

# Australian author wins Commonwealth prize

Australian author Christos Tsiolkas has won Best Book in the 2009 Commonwealth Writers Prize.

The announcement was made this evening at the Auckland Writers and Readers Festival.

Tsiolkas won the leading literary award for *The Slap*, which centres around a man slapping a child who does not belong to him at a suburban barbeque.

The Melbourne author received a \$20,000 prize and will meet the Queen.

The Greek-Australian has something he wants to ask her.

"I can tell the Queen to give the Parthenon marbles back to Greece," he said.

Mohammed Hanif from Pakistan won the best first book award for his novel *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*.

Tsiolkas's tale of domestic life beat South African writer Mandla Langa, Britain's Jhumpa Lahiri and Marina Endicott from Canada to the prestigious literary prize, and followed his win in the South East Asia and South Pacific category in March.

Chair of the judging panel Nicholas Hasluck said *The Slap* was "sure to challenge readers and provoke debate".

"Offering points of view from eight different characters, it taps into universal tensions and dilemmas around family life and child-rearing. This book is sure to challenge readers and provoke debate," he said.

Previous Australian winners of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize include Peter Carey, Murray Bail, David Malouf and Kate Grenville.



Tsiolkas is also in the running for the Miles Franklin Award, to be announced in June.

## Greece spars with Skopje over giant Alexander statue

GREECE heaped scorn overnight on plans by Skopje to erect a gigantic equestrian statue of Alexander the Great, the famed warrior-king of antiquity that both countries claim as their own. "From the information we have, the size, height and cost of this statue are inversely proportional to seriousness and historic truth," Greek foreign ministry spokesman George Koumoutsakos said.

The 22-metre statue of the ancient king of Macedon is to be placed on the main square of Skopje at an estimated cost of 4.5 million euro (\$8.08 million), local authorities said.

Greece currently has a 6.15-metre statue of Alexander adorning the waterfront of its northern city Thessaloniki.

It also has plans to erect another statue in Iraq, on the site of one of Alexander's victories over the Persians at the Battle of Gaugamela in 331 BCE.

Born in Pella, modern-day Greece, Alexander conquered the Persian Empire and much of the world known to ancient Greeks before dying in Babylon in 323 BC at the age of just 32.

In recent years, Greece has faced a challenge from the former Yugoslav republic over the spiritual rights to Alexander's heritage and has been at pains to stress that the ancient Macedonians were Greek.

But the tiny Balkan nation, which became independent after the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, has staked its own claim as it lies on what was once part of ancient Macedonia.

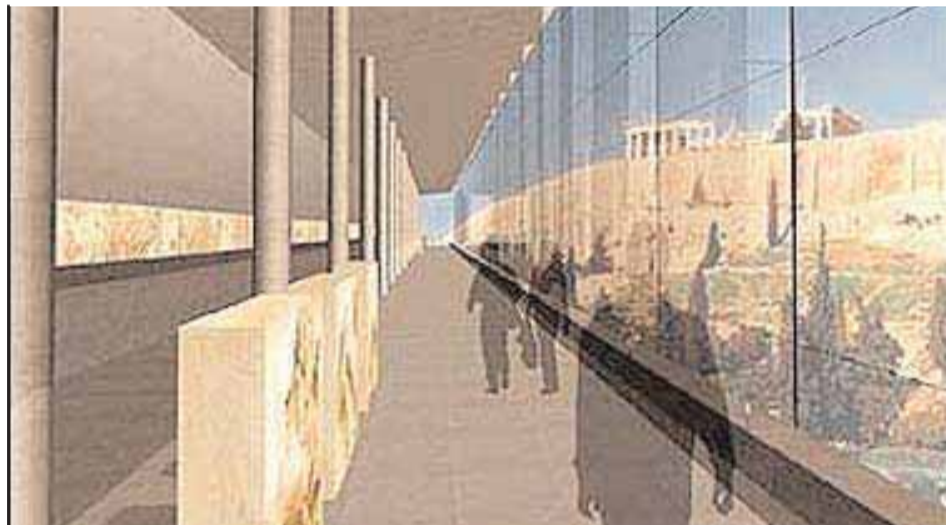
Greece has also refused to recognise its neighbour under its constitutional name of Macedonia because that is also the name of the northern Greek province of Macedonia.

United Nations-led negotiations on the issue have proved fruitless ever since, and Athens has used its veto to prevent Skopje becoming a member of NATO.

# "The Age" in favor of Marbles return to Greece

*In an article in Australia's "The Age" newspaper entitled "Britain runs out of excuses for keeping Elgin Marbles" underlines that the opening of the New Acropolis Museum will minimize the British Museums argument that it is the best place to house the marbles that were removed from the Acropolis by Lord Elgin.*

According to the article, for two centuries, Britain has held on to a collection of ancient treasures from Greece, defying the latter's moral claim to the sculptures known as the Elgin Marbles. Even that popular name, after the British ambassador who took them from the fabled Parthenon temple in Athens, singularly fails to acknowledge the place of the statuary in Greek heritage. Pericles commis-



sioned the series of sculpted panels in the 5th century BC to commemorate his victory against Persia. They did so for 2300 years at the Parthenon until Lord Elgin, ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, came along in 1801, when Athens was under enemy occupation, and took them.

Since 1816, when the British

Museum bought the statuary for £35,000 after Parliament voted to acquire them for the nation, Britain has played the role of custodian, preserving these treasures for posterity. Had Britain been occupied and the treasures of Buckingham Palace removed across the channel, one doubts the British would ever have seen this as anything but looting, however the "custodians" dressed it up. In any case, the marbles were damaged by attempts to "clean" them in the 1930s.

Next month, the opening of the Acropolis Museum, with reserved space for the missing works that exactly matches the Parthenon temple dimensions, will further weaken Britain's tenuous claim to be best placed to look after these treasures. Greece, which retains 36 of the 115 panels in the Parthenon frieze, will be able to display the 160-metre-long work better than the British Museum could ever do. Fears of setting a precedent - which could, for instance, affect many of the 40,000 Aboriginal artefacts held overseas - do not alter the original wrongs committed in the service of the British Empire. With most Britons supporting the Greek claim, Britain ought finally to return its ill-gotten "marbles" to where they belong.

## Eleftheria Arvanitaki to tour Australia

One of the greatest moments of this year's 27th Greek Festival in Sydney organized by the Greek Orthodox Community of New South Wales, will be a series of concerts by Eleftheria Arvanitaki at Sydney's famed Opera House. Arvanitaki arrives in Sydney next week and will give her first concert of Saturday May 23rd. On Sunday, May 24th, Arvanitaki will perform at the Melbourne Arts Center and will return to Sydney for one more show on Monday, May 25th. On the occasion of her arrival in Australia, Arvanitaki will also give a series of press conferences to Greek and English language media. Last Wednesday, Arvanitaki gave a 20 minute interview on SBS's Greek language program where she spoke about her recently released album, her Australia concerts and responded to questions about her artistic course and views on Greek music.



Melbourne newspaper "The Age" presented an interview with Arvanitaki in its "Metro" supplement. The title of the article is "Goddess of music adored by Greeks around the world" which characterizes her as a modern day goddess adored by fans in Greece and around the world.