

The Elgin Marbles will never return to Athens - the British Museum is their rightful home

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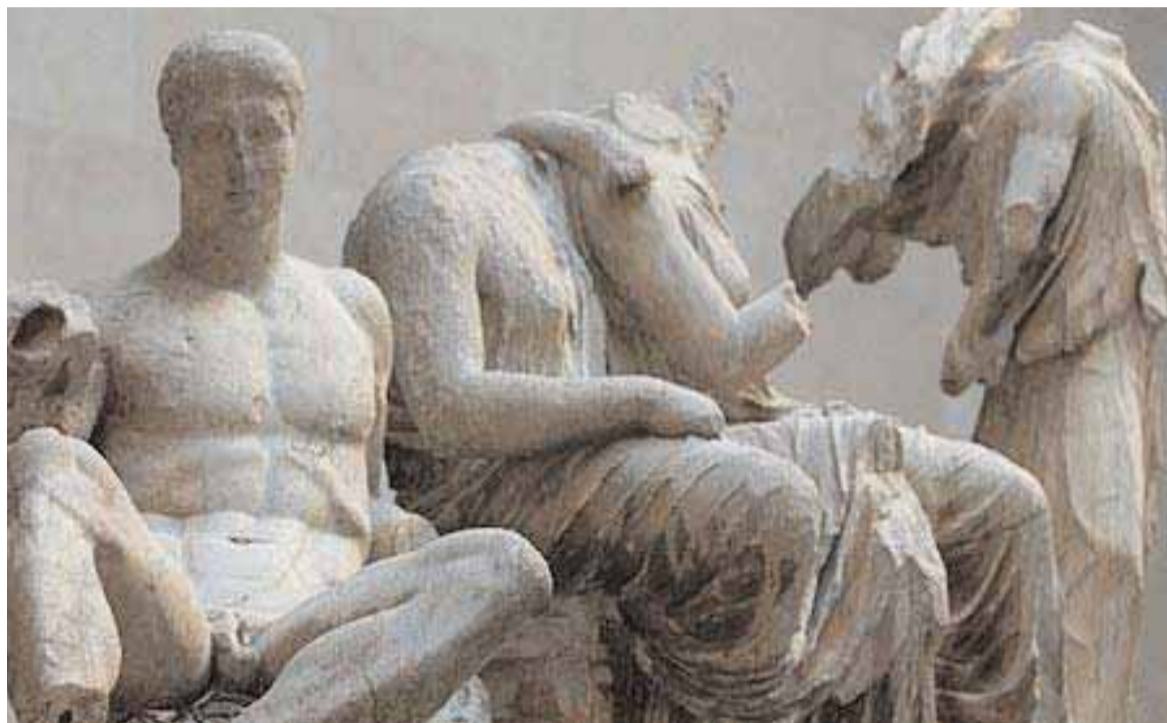
Having built this new museum for the Elgin Marbles, the Greeks have managed to rustle up one or two British journalists credulous or naive enough to write articles calling for their return. But if anyone thinks the building is ever going to house anything other than the plaster casts that are on display there now, they are hopelessly out of touch with reality. There is virtually no chance that the director or trustees of the British Museum, now or in the future, will comply with this outlandish demand.

Let's review the facts. Lord Elgin paid the enormous sum of £39,000 to acquire the marbles, and was careful to obtain documents from the Turkish Government approving their removal from Greece, which had then been part of the Ottoman Empire for 350 years. Since Parliament legally purchased the marbles from Lord Elgin in 1816, the British Museum's title to them is unassailable. The Greeks know this perfectly well - otherwise, instead of pulling this PR stunt, they would be suing Britain in the European courts.

What those calling for the return of the marbles can't seem to get through their heads is that, even if it wished to, the British Government cannot simply transfer their ownership to another European state. Objects in our national museums belong in law not to parliament but to

their trustees. This ensures that no government can sell works from our museums to raise revenue (as happened in Russia in the 1920s), or give them away for short-term political advantage. Were the trustees of the British Museum to comply with the Greek proposal, they would be in breach of their obligation to use the objects in their care for maximum public benefit, and could therefore expect a lawsuit of their own from members of the public, such as me, compelling them to fulfil the trust that was placed in them when they were appointed.

So here are a few ideas for the Greeks: first, why not erect a statue of Lord Elgin near the Parthenon to express their nation's gratitude to him for saving the marbles? After the Ottoman conquest of Athens in 1458, the Turks used the Parthenon as a mosque and then as a powder



magazine. In 1687, when the building took a direct hit from a Venetian cannon, most of its interior walls were destroyed, bringing much of the frieze down with them. By the time Lord Elgin became ambassador to Istanbul in 1798, the Parthenon was a ruin. Turkish soldiers used the marbles for target practice, and the locals burned statues to make lime for the mortar to build their houses. His purchase of the marbles was motivated by the real risk to their survival.

Second, instead of whining about events that happened more than two centuries ago,

perhaps the Greek ambassador should formally thank Britain for displaying the marbles in those beautiful galleries at the British Museum, where 4.6 million visitors a year from all over the world can view them free of charge.

Of course that won't happen, because the "controversy" over the marbles is largely a matter of Greek politics. Remember that until very recently, it had not seriously occurred to anyone that they should be given back to Greece. For most of the 19th and 20th centuries, the defining element in Greek identity was membership in the Greek

Orthodox Church. When in the 1980s the socialist minister of culture Melina Mercouri noisily campaigned for the return of the marbles, the actress skilfully turned them into a symbol of Greek identity. Since her time, no Greek politician has ever lost a vote echoing her demand. But the marbles no more "belong" to Greece than do the plays of Euripides.

Let the new museum stand as a monument to the futility of cultural nationalism - in this case trying to claim back something that by now belongs to the whole world.

Telegraph.co.uk -

Zervas charged over brawl that killed brother

PETER Zervas, the brother of Anthony Zervas - the man killed during a rolling melee at Sydney airport - has been charged with affray and riot.

Peter Zervas, 32, is the older brother of Anthony, who was bashed and stabbed to death at the airport during the fight between members of the Comanchero and Hells Angels motorcycle clubs on March 22.

Zervas barely escaped being murdered himself a week later when he was shot nine times as he drove into an underground car park at the home of his mother in Lakemba.

Police have not arrested anybody over that incident though several suspects have emerged.

Zervas recovered quickly and left hospital a week after he was shot, refusing offers of police protection. He has spent the past two months in hiding, on

an order not to associate with other Hells Angels.

He still has several bullet fragments lodged inside him and has to wear a body brace, after one of the rounds damaged one of his vertebrae.

Yesterday detectives attached to Strike Force Metter, formed to investigate the brawl, arrested him at his mother's apartment.

It is expected police will lay charges of riot and affray against the other members of the Hells Angels involved in the brawl - including the Sydney chapter president, Derek Wainohu.

Yesterday's events follow comments by the Police Commissioner, Andrew Scipione, that more

charges were expected over the brawl.

"This investigation still isn't over. There are more people who will be before the courts and that will happen in the not-too-distant future," he said.

Zervas was arrested a day after detectives re-arrested the Comanchero president, Mahmoud "Mick" Hawi, and charged him with the murder of Anthony Zervas.

Hawi's arrest was welcomed by Zervas's mother, Frederika Bromwich. She yelled abuse at Hawi's supporters after his court appearance in Kogarah on Tuesday.

"Today is the beginning of justice for my son," she yelled.

