



SWISS COMMITTEE
FOR THE RETURN OF
THE PARTHENON MARBLES



THE CASE FOR REUNIFICATION¹



Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin, was made British Ambassador to the Sublime Porte of Constantinople, the seat of the Ottoman Empire in 1801. At that time Greece had been under the rule of the Ottomans for around three and a half centuries. Through a variety of dubious practices, Lord Elgin obtained permission from the occupying power for his artists to draw, paint and make casts of some of the Parthenon Marbles. But gradually they began to remove, in effect steal, various treasures until they had collected nearly half the existing sculptures. Largely financed by his wife, Lord Elgin began the colossal task of slicing off the backs of the blocks of the frieze, removing metopes and dismantling the pediment statues in order to ship them to Britain. Extensive damage to the Parthenon and to many of its structural elements was caused during the removal of the sculptures. Unfortunately the ship carrying many of the treasures sank. The salvage work



Torso of Poseidon, the front part of which is in Athens and the rear part in London

nearly bankrupted Lord Elgin and he was captured and imprisoned for three years by the French. On his return to England, he was forced to sell the Parthenon Marbles sculpted by Phidias - henceforth to be known in Britain as the Elgin Marbles - to the British Parliament for much less than he had expected.

Even then there were many who felt that Lord Elgin had little, if any, legal right to the Marbles. Some Members of Parliament abhorred the dishonest manner in which they had been acquired and proposed that they be returned as soon as a future free government in Greece demanded their restitution. As MP Hugh Hammersley said during a House of Commons debate in 1816: *"I regretted the dishonesty of the transaction by which the collection was obtained ...when the most celebrated temple was stripped of its most noble ornaments..."*.

Lord Byron, a renowned lover of Greece and the arts, also penned this criticism of Elgin's actions in his narrative poem "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage" in 1812:

*Dull is the eye that
will not weep to see
Thy walls defaced, thy
mouldering shrines removed
By British hands, which
it had best behoved
To guard those relics
ne'er to be restored.*



This may explain why Parliament quickly donated the Marbles to the trustees of the British Museum who have certain obligations under the British Museum Act concerning the treasures in their keeping.

Ever since it regained its independence in 1830, Greece has been determined that the missing Marbles should be returned to their place of origin. In 1982, Minister of Culture Melina Mercouri launched a campaign for the return of the Marbles to Greece. In her opinion: *"The issue is the restitution of part of a unique monument that has been embraced by the world as the particular symbol of civilization. For Great Britain to restore the Marbles would ever honour its name"*.

One of the few valid reasons for the British keeping the Marbles was that there was nowhere suitable for them in Athens whereas the British Museum had built a special gallery for their display. As the Greeks were determined to remove this last remaining barrier to their return, they decided to launch an international architectural competition, which was won by Swiss-French architect Bernard Tschumi, for a magnificent, state-of-the-art New Acropolis Museum which was inaugurated on June 20th 2009.

That the Parthenon Marbles should be divided between a museum in Athens and another in London defies logic. They were never intended to be displayed as independent works of art in a museum 1,500

