



December 2005

The 'Reunification' Movement Goes Global

In late November four members of the British Committee - Professor Anthony Snodgrass, Eleni Cubitt, Christopher Price and Matthew Taylor - visited Athens to exchange information with the Greek Government, along with leading officials of 12 of the 15 'reunification' committees which now exist worldwide.

Countries with committees for the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles:

Great Britain	Italy
Australia	New Zealand
Belgium	Russia
Canada	Serbia
Chile	Spain
Cyprus	Sweden
France	USA
Germany	

They met the Greek president, Karolos Papoulias, the prime minister, Kostas Karamanlis, and the deputy minister of culture, Dr Petros Tatoulis, as well as colleagues from other committees operating around the world. All three confirmed that the Greek government's firm objective was a mutual agreement between it and the British government and between the British Museum and the Acropolis Museum under which the Parthenon sculptures currently in the British Museum would

be relocated to the new Acropolis Museum. Dr Tatoulis confirmed that this museum would be ready, contrary to the 'reproaches' of the British Museum, before the end of 2006. He made it clear that the Greek request for the marbles was not based on narrow perceptions of national boundaries or cultural property but rather, internationally, on the fact that the Parthenon and the Acropolis were part of the world cultural heritage.

A decision was also taken to set up new arrangements - details of which will be outlined in the next Newsletter - to improve international coordination, keep all committees informed of progress and widen enlightenment about the movement to re-unify the sculptures. Mr. David Hill, from the Australian committee - who worked tirelessly in London with the British Committee campaign in 2002 - has agreed to lead this initiative. In all the meetings in Athens, David Hill emphasised the need 'for negotiations at governmental level between the Greek and the British sides'.

In answer to a reporter's question, Professor Snodgrass said 'The British cultural establishment is changing its approach and, in tune with this, we have moved from an environment of confrontation to one of 'surrounding' the British Museum, by increasingly convincing the Museum's natural allies of the justice of our cause'.



British Committee chair, Professor Anthony Snodgrass and Greek deputy culture minister, Petros Tatoulis, with ministry officials and representatives of other 'reunification' committees worldwide on the Acropolis in Athens above the site of the new museum.

'Global warning: museums are custodians and not owners of objects'

Alissandra Cummins, current head of the International Council of Museums; quoted in *Museums Journal* - December 2005

The New Title of the Committee

The experience of our exhibitions, meetings and lectures over the past three years has brought out one very clear finding: that for the general public, here and abroad, it is the **reunification** argument, new to many people, which really cuts the ice. Viewers of our travelling 'Marbles Reunited' exhibition who have seen for the first time, 'virtually' reunited, the single reliefs and even single figures that are now in reality cut into two halves, separated by a distance of some 1500 miles from each other, can appreciate instantly the absurdity of the present disposition of the Parthenon sculptures. We owe to Elena Korika of the Greek Ministry of Culture

The time had come to drop from our title the word 'Restitution'

the original idea behind this exhibition. It is a further, telling fact that the reunification argument is the one element in our position that the British Museum never publicly addresses, presumably because the argument is unanswerable.

For these reasons the Committee agreed, a while ago, that the time had come to drop from our title the word 'Restitution', which anyway no longer reflected accurately the recent policy of Greek Governments, and to replace it with 'Reunification'. The logo 'Marbles Reunited', first designed for our 2003 campaign and carrying the same message, has also been incorporated into our letterhead.

A 'First' at UNESCO

On 10th February this year, the governments of the UK and Greece agreed a recommendation on the Parthenon marbles for the first time ever. After taking note of existing cooperation between the British Museum and Greek museums and of the construction of the Acropolis Museum, it invites the Director General of UNESCO to encourage further exchange of expert information in areas of understanding, research and museology and to assist in facilitating further meetings with a view to resolving the issue of the Parthenon Marbles, taking into account at the same time the sensitivities of both sides. It represents an important start to a cooperative approach by both governments.

Cultural Artefacts, Museums and the Law

Anthony Snodgrass - Chairman BCRPM

Many readers will have noticed the series of news items during 2005, which relate to the holding of cultural artefacts by museums in Britain, and more specifically by the British Museum. Apart from the revelations of the serial damage to pieces of the Parthenon sculptures in London over the years from 1961 to 1981, which were divulged in May under the Government's Freedom of Information Act, there have been two issues prominent enough to warrant government intervention since then.

First, there is the issue of human remains, where the Human Tissue Act of 2004 came fully into force this October, giving the British Museum and eight other national museums powers to move human remains out of their collections in response to the claims of indigenous peoples, particularly in Australia (the British Museum Act of 1963 notwithstanding).

