

# Greek government unveils new home for Elgin Marbles

*Fresh demands for the return of the Elgin Marbles are accompanying the launch next month of the £115 million Acropolis Museum, which has a reserved space for the world's most famous piece of classical statuary.*

*The 270,000 sq ft museum is being established as a home for the 160-metre long strip of marble that adorned the Parthenon until 1801. The museum, which stands just 400 metres from the Parthenon, opens in June – three decades after the building was first proposed.*

Antonis Samaras, the minister for culture and athletics said: "The opening of the Acropolis Museum is a major world event. June 20th will be a day of celebration for all civilised people, not for Greeks alone. I want the Britons especially to consider the Acropolis Museum as the most hospitable place for them."

Greeks hopes have been emboldened by the return to Athens from Germany and Sweden of a host of treasures, including some taken from the Acropolis itself. The frieze adorned the Parthenon until 1801 when Lord Elgin, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, removed it, along with a host of other treasures when Athens was under enemy occupation.

They were sold by Lord Elgin to the British Museum for £35,000 after Parliament voted in 1816 to acquire them for the nation and were vested "in perpetuity" in the trustees of the British Museum. The Greek Government disagrees.

Mr Samaras is the successor to the late Melina Mercouri, whose strident claims for the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles made headlines more than 20 years ago.

The language today is more restrained, yet more confident. "I, along with every other Greek, wants the marbles reunited, just as Melina did," he said. "The argument against was that there was no deserving museum in Greece to house them. Now, this argument is off the table – it cannot stand anymore. The Acropolis Museum was Melina's dream, and now we see it standing."

Greece retains 36 of the 115 panels in the Parthenon frieze. With the reproduction in its glass-walled upper gallery of the exact dimensions of the Parthenon temple, the building allows the marbles to be represented in their original configuration and context, in a way that could never be done in the British Museum.

The Greeks have also taken heart from polls that have shown that the majority of Britons support the return of the Marbles.

The fight for the return of the Marbles has led to committees being set up in 14 countries to lobby for their return.

The gallery offers a simultaneous view of the Parthenon itself, the extraordinary temple to the goddess Athena and, in the view of many, the greatest classical building in the world.

Constructing a vast new museum in one of the world's most ancient cities was not easy. When archaeologists



*A Sections of the Parthenon Marbles Photo: PA*

began work they uncovered a 5th century BC settlement. The response of the architectural team of Bernard Tschumi from New York and Michael Photiadis from Greece was to build the elegant modern structure above the archaeological diggings. The site, which is still being excavated, can be seen by visitors through the museum's glass floor.

Neil MacGregor, the director of the British Museum, has rejected overtures from Athens and said that it is the museum's duty to "preserve the universality of the marbles, and to protect them from being appropriated as a nationalistic political symbol".

If the British Museum, which says it is barred by its constitution from handing back its treasures, were obliged to return the marbles, the floodgates might open on other restitution claims. Nigeria, for instance, wants the return of the Benin bronzes, looted by Britain in 1897. The 270,000 sq ft museum is being established as a home for the 160-metre long strip of marble that adorned the Parthenon until 1801. The museum, which stands just 400 metres from the Parthenon, opens in June – three decades after the building was first proposed.

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## Jordan and Peter marriage split

Cypriot singing star Peter Andre is to split with his glamour model wife, Jordan, reports Sky News this evening.

Andre married Jordan, whose real name is Katie Price, in 2005, after meeting in the Australian jungle while appearing on the British ITV show, I'm A Celebrity...Get Me Out of Here.

According to Jordan's management company, the couple "have both requested that the media respect their families' privacy at this difficult time."

Andre, 36, was born to Greek Cypriot parents and is a regular visitor to the island.

He and Jordan have two children, Junior, aged three, and Princess Tiamii, who is nearly two.

Jordan, 30, also has another son, six-year-old Harvey, from a previous relationship.

Together, they starred in a string of fly-on-the-wall shows about their marriage and hosted their own chat-show.

## Somali Pirates Release Greek-Owned Ship

A maritime official says Somali pirates have released a Greek-owned ship captured in late March.

Andrew Mwangura of the East Africa Seafarers Assistance Program said the MV Nipayia was freed late Saturday, and that all of its crew was safe. He said it is not clear whether a ransom was paid.

The Panama-flagged ship was hijacked March 25 off Somalia's southern coast.

Meanwhile, 11 Somalis have been charged with piracy in a Kenyan court.

The Somalis were captured by the French Navy in the Indian Ocean last week, and handed over to Kenyan authorities for prosecution.

They appeared in a Mombasa court Monday, where they were accused of possessing weapons and attacking a French warship, the Nivose.

The Nivose is part of the European Union's anti-piracy naval force off Somalia. Despite this presence, and that of other foreign warships, Somali pirates have continued to hijack commercial vessels for ransom.