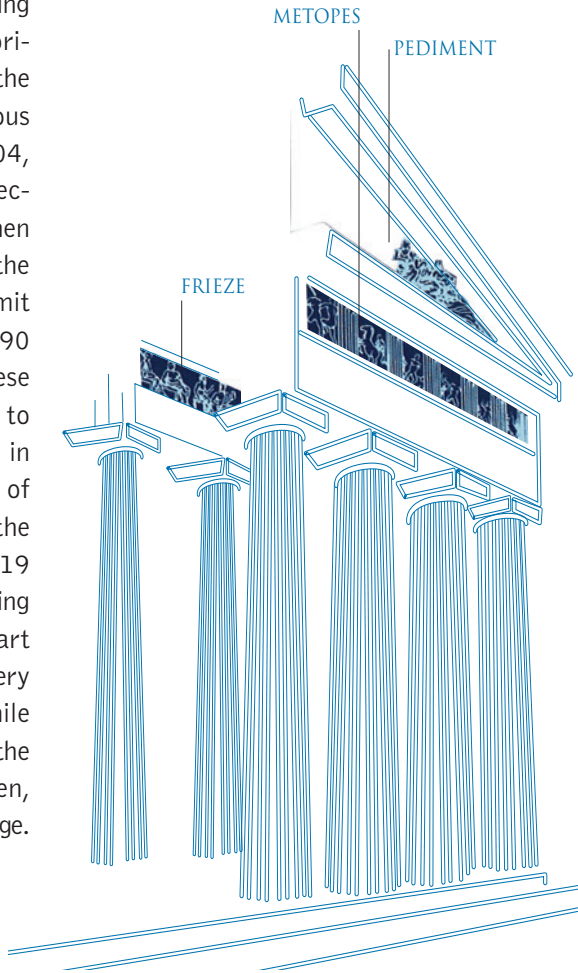
miles from their natural and historical setting. They are only meaningful when viewed next to the temple for which they were crafted, taking into consideration that, like the different shots of a film, they form a whole depicting the history of the Greek gods followed by that of Athenian democracy. The Parthenon too – this unique monument of Western civilization – can only truly be understood with all its surviving sculptures in one location.

The International Association for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures, as well as our Swiss Committee, insist that the purpose-built New Acropolis Museum, with its unique location, size, and configuration, provides the ideal venue for all the Parthenon's surviving works of art. Toward this goal, it seeks the understanding and support of the UK authorities and the British Museum.

The Parthenon sculptures were created in the 5th Century BC by the master sculptor Phidias to beautify and illuminate



the Parthenon on the Acropolis. Stunning in their beauty and unparalleled in originality, many fell victim through the years to wars, invasions and religious intolerance. Between 1801 and 1804, the Parthenon sculptures were subjected to an even greater calamity, when Lord Elgin, British Ambassador to the Ottoman Porte, on the basis of a permit of questionable validity removed 90 large pieces from the Parthenon. These pieces eventually found their way to London where they are still exhibited in the British Museum. They include 56 of the best preserved panels from the temple's frieze, 15 metopes, and 19 figures from its pediments. The remaining pieces of the Parthenon's sculptural art are on display in the Parthenon Gallery of the New Acropolis Museum, while smaller fragments are in the Louvre, the Vatican Museum, and in Copenhagen, Vienna, Munich, Würzburg and Cambridge.



AND YET - HALF THE SCULPTURES
ARE STILL IN LONDON!



THE SWISS COMMITTEE FOR THE RETURN OF THE PARTHENON MARBLES

(COMITÉ SUISSE POUR
LE RETOUR DES MARBRES
DU PARTHÉNON)

Founded on March 8th 2008, in Geneva, the Swiss Committee campaigns to promote the reunion of the Parthenon Marbles by increasing public awareness in Switzerland of our cause.

Our organization is composed of a group of highly competent and committed individuals. Membership is open to any person or entity who subscribes to our values and aims.

The Swiss Committee for the Return of the Parthenon Marbles is active both on a national and international level.

In Switzerland, the Committee is the leading source of information about the Parthenon Marbles and the need to support their reunification. To this end, conferences are organized, documents published and direct contacts established with Swiss leaders.

On an international level, the Swiss Committee is an active member of the International Association for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures composed of 17 committees from all over the world. The Swiss Committee's President, Prof. Dusan Sidjanski, was elected Vice-President of the International Association in June 2009. Furthermore, it has established close relations with the Greek Government and the New Acropolis Museum. In addition, the Swiss Committee maintains relations with international organizations involved in the cause such as UNESCO, the European Union and the Council of Europe.



THE SWISS COMMITTEE NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!

If you wish to become a member of the Committee, please download the membership form at: http://www.parthenon-suisse.ch/pdf/devenez_membre.pdf

If you wish to support the committee's work, please donate at UBS:

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