Secondly, there has been the controversial Feldmann case, where the British Museum was found to have acquired, in 1946, four old master drawings which had seven years earlier been forcibly sequestered, under the Third

Reich, from the possession of a Jewish lawyer living in Prague who later died at Auschwitz. Here the relevant legislation is still pending, after the High Court's ruling, in May, that the return of the drawings would be in breach of the British Museum Act. But the Minister of State for Culture, David Lammy, has publicly expressed a resolve to see the necessary legislation through Parliament, as in the previous case.

These cases are relevant to our cause because they show that 'insuperable constitutional obstacles' can in fact be readily surmounted in special cases. I pass over other recent instances (the Benevento Missal, the Ethiopian Tabots, the Rosetta Stone) where it seems that the British Museum has adopted the solution of a longer- or shorter-term loan, and draw your attention to the Recommendation of the Intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO for the Return of Cultural Property which, in February 2005, was jointly signed by both the Greek and (remarkably) the British delegations (see box on page 1).



London to Athens by Bike

British Doctor, Chris Stockdale celebrates in front of the Parthenon, after spending twenty seven days cycling from the British Museum to the Acropolis in May to raise awareness about the Parthenon Marbles.

This is not his first undertaking in support of the marbles, having previously swum between the islands of Delos and Paros in 2000.

A New Home for the Parthenon Marbles



For many years, the British Museum has highlighted the lack of a suitable place in Athens to exhibit the Parthenon Marbles as a reason for retaining the sculptures in Britain.

In 2000, a design by Bernard Tschumi, a Swiss architect, was chosen for the New Acropolis Museum. Since the competition there have been many delays to the project for many different reasons, however, all previous political and contractual problems have now been resolved.

In October, Greece's deputy Culture Minister, Petros Tatoulis announced that the museum's completion date was now expected to be the end of 2006. The release of this statement coincides with an important phase of the project, where the foundations and basements (typically the part of a building project where delays are most likely) are now completed. The next phase is the installation of seismic protection pads to the tops of the columns, onto which the main building will sit.

It is expected that the concrete structure will be completed by March 2006, ready for the installation of the glazed facades.

The construction of the New Acropolis Museum is not only a complex project technically; it is also creating a space that will redefine the nature of Greece's archaeological museums. The building looks at and responds to its context, integrating with the archaeology of its site. It will draw in local people as well as tourists, through its feature of an extensive café area, which will have one of the best views of the Acropolis in Athens.

To prepare for the installation of artefacts to the new museum, the existing Acropolis Studies Centre adjacent to the site is hosting a series of exhibitions cataloguing people's reactions to different experimental methods of displaying items. The first exhibition, focussing on items collected from all over the Acropolis has studied many aspects of their display, from lighting to the highlighting of specific details and was extended for a number of months due to its popularity. The next exhibition will recreate the space beneath the museum, where the archaeological remains from the building's site will be viewed in-situ.

The new exhibition opens in March.



Professor Paul Cartledge's Lecture at Hamilton College, October 4th 2005

Evolution of the Parthenon means that our present image of it is quite different from its original state. Originally, the sculptures were painted various colours, not the white marble we know today. The figures were located outdoors, set against mountains and greenery.

Some Britons cite political, emotional and cultural reasons for keeping the Parthenon Marbles where they are. The British Museum gives legal grounds and states its right to hold them based on its record of stewardship.

Cartledge countered these arguments by responding that scholars presently study the Parthenon and its sculptures as a whole; therefore, the separation of its Marbles actually inhibits their scholarship. He also highlighted flaws in the British Museum's record of stewardship especially the 'cleaning' in the 1930s, which removed part of their original coating, the damage is still visible today.

Cartledge maintains the necessity of returning the Marbles to Greece; encouraging the mentality not of 'giving up' the Marbles, but of 'giving them back', to be housed in the New Acropolis Museum once it is completed. It appears, however, that the situation will not be resolved quickly because the retentionists' arguments are so firmly rooted in British cultural heritage.

'Reciprocal exchange is surely the only way forward,' Cartledge says. 'To be practical and pragmatic, it is a political issue that will determine the location of the Marbles.'

The Restored West Frieze of the Parthenon

Anthony Snodgrass

Since July last year, nearly all of the fourteen slabs of the Parthenon's West Frieze preserved in Athens have been on public view in the (existing) Acropolis Museum, after eleven years of painstaking conservation. Lord Elgin's agents, in a rare act of restraint, had left them on the Parthenon because their removal would have entailed damage to the architecture even more drastic than that which they already inflicted in the removal of the rest of the Frieze, and of



The left image shows slab 2 from the west frieze in the Duveen Gallery at the British Museum.

constant proclamations of the 'destruction' and 'utter wreckage' of the pieces which had in fact stayed there.

Now you can judge for yourself whether, according to the views of rival commentators, the West Frieze in Athens is in fact 'in better condition than the pieces in London', or whether 'anyone looking at it would be horrified at its poor state'. It is not an open-and-shut case: it depends on what you regard as more impor-



The right image shows slab 10 from the west frieze after restoration, in the Acropolis Museum in Athens.

tant. The smooth, matt, homogeneous whiteness of the London slabs will appeal more to people conditioned to expect that that is how Greek sculpture should look; specialists and some others will rate fidelity to the ancient appearance more highly. Here the Athens slabs, with their partially preserved patina, together with all the fine detail and even traces of the original colouring that it safeguards underneath, score heavily, despite the rain damage which they also display. It is the Athens pieces, beyond question, which offer a closer resemblance both to the original, and to how the London slabs must have looked before the drastic cleaning of 1938-39.

The importance of this step is that, for the first time in two hundred years, one can compare and judge for oneself the relative condition of the frieze slabs in London and of those in Athens. Until now, most people had little choice but to accept the entirely hypothetical assertions of British commentators (the British Museum staff included) that if Elgin and his rival antiquarians had left the Marbles in Athens they would have simply disappeared, and their

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The Marble Misconceptions of Ministers and Museums

Chris Price - Deputy Chairman BCRPM

Department of Culture, Media and Sport

Misconception *'The British Museum is independent. DCMS and its ministers cannot interfere with the British Museum by discussing the marbles with the Greek Government.'*

Truth Funding agreements between DCMS and the Treasury encourage ministers to interfere by linking government objectives with those of the institution. Ministers have now promised to interfere with the British Museum Act by amending it to allow the British Museum to send back Holocaust looted artefacts.

British Museum

Muddle *'The British Museum holds [the marbles] in trust for the nation and the world'* (BM website)

'The British Museum owns the marbles.' (Frequent assertion by BM directors)

Clarification Which statement is correct? Does the British Museum 'own the marbles or are they held in 'trust'? And how do its trustees go about holding the marbles in trust for 'the world'? The current president of ICOM states: "Museums are custodians and not owners of objects" (Museums Journal, December 2005)

Misconception *'Trustees of the British Museum hold its collections in perpetuity by virtue of the power vested in them by the British Museum Act (1963)'* (BM website)

Truth No parliamentary statute enacts anything in 'perpetuity'; UK parliaments have sovereign powers to amend any act of parliament any time. They are currently proposing to amend the British Museum Act (1963)

Lectures and Publications

Invitations continue to arrive, from across the globe, for the Chairman and others to lecture on the issue of the Marbles. A lecture at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI) in October 2004 was followed by another in the Library of Congress at Washington in March 2005 and, next day, a seminar on the 'Declaration on the importance and value of universal museums' (signed by 18 self-styled members of that category) at the National Gallery of Art in the same city. American audiences, here and on earlier occasions at New York and St. Louis, have shown a similar, overwhelmingly favourable response to that of Australians at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, earlier in 2004. Meanwhile, Professor Paul Cartledge has also lectured in Hamilton, NY this October (see sidebar on page 2).

In this country, the Chairman and Matthew Taylor accepted invitations to speak at the Bristol Architectural Centre, and the Chairman to address the Scottish Hellenic Society in Glasgow and later in Aberdeen, the Edinburgh College of Art and the Trinity College Archaeological Society in Dublin next April, not to mention talks to various Cambridge audiences.

Meanwhile, the following publications by the Chairman, have appeared in recent months:

'The Parthenon Marbles as an archaeological issue', in *Material engagements: studies in honour of Colin Renfrew* (eds. N. Brodie and C. Hills, McDonald Institute, University of Cambridge, 2004), pp. 115-24.

'What do the Parthenon Sculptures embody?' (Research into Practice Conference, University of Hertfordshire, tinyurl.com/am5u2, November 2004).

'The Parthenon Marbles as an architectural issue' (*Medelhavsmuseet: Focus on the Mediterranean* (Stockholm) 2 (2005), pp. 151-56.



What Has Happened to Parthenon 2004?

In the run up to the Athens Olympics, Parthenon 2004 ran a publicly prominent campaign for the return of the marbles, involving celebrities & Olympic athletes who supported reunification.

Parthenon 2004 has not disappeared, but will reconvene under a new name early next year.

Watch this space for announcements...

The Parthenon marbles in the 21st century

Chris Price

The change of emphasis from restitution to cooperation – outlined by Anthony Snodgrass above – has already had two consequences. First, it has induced real awareness both in government and amongst the population at large not only about the issue of where the marbles should be located but also about the purposes and the context of museums and the objects within them. It has also helped create awareness of another reality – that the 200-year-old argument over the marbles always has been concerned with acute perceptions of *cultural* injustice, which are now beginning to reappear and complement perceptions of the economic injustices which led to the successful demands by colonial peoples for national independence after the second world war.

