



Celebrating the new Acropolis Museum



On 15th January 2010, the Hellenic Centre hosted a celebration for the opening of the New Acropolis Museum (www.theacropolismuseum.com) in the preceding year. The proceedings were conducted against a back-projection of beautiful, continuously changing images, taken from the final stages of preparation for the opening. After introductions, the main presentation consisted of a short talk by Anthony Snodgrass, Chair of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles (www.parthenonuk.com).

The speech did not attempt a commentary on the images. Instead, it suggested that it was time for Greeks generally to hold their heads higher in the light of this latest achievement, in a sequence that began with the construction of the Venizelos International Airport and the Athens Metro, and continued with the 2004 Olympics, at whose opening ceremony Mrs. Angelopoulou-Daskalaki coined the apt phrase 'the New Greece'. Its validity will be clear to any traveller who transfers from the Athens Airport to Heathrow, or from the Athens Metro to the Circle Line.

Part of this increase in self-confidence should be a reduced deference to entrenched British attitudes, or to such institutions as the British Museum and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The former, for all its fame, is administered under a deeply flawed Trustee system. The latter, unlike its Greek counterpart, is not seen as being in the front rank of Ministries: it would for example have been unimaginable for any British Premier of the past fifty years to have taken on the Culture portfolio themselves, as Constantine Karamanlis had done in 2004-2006. The New Acropolis Museum is the proper culmination for a revived Greek

cultural ascendancy.

Aware that a celebration at the Hellenic Centre was taking place in honour of the New Acropolis Museum, Professor Pandermalis issued the following message. He said: "On the 20th June the New Acropolis Museum was inaugurated with due splendour but also respect for the unique objects now resting in the New Museum. For a whole week the welcoming building was celebrating with VIPs as well as ordinary people and calling for all to rejoice with us in the ancient beauty of these statues and sculptures.

Half a year later the new Museum has now firmly registered with the international community thanks to the number of visitors, which by the 31 December 2009 reached 1,370,114. At the same time the enthusiastic comments both public and private confirmed that the new way of exhibiting these classical masterpieces can still enthral the public of the 21st century.

It is in the gallery dedicated to the Parthenon that for the first time the problem of these sculptures can properly be seen. Their tragic fragmentation becomes an experience for each visitor who now has an opportunity to better understand one of the great cultural dilemmas of our time: the question of the reunification of the Marbles. The large numbers of visitors has greatly contributed to this understanding.

With renewed enthusiasm the new museum is looking forward to a new dialogue which will lead to a felicitous solution of this problem.

With my warmest thanks to all those who formally or privately declare their love for the Parthenon."

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Girl power... (Athena would've approved)

On Saturday 12 September 2009 from 11 pm to midnight the Fourth Plinth in the north west of Trafalgar Square, home to Antony Gormley's Project "One & Other" was occupied by Sofka Smales.

"I feel really passionate about the Parthenon Marbles", explained Sofka, a student at London's Central St. Martins College. "I have always felt that these sculptures should rightly be returned to their country of origin. Especially now that a first class museum has been



built in Athens to house them."

Nineteen year old Sofka staged her plea for the return of the Parthenon Marbles, arriving on the Plinth dressed in white with a sash and reflected lettering 'RESPECT' on the front and 'REUNITE' on the back. She carried onto the Plinth her posters, banners, plus the roll of wallpaper. Below a crowd gathered as two acoustic musicians played popular Greek songs, others sang and some danced.

Sofka used the image of the divided horsemen (the logo by the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles), with London and Athens marked under each section, on two hand held banners to show that the frieze - divided between Athens and London, would be best reunited.

During her 60 minute stint on the plinth, Sofka wrote a letter on a piece of wallpaper, to Neil MacGregor, the Director of the British Museum. In this letter she outlined her vision. Below the crowd listened as she read it out loud and cheered when she asked for the return of the Parthenon Sculptures to the new Acropolis Museum in Athens.

