



# THE PARTHENON SCULPTURES

NEWSLETTER NO. 7

THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE FOR THE  
REUNIFICATION OF THE PARTHENON SCULPTURES

MARCH 2009

## NEWS BREAK, as we go to press...

Officials in Athens report that the opening ceremony of the New Acropolis Museum will be held on June 20<sup>th</sup>.

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## DIRECTOR MacGREGOR 's SELF-SERVING PR CAMPAIGN

By Michael J. Reppas  
President and Legal Advisor of ACRPS, Inc.

**M**uch ado has been made of the success of Neil MacGregor, director of the British Museum, for his promotion of the museum and its collection. MacGregor has been called "the greatest museum boss in the world," a "clever fox," and in retentionist circles, he is considered a visionary for establishing how international museums should be promoted to the world. In my opinion, MacGregor deserves the most applause not for his PR savvy in promoting his museum (that's his job, after all), but rather for his fantastic ability to consistently avoid the most fundamental question facing the museum: *whether or not the pieces in the collection were legitimately acquired to begin with!* For our Committee, obviously, the concern lies predominantly with the Parthenon Sculptures, but to a plethora of other countries also looted in the hey-days of 18<sup>th</sup> Century Colonial England, MacGregor's claim that the museum collection is all about "telling the truth of mankind's history" rings very hollow to say the least.

We can all understand, MacGregor's conduct and goals, but we cannot forget (nor let others forget) that the new British promotion does not legitimize the manner in which the collection was originally acquired. Far too many people are being swayed by MacGregor and the PR firms engaged by the British Museum, who are attempting to turn the debate away from the questions of **acquisition and rightful ownership**, and instead only upon "universality" and "the common heritage of mankind." It is too self-serving and convenient to address only the "truth" of the pieces as achievements of mankind, while ignoring the "truth" of their being looted and dubiously acquired by the museum. On behalf of our Committee, I urge you all to remind everyone engaged in this debate that we do not accept the British claim that they "own" the Parthenon Sculptures, for **they do not**.

## THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE NEW ACROPOLIS MUSEUM (AFNAM)

**W**e are pleased to announce the establishment of **AFNAM**, whose mission is to raise awareness about the newly built state-of-the-art New Acropolis Museum in Athens. The new organization will sponsor, among others, public outreach and educational programs, promote educational and scholastic exchanges, encourage the study of the museum's collections, and organize scholarly symposia. It will also seek to enhance the debate on cultural issues and the restitution of the Parthenon Sculptures.

The Honorable Michael S. Dukakis and Mr. George Stephanopoulos, as honorary co-chairs, head an impressive list of distinguished Americans who have joined AFNAM's Honorary Committee. The Board of Directors is headed by Pantelis Michalopoulos, Chairman, and Connie Mourtouपालas, President. Michael Reppas, our President and Legal Advisor, serves on AFNAM's Advisory Committee. We wish the American Friends well in the pursuit of their mission and look forward to working with them. They may be contacted at [afnamus@gmail.com](mailto:afnamus@gmail.com) or at [info@afnamus.org](mailto:info@afnamus.org)

## MEET OUR NEWEST INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

**W**e are very pleased to announce that the **Swiss Committee for the Return of the Parthenon Marbles**, the London-based **Marbles Reunited**, and the **Finish Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Sculptures** have recently joined the **International Association for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures**. The addition of these organizations to the ranks of the International Association brings its membership to 17 committees from 16 nations.

The expansion of the Association since its creation in 2005 is a powerful reminder of the widespread and growing support in Britain and around the world for the Parthenon Sculptures to be returned home. The Association has now member organizations in Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Canada, Cyprus, Finland, Italy, Germany, New Zealand, Russia, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA. In Britain, two separate organizations -

**-The British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles and Marbles Reunited** -- pursue the goal of reunification. Each runs its own campaign but works closely with the other, with the two organizations complementing each other by targeting different aspects of the issue. For additional information concerning any of the above organizations, please refer to their individual websites, where available, or to that of the International Association at [www.parthenoninternational.org](http://www.parthenoninternational.org)

## **NOT THAT OLD MYTH AGAIN!**

### **EDITORIAL**

By Dennis Menos

**H**istorians generally agree that Lord Elgin rarely showed interest for the arts. As a soldier and career diplomat in the service of His Majesty, his life's focus was with advancing the Crown's interests.