These perceptions represent a worldwide longing for the repatriation of history. They are already creating a tide of political and economic cooperation that looks likely to gather strength throughout the 21st century, in a new, more benign *cultural* context. Because they emerge not from campaigns by economic or political interests but from peoples and individuals worldwide – some yearning for venerated objects to come home from abroad and others feeling unease about disputed objects, the fruits of imperial victories, displayed within their own museums – they have been slow to impact on governments and museums. However, they are now increasingly doing so.

There will however be difficulties facing a new environment of international museum cooperation. There will partly centre around the art 'market' and how it can cope with voluntary cooperation over objects customarily defined in terms of monetary value. In the 19th and early 20th century, this art market played a global role in the civilisation and re-education of the new moneyed elites in the United States of America. (Lord Duveen, the donor of the British Museum's Parthenon galleries, was brilliantly successful in meshing the glut of artistic objects in an economically declining Europe with the cultural aspirations of the untutored US super-rich.) The traditions of the market have made it an elite rather than a popular pastime. Charitable contributions to culture in the US, for example, come overwhelmingly from the middle and upper classes – while those to sport and religion come from the lower income groups. If international governmental and public museum cooperation is to succeed, we now need a completely new breed of cultural entrepreneurs, skilled in the arts of political as well as financial and economic negotiation. Some of these exist already as private consultancies; others will be found among the new breed of museum directors – who will have to be careful to neither replicate the implicit colonial hegemonies of the past nor adopt a paternalistic attitude towards requests for the return of museum objects.

Two recent developments have sought to disentangle strands of this issue. A packed session at this year's Museums Association Conference examined ownership and context in the framework of international cooperation. Professor Norman Palmer of UCL, who has chaired a range of governmental committees on the issue, pronounced 'ownership' of objects by museums and individuals an inexplicit issue at law that has not been crucial in current cooperation agreements and need not be in future ones. Helen Wilkinson, the policy officer of the Museums Association, said that while 'context' was an issue that with which many museums struggled, some had solved it by placing objects in different contexts and at different times. She emphasised that it was an issue on which all parties had a legitimate view – the museum where the objects were; the country and people where the objects originated; and the audiences who saw the objects. It was one on which no one government or museum should be the final arbiter. Elena Korika, the international head of the Greek Culture Ministry, described a range of current cooperation agreements that had worked well. She said that when restitution took place, it should involve joint responsibility between the original museum in which it had been kept and its new location.

The consensus of the meeting was that governments should be involved in international museum cooperation alongside international institutions like UNESCO and the EU; that cooperation over the display of museum collections was a growing phenomenon; and that it was a more productive route to the solution of disputes than demands for 'restitution'.

The second phenomenon has involved two recent articles in the *Art Newspaper* – both by very senior figures in the influential international cultural consulting firm, AEA. One by Maxwell Anderson asserted that the British Museum, while seeking an international role, has 'yet to articulate a concerted approach to restitution claims that rests not merely on British law but on a moral footing no less sure than that applied to future acquisitions' – an area in which he had praised the BM's policy; the other by Adrian Ellis (echoing Professor Palmer) asserted that museums 'whose approach consists primarily of a legal defence, will lose the battle for public sympathy and, in the aftermath, be forced to accede to political demands regardless of the weak legal standing of those claims.' The task of the British Committee, over the next twelve months which will lead up to the completion of the Acropolis Museum in Athens, will be to build on this platform of wide ethical support to encourage voluntary cooperation between British and Greece and between the British and the Acropolis Museums.

'Universal Museums' in Disarray

Three years ago some of the Western world's most prestigious museums defended their practice of holding on to contested objects on the grounds of their unique mission – to display a wide cultural panorama. It is a mission that is becoming harder to defend. A former Getty curator is on trial in Italy on criminal charges of conspiring to import illegally excavated antiquities; the New York Met is discussing the fate of allegedly looted objects in its own collection with the Italian authorities; and the US courts have become more and more willing to take account of the law in the countries of origin in dealing with provenance disputes.

Neil MacGregor, the British Museum director, defended the 'universal' mission to the *New York Times* on November 17th by rechristening it as 'internationalist'. He attacked the 'nationalist perspective' of those countries demanding restitution of objects. 'There is a very real tension, he said, between the belief that great culture is a shared inheritance of everybody and the view that it is the particular inheritance of one modern political entity.' Former imperial powers, however, are suspect converts to this interpretation of internationalism. Voluntary international cultural cooperation takes two to tango; and it has had an increasingly impressive track record in recent years for dispute resolution. It is in this 'cooperation' context that we believe there is now every prospect in the years to come of a UK / Greek deal on the Parthenon Marbles.

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