To watch Sofka's 60 minutes on the Plinth simply go to: <http://bit.ly/aD37zi>

Sofka was joined by Eleni Cubitt, Hon Secretary for the British Committee, on the following Tuesday, when the ladies met at the British Museum to deliver Sofka's letter to the Director, Neil MacGregor. ■

The New Acropolis Museum at London's Hellenic Centre

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Also expressing her views and admiration for the New Acropolis Museum at the Hellenic Centre last week, was writer and artist Christina Borg, who spoke of the significance of Dr David Starkey's campaign to retain the recently discovered 'Staffordshire Hoard' in its area of provenance, to be exhibited as one curator explained, "Within their walls" in its correct context. Drawing an analogy with the Greek campaign, she said "This is precisely what Greeks and restitutionists have been fighting for, for two centuries - to show all the Parthenon Sculptures which are part of a continuous narrative in their natural context." During her speech, she mentioned a recently published interview in which British Museum Director Neil MacGregor talks of collections being available "as totalities, not dismembered." Yet this comment she says points to a clear contradiction where the Parthenon Sculptures are concerned. They will be deemed as "dismembered" as long as their missing halves remain in England. Bringing the pieces together in their rightful ancestral home in Athens is the right thing to do.

With the current focus on the exhibition 'A History of the World in 100 Objects', the British Museum once again successfully deflects attention from the issue of repatriation, willfully

dismissing any addresses on the subject as matters of opinion. Currently, Christina Borg said, "The British Museum is the more powerful." In summing up, she quoted ancient historian Thucydides, who wrote, "For we both alike know that into the discussion of human affairs the question of justice enters only where the pressure of necessity is equal, and that the powerful exact what they can, and the weak grant what they must."



The scholar Mary Beard may consider it "crude and nationalistic" of Greeks to expect repatriation but her remarks point to an insufficient understanding of the Greek psyche. The repatriation of the marbles is not something that burns in the hearts of mainland Greeks alone, but in the millions of Greeks of the diaspora and moreover in the hearts of millions of understanding people of various ethnicities - in every corner of the world. ■

Mary Philips - a live Caryatid

Sofka's stand was followed in November by 26 year old, American graduate, Mary Philips. It was Mary's first visit to London and she had written to the British Committee to express her wish to help the cause by staging a silent, single woman protest. She chose to spend her first Sunday in the capital standing in the forecourt of the British Museum dressed as a caryatid, holding a panel bearing the words 'Please let me go home'.



Despite the urge to hurry into the museum to shelter from the rain and cold, many visitors paused to read Mary's message and take a few photographs. It was Mary's appeal for the return of the Marbles that struck a chord, with many people vocalising their support and encouragement before heading into the museum.

Approached for his view of Mary's one-woman appeal, Neil MacGregor voiced his admiration for her fortitude in braving the elements, calling her act "an elegant way of making her point."

Mary, 26, who has a degree in classical languages from the University of Pittsburgh, was born in the same year that the British Committee for the Reunification of the Marbles was founded, confirming that every generation delivers new supporters arguing for reunification.

"I have followed the great efforts of the British Committee and recently visited the awe-inspiring Acropolis Museum in Athens," Mary said, "and saw for myself how worthy a place it is to receive back its marbles. The return of the Marbles would be a British cultural gesture of singular poignancy."

As the rain eventually stopped, English student and 'Plinthian', Sofka Smales, joined Mary for a photo.



The context of the New Acropolis Museum

Matthew Taylor - Architect & Treasurer, Marbles Reunited



The Parthenon reflected in the wall of the Parthenon Gallery of the New Acropolis Museum

"In London, in the context of the British Museum, a world museum, they tell the story in the context of Egypt, and the Near East, and Europe. So they give a much wider, if you like, story." Joanna Mackle, British Museum Spokeswoman in 2004.

"I believe more strongly than ever that the marbles should remain in London, to be displayed in an international cultural context." Bonnie Greer, Deputy Chairman of British Museum Trustees in 2009.

The opening of the New Acropolis Museum in 2009 represented a unique opportunity to display the surviving Parthenon Sculptures within the context of the Parthenon. The term context is often slid into arguments about the Parthenon Sculptures, but rarely with much thought about its true meaning. In justifying their continuing retention of the Parthenon Sculptures, the British Museum talks about displaying them in the context of other artefacts from different times and places, implying that this was the most important contextual relationship of the sculptures, when the reality is that