But now comes Elgin's great great great grandson, Alastair Bruce, to proclaim that his grandfather was "passionate about antiquities and wanted to preserve them from the destruction they faced."

Elgin's alleged passion about antiquities is such an old myth -- one that has been repeatedly debunked -- one cannot help but wonder why the grandson chose to raise it at this time. Could it be, because of concern that completion of the New Acropolis Museum will finally compel the British government to do what is right with the sculptures unlawfully held in London?

The world is familiar with the events that led Lord Elgin to plunder the Parthenon of its best preserved art -- the so-called Ottoman firman that did not exist and the generous bribes to the Ottoman authorities that allowed the Elgin crew on the Acropolis to work unimpeded. The Parthenon Sculptures were not removed from the temple "to preserve them from destruction." They were taken by Lord Elgin for his personal gain.

Time has come for Alastair Bruce and others, who might still believe in the old myth, to turn their sights to the newly completed New Acropolis Museum on the foothills of the Acropolis and the opportunity it offers to finally undo the centuries-long wrong. The Parthenon, that unique and preeminent building of Western civilization, must become whole again. The time is NOW. The world is patiently waiting.

**VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ESTABLISHING PARTHENON COMMITTEES IN SELECT U.S. CITIES, TO RECRUIT MEMBERS AND PLAN PUBLIC INFORMATION EVENTS. Please contact Michael Reppas, ACRPS, Inc., President and Legal Advisor at (305) 822-8422, or by E-Mail, [Reppas@ReppasLaw.com](mailto:Reppas@ReppasLaw.com)**

## **THE VATICAN RETURNS A PARTHENON FRAGMENT AND MAKES A PROMISING SUGGESTION**

**F**ollowing the example of museums in Palermo and Heidelberg, and of private donors in Sweden and Austria, the Vatican returned to Greece in November 2008 a fragment in its possession from the Parthenon frieze. The fragment depicts the head of a man carrying a tray of sweets as an offering to Goddess Athena during a religious procession.

Although the returned fragment came as a "loan" and only for a year, Athens enthusiastically welcomed the gesture. "This is a very important event," commented the then Greek Culture Minister, Michalis Liapis, "and an example for others to follow and eventually restore the unity of the Parthenon." He was referring of course to the British Museum where the great majority of the surviving Parthenon art is on display, as well museums in France, Germany, Denmark and the Vatican where small collections of Parthenon sculptures can be found.

The "loan" of the Vatican fragment might be renewed for an extended period, assured the Greek authorities the head of the Vatican Museum's department of classical antiquities. Two additional small fragments of the Parthenon sculptures that the museum owns might also be lent to Greece at a later date.

Within days of the return of the Parthenon fragment, Francesco Buranelli, a Vatican official offered a promising suggestion for resolving the Parthenon Sculptures' reunification issue: Designate the Parthenon Gallery of the New Acropolis Museum, he suggested, as a Pan-European entity; place a British Director in charge; and assemble in the Gallery all surviving Parthenon art presently dispersed in several European museums. The arrangement would bring together a heritage that belongs to all of mankind, while also allow the participating nations to maintain ownership of their holdings on display. Under Buranelli's proposal, the Parthenon Pan-European entity would be under the jurisdiction of a EU body and enjoy a form of extraterritoriality similar to that of embassies.

The suggestion offers attractive features. Still, it does require close scrutiny by the nations involved, especially Greece. Why the requirement, for instance, for a British Director and not a "rotating Director" from among the participants of the joint venture? Would participation in the proposed Pan-European entity be voluntary? Could a participating nation abruptly withdraw its sculptures? Would Greece agree to the display in the new entity sculptures that it considers to be its own, but whose ownership is claimed by foreign museums?

Congratulations to Alexandros Haralambides of our Board for his appointment as the new President of the American Hellenic Institute, replacing Gene Rossides.

## EARLY DAY MOTION IN PARLIAMENT

On November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2008, Member of Parliament Edward O'Hara introduced an *Early Day Motion*, which was cosigned by 37 other members of the British Parliament. The text of the Motion is as follows:

“That this House notes the forthcoming opening of the Acropolis Museum in Athens in the spring of 2009; congratulates the Greek government on the completion of a truly world-class new home for the treasures of the Acropolis hill; recognizes the unique beauty of the top floor gallery of the museum, built to the same size and orientation as the Parthenon itself and designed specifically for the display of the surviving Parthenon sculptures as an artistic unit and in the best possible location and light with the Parthenon itself in full simultaneous view; regrets the fact that as long as the surviving Parthenon sculptures are kept separately in the British Museum and in Greece they cannot be viewed in this optimum context; and calls on the Government to encourage and facilitate the opening of discussions between the British Museum and the Greek authorities with the purpose of the reunification of the Parthenon sculptures in Athens with responsibility for their display, curation and study being shared between the British Museum and the New Acropolis Museum in accordance with the best contemporary museum practice.”

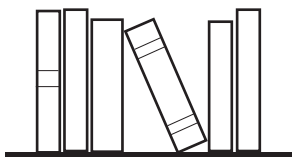
Thank you MP O'Hara! (Ed.)

## BOOKS OF INTEREST

Two highly acclaimed recent books, dealing with the issue of antiquities removed from their places of origin, make for interesting reading. Persons who wish to acquire a greater insight into this admittedly very complex issue may wish to consult :

James Cuno's, **Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage**. Cuno is Director of the Chicago Art Institute and, understandably, is opposed to the return of removed artifacts to their countries of origin.

Sharon Waxman's, **Loot: The Battle Over the Stolen Treasures of the Ancient World**, which includes details on Lord Elgin's pillage of the Parthenon, highlights of his personal life, and intrigues (at that time) by French collectors for acquiring Greek art. Not surprisingly, Waxman favors the return to Athens of the Parthenon Sculptures now in the British Museum.



## RESTORATION OF THE PARTHENON

*(We are grateful to Ms. Maria Ioannou, Director of the Acropolis Restoration Service, for providing us with much of the information included in this article).*

During its long history, the Parthenon has served as a temple to Goddess Athena, as a Christian Church, and after the Ottoman occupation of Athens, as a Mosque. Each change in occupancy brought forth alterations to the temple; as did damage caused by earthquakes. The Parthenon sustained its greatest loss, however, when a shell exploded on its East Façade during the Venetian siege of the Acropolis in 1687, and also later when Lord Elgin claiming authority which he did not have, proceeded to ravage the building, removing its best preserved art and transferring it to London.

Although major attempts at the Parthenon's restoration were undertaken as early as the 1820s, when Greece gained its independence from Ottoman rule – especially during the 1896-1902 and 1923-1933 time frames -- it was not until 1984 that the current restoration program got underway.

Priority was given to the removal and transfer to the Acropolis Museum of 14 of the original metopes and of the last remaining sections of the Panathenaic frieze, still in situ on the monument. Removal of the metopes necessitated that segments of the pediment and entablature that secured them in place first be dismantled. Similarly, architrave blocks that supported the frieze were removed, dismantled and repaired before resetting them in their original positions. The removed metopes and panels of the frieze, incidentally, have since been cleaned by a prototype method of laser cleaning that utilizes ultraviolet and infrared radiation. The process preserves all details on the original relief and ensures for best aesthetic results.

The current focus of the Parthenon's restoration program is with the North Façade, which sustained much of the damage during the explosion of 1687. As a result of this explosion, numerous fractured pieces from the central section of the North Pteron lay around the monument during many years of Ottoman rule. Unfortunately, early Greek efforts to restore them did not prove successful. At times, fragments were mismatched, iron reinforcements were used to secure them together, and missing parts of marble were replaced with reinforced concrete. To undo this damage, 230 members have been or currently are being dismantled and their rusted iron reinforcements and concrete fillings removed. After structural restoration, the drums of the columns and other members of the entablature are being reset to their correct positions. Completion of this phase of work is scheduled for the summer of 2009.

## **MEDIA COVERAGE ON THE NEW ACROPOLIS MUSEUM**

(We are continuing to include in this issue comments on the New Acropolis Museum appearing in influential British and other international media).

...The Greeks have long wanted their Marbles back, but the building of the new Acropolis Museum finally gives them the physical authority ...The museum is a provocation, an enticement, a tease. Tschumi {the museum's architect} has done everything other than daub slogans on the exterior walls to say to the world at large: "The Parthenon Marbles belong here, next to the building from which they were taken."

...{The Parthenon Gallery} is flooded with natural light... the frieze looks proudly outward, as it did for centuries on its parent building, rather than brooding inward as it does in Bloomsbury. This, be sure of it, is architecture as propaganda...

(Peter Aspden, FinancialTimes.com, November 29, 2008)  
<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/bd9e9518-bcdc11dd-af5a-0000779fd18c,dwp uuid+0c6e86ce-a>

...The plan echoes that of Acropolis itself – the visitor will ascend through the building as if climbing the steep slopes of the hill, passing through halls filled with sculpture from the archaic temple of Athene, before reaching the very apex, where the Parthenon sculptures themselves will be displayed in a large glass-walled hall from which visitors will be able to enjoy wonderful views of Pheidias' great temple...the building has been designed with the express programme, according to Tschumi, of "being good enough to make the Brits want to give the Elgin Marbles back."...

(Charlotte Higgins, The Guardian, December 3, 2008)  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culturecharlottehigginsblog/2008/dec/03/architecturemuseum>

...On the new museum's first level, raised glass floors give visitors a view of excavated sixth-century BC ruins below; on the second, the Archaic gallery is filled with freestanding korai (ancient statues of female figures); and the third is a crowning box, built to the same dimensions as the Parthenon, in which the Athenian-held sections of the frieze are displayed with reproductions – placeholders for the British Museums portions.... But the museum's real proof of success is yet to come. "It has to convince the world that the Elgin Marbles should come back," Tschumi says, "and I believe it will."

(Eleni Gage, CNN.com/travel, October 28, 2008)  
<http://www.cnn.com/2008/TRAVEL/getaway/8/10/28/acropolis.museum>

## **ETHIOPIA IS SEEKING THE RETURN OF ITS ARTIFACTS**

**G**reece is not alone in asking for the return of its artifacts (i.e the Parthenon Sculptures) kept in London. Ethiopia has similarly gone on record, as demanding the return of some of its "looted" treasures held in British museums.

The Ethiopian request, according to newspaper accounts, was made early last year by that nation's President and includes an appeal for the return of an 18-carat gold royal crown, several hundred priceless manuscripts, and nine wooden altar slabs of great religious significance to the people of Ethiopia. The artifacts, removed from Ethiopia by British forces in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century after their victory over the Ethiopian forces at Magdala, represent much of that nation's cultural heritage.

An earlier request by Ethiopia concerned the remains of an orphan prince who had been spirited from his homeland by British forces at the end of the same battle and are buried now at the crypt of St. George's Chapel at Windsor Castle.

### **NOTICE**

The American Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures, Inc.(ACRPS) is the only IRS recognized Not-For-Profit organization in the United States, formed expressly to educate the American public about Greece's most acclaimed Parthenon Sculptures now in London and to demand their return to Athens. We encourage all supporters of this noble cause to join us. Contributions and membership fees are considered by IRS as charitable donations and are fully deductible. Payment of membership fees and/or donations should be made to Alexandros Alexandrou, Treasurer, at 12201 St. James Road, Potomac MD 20854. Please make checks payable to ACRPS, Inc.

**THE PARTHENON SCULPTURES** is the official Newsletter of the American Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures, Inc. Dennis Menos at **DMenos@msn.com** is editor; design and layout by Cimon Psira at **ameragreek@verizon.net**

**PLEASE CONSIDER JOINING OUR COMMITTEE AND HELP US RETURN TO GREECE THE PARTHENON SCULPTURES NOW IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM. MEMBERSHIP FORMS FOR THIS PURPOSE MAY BE FOUND IN OUR WEBPAGE: [www.parthenonsculptures.org](http://www.parthenonsculptures.org)**