyer distributions outside the British Museum, presentations to interested groups and associations, as well as the screening of the film *Lord Elgin and Some Stones of No Value* by Christopher Miles. It also drafted the volunteers that helped in the running of the Marbles Reunited relaunch in 2007.

During the last event outside the British Museum the team distributed a large number of leaflets, engaged in thought-provoking conversations with the Museum's visitors, receiving a lot of positive feedback and many good wishes for the quick return for the sculptures.

For more information visit <http://marbles.apokrisi.net>

Lazaros Filippidis - Committee Member, Marbles Reunited

How You Can Help

If you would like to support us, please consider becoming a member of our campaign. Membership of Marbles Reunited is open to anyone, the only pre-requisites are that you must be over eighteen years old & support the return of the Parthenon marbles to Greece.

Marbles Reunited is entirely funded through voluntary donations. Please get in touch if you would like to contribute, have skills to offer, or have other suggestions.

Our website has further information on the campaign.

<http://www.marblesreunited.org.uk>

Review - The Parthenon Marbles

Chris Price - Vice Chairman, BCRPM

A review of Christopher Hitchens, *The Parthenon Marbles: the case for restitution*; published by Verso

This book is not a new one; but while the text is identical to previous editions, new introductions by Christopher Hitchens and Nadine Gordimer place it firmly in today's context. A new Acropolis Museum is about to be completed in Athens, tailor made to unite the Parthenon frieze which is currently split 50-50 between the British Museum and Athens. All the previous excuses – that the Marbles should stay in London because we are better at looking after archaeological objects than the Greeks – have collapsed.

More important, the cultural mobility atmosphere has changed beyond measure. Deals are now being done regularly about the return of cultural objects. The new museum in Athens is helping to exert the same sort of pressure to rectify historical cultural colonialism as Harold Macmillan's "wind of change" speech did, half a century ago, in ending political colonialism.

Powerful museums today can no longer afford to be complacent about their imperial loot. None of this is the museums' fault. The Parthenon Marbles were imperial spoils sanctioned by the British Parliament and Government two centuries ago. But for many years now politicians have begun to feel guilty about the past and have sought to use our cultural spoils diplomatically.

During the Second World War, Winston Churchill favoured returning the Marbles to Athens as a sort of Victoria Cross for Greek gallantry in fighting the Germans. (An unsentimental Attlee, who chaired cabinet committees during the War, scuppered the idea fast.) Macmillan toyed with the idea of swapping the Marbles for a truce in Cyprus with the EOKA, the National Organisation for Cypriot Combatants; and by the 1980s, Labour politicians in opposition went further. Both Michael Foot and Neil Kinnock promised to return the Marbles when Labour was back in government. It never happened because, like Attlee, Tony Blair did not do 'culture'. Over time he was persuaded to send Aboriginal objects back to Australia and signed up to an agreement over Holocaust-looted art. But he balked throughout at the ethical issue of returning stolen objects to their original owners.

So far as the Marbles are concerned, New Labour has used the British Museum trustees as an alibi for inaction. The trustees are worthy often anonymous business folk, gently sprinkled with a few celebrities, like Bonny Greer and Helena Kennedy. It would be nice if they would initiate a public debate; but even the normally voluble among them button their lips,

as if they have signed some Trappist oath to keep silent.

The British Museum is a very public institution with a very private governing body of trustees. So the one individual who has the ability to do something about all this is Neil MacGregor, the Museum's popular and effective director, who has recently signed up for another five years in Bloomsbury at a time when many were predicting he would be snapped up by the Met in New York. His current alibi for doing nothing so far – an insistence that nothing can happen until the Greeks should acknowledge 'ownership' – is a precondition calculated to humiliate the Greeks and maintain the status quo. He might just use his last years to sort out a settlement.

The agenda, however, has now become positive reunification rather than mere restitution. In 1806 Lord Elgin's agents only managed to saw off around half the frieze from

the architectural pieces of the temple on which they had been carved by Pheidias and his assistants two and a half millennia ago. The rest are now in the New Acropolis Museum in Athens, where they will be displayed in a stunning glass gallery lit by the Med-

iterranean sun alongside the Parthenon. The millions of tourists who will visit the Museum next year will not miss the eloquence of the empty spaces which the British Museum trustees still continue to 'own'.

The virtue of Hitchens's book is the detail with which he lays out the history of the theft and the subsequent arguments – from the debate in parliament about bailing out the (virtually bankrupt) Lord Elgin in the early 19th Century down to the former British Museum Director, Sir David Wilson, characterising any removal of the marbles to Greece as "cultural fascism".

Hitchens is adept as getting the prose just right and revealing an unpleasant English mix of aesthetic hubris and imperial realpolitik. The sub-text is that since we inherited the intellectual supremacy of Greece it is reasonable that we keep its heritage safe.

I have always felt since clambering over the Parthenon 55 years ago that the Marbles should go back; and I have always admired Hitchens's taut campaigning talent since we were fellow New Statesman journalists 40 years ago. Today Hitchens is often, wrongly, parodied as a political turncoat; his loyalty to this cause defies that accusation. When the Marbles do go back, he will have played a crucial role in their homecoming. ■

Hitchens is adept at getting the prose just right and revealing an unpleasant English mix of aesthetic hubris and imperial realpolitik

Marbles Reunited Appoints Campaign Director

The campaign for the return of the Elgin Marbles to Greece has moved up a gear with the appointment by Marbles Reunited of a full-time Campaign Director, Thomas Dowson, who will be based in the organisation's office in the West End of London. The appointment of Thomas was warmly welcomed by Andrew George MP, Chairman of Marbles Reunited, who says, "We have appointed a Campaign Director to up our profile and raise awareness of the issue."

Thomas trained as an archaeologist in South Africa at the University of Witwatersrand, where he obtained a first class Honours degree in Archaeology. He has curated a number of museum exhibitions and has held several research and teaching posts at universities in England and South Africa. Thomas has contributed to television documentaries in both countries and has a particular interest in the socio-politics of art and archaeology, including the repatriation of art, the exhibition of prehistoric and ancient arts, and heritage management. He has published numerous books and articles on these topics.

His previous experience includes challenging the Eurocentric agendas of art galleries in early 1990s South Africa, daring these institutions to include on their programmes exhibitions of southern African rock arts. As a result, the Johannesburg Art Gallery invited Thomas to curate a major exhibition on San hunter-gatherer art past and present. The exhibition was opened in August 1994 by the first ANC Minister for Culture and Education and representatives of San communities.

This issue of *Marbles Reunited News* was kindly sponsored by the Macedonian Society of Great Britain
www.macedonia.org.uk

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