



Carved wood structures in Meteora Monasteries

The Meteora Monasteries constitute one of the largest and most important complexes of Eastern Orthodox monasteries in Greece, second only to Mount Athos.

The six monasteries of Meteora (meaning in Greek: "suspended in the air") are built on natural sandstone rock pillars located at the northwestern edge of the plain of Thessaly near Pincios River and Pindus Mountain Range in central Greece. The Meteora Monasteries are a UNESCO World Heritage Monument distinguished for their wooden structures.

The Church of Holy Trinity (Hagia Triada) in the Holy Trinity Monastery was built in 1475 and the gilt iconostasis (the screen decorated with icons that divides the sanctuary from the nave of an Eastern Orthodox Church) made of carved wood is dated back to the 1660s. In 1975 it was stolen and was replaced. Parts of the iconostasis are kept in the monastery. The Timios Prodromos Chapel built in 1682 also features a gilt iconostasis of carved wood.

The Katholikon (main church) in Saint Stefanos Monastery was built in the 14th century and was restored in 1545. It has carved wood ceilings and iconostasis. The current Katholikon, the Church of Saint Charalambos, was built in 1798 and features an iconostasis of exceptional artistry dating back to 1814.

The Varlaam Monastery Katholikon, the All Saints Church, was built in 1541-1544 and its gilt iconostasis of carved wood was made in the early 18th century. The Abbot Throne made of carved wood and decorated with ivory was made in 1784-1808.

The Katholikon of the Monastery of Rousanou was built in mid 16th century and was dedicated to the Transfiguration of Jesus. The gilt iconostasis of carved wood also dates back in the 16th century. Half of it was stolen in the 1970s.

The Monastery of the Transfiguration of Jesus (Great Meteoron) was erected in mid 14th century and has most of the carved wood structures found in Meteora distinguished for their ornaments. The building serves as the main museum for tourists.

The monastery's hospital and Home for the Elderly were built in 1572. It has two chapels dedicated to Saint Prodromos and Saints Constantine and Helen. The gilt iconostasis of carved wood in the monastery's Katholikon is a masterpiece. Equally important are the two carved wood crosses on display in the monastery museum.

The Monastery of Saint Nikolaos Anapafsas is the only one of the six monasteries in Meteora that has no wooden structures of notable historical and artistic value.

New move for return of the Parthenon marbles

with a legal challenge before the English courts

Under an initiative of AHEPA of NSW and the Greek Australian Committee for the return of the Parthenon Marbles, Greeks of the Diaspora are bound to set up an international fund to finance an action in the English High Court for the return of the Parthenon Marbles.

The idea belongs to Victor Bizanis, President of AHEPA of NSW. Below you will find the full article written by Victor Bizanis, published in greekaustralian.com.au

For years political and populist attempts to induce the British Museum and the British government to return the Parthenon marbles to Greece have been rebuffed and rudely ignored. The British may rely on a threadbare claim of legality because of a supposed sale or contractual transaction but with whom?

*The Ottoman bey of Athens at the time? Certainly there was no Greek national representative as there was no Greek nation to protest the ravishment of porticos and frescoes from the outer decorations of this, the most revered building in Western civilization. For too long, supporters of the return of the Parthenon marbles have seen a legal challenge in the English High Court to be too daunting and unlikely to achieve the desired result. But a new initiative coming from the AHEPA organization in Sydney Australia may be able to construct a respectable argument to put before the English courts in such a claim – to release the marbles to the representatives of the Greek government for a return to their home and origin Athens. The two Decisions one legal the other administrative are of Interest *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* (commonly known a *Mabo*) was a landmark Australian court case which was decided by the High Court of Australia on June 3, 1992. The effective result of the judgement was to make irrelevant the declaration of *terra nullius*, or "land belonging to no one" which had been taken to occur from the commencement British colonisation in 1788, and to recognise a form of native title. It is argued by some historians [who?] that the Royal Proclamation of 1763 was seen to apply to Australia at the time of settlement, and therefore governed unceded territories. Although *Mabo* was litigated within the legal context of property law, the decisions clearly had much wider implications which have still to be determined.*

Thus in 1992 the Australian High Court made a historical determination to release land back to the "original owners" Aborigines of the northern Australian islands, As with all Australia the first English colonists had claimed land in the name of the King of England by ignoring the fact that people were already living there by declaring it as "terra nullius" – i.e.



*nobody's land. Eddie Mabo took on the state of Queensland and with help from support groups won the day overturning what had been established custom and law. The result was that the Australian government was forced to admit that his island and large swags of the Northern Territory and Queensland came under the same heading and should be returned to their original owners. It was conditional that the original owners had never left which in most cases it applied to was true. Land that had passed into private hands as settled property affecting the lives of white Australians and in the cities was excluded from the court's ruling. The historical decision is simply known as "Mabo" *Mabo* dealt with land rights but a later development has occurred which sets a precedent which could be even more relevant. Bringing Them Home Then some years ago indigenous people of Australia again made a claim this time supported by the Australian government for the return of human remains such as bones, skulls and teeth.*

*Tasmanian aborigines who demanded the return of bones, skulls and body remains of their ancestors which had been taken away to England during the 19th. and early 20th century for anthropological investigation. The claims were based on religious and cultural grounds and that the taking was unauthorised by the descendants of the deceased whose body parts were scattered in universities and museums in England. In 1996 and again 1999 the British government conceded the claim and the desired items were returned to the lineal descendants of the long dead aborigines. These two significant circumstances could well give rise to the thread of an argument for a claim to be brought in an English court of law by applying *Mabo* as a persuasive precedent from the highest Australian court and the human remains ruling of the British government.*

The Parthenon Marbles The marbles were extracted crudely and wantonly between 1801 to 1812 from the Parthenon and sustained significant damage in the process. Whatever claim to some purchase or contract that could be relied on by supporters of Elgin, the fact remains that the Greek peoples were a conquered race, there was no nation, the Ottomans ruled as part of their empire then but

in the way of history and other empires only held sway in Athens for a few years after the looting. The marbles were not removed either to protect them or to glorify them in England. Elgin simply had them installed in his private gardens along with the garden gnomes. The British Museum later acquired them by purchase from Elgin or his representatives to meet his debts. Were they "stolen" in the sense of English law or not is one question that would rise in any claim.

*If found to be stolen no title passes to a third party and that what would be part of the claim. No Greek Representative or authority or even lay person sanctioned the original looting of the marbles. They were certainly not Ottoman Turkish property other than being part of the captured territory. That they have deep cultural significance and meaning to the Greek peoples cannot be denied. They are integral to the linings of the most famous building in Europe when Greek learning and art laid the basis for western civilization and set standards of beauty and grace apparent to this day in the great museums of Europe and America. Other magnificent remnants of that time, Niki of Samothrace and Venus de Milo in the Louvre are stand alone statues. But the Parthenon marbles are integral adornments to an existing building and belong if not in position at least in the dignity of the new Athens Acropolis Museum in the hands of the people who are the lineal descendants of the age of Pericles, Phideas, Iktinos and Kallikratis and like the ruling in re *Mabo* as to continuity of residence, never left the site of Athens. Contacts have been made with other concerned people such as George Bizos a senior counsel in South Africa and other organizations and it is important that the best brains get together to coalesce money and intellectual input and to bring the arguments to a sharp point using the best legal people for the actual hearing.*

The Australian branch of the world wide Ahepa organization though its Marbles representative Manuel Comino OA and legal advisor Victor Bizannes believe that the time has come for an international fund to be set up to finance an action in the English High Court using these two significant cases as part of the argument for the return of Hellenic property to its original owners- the Hellenic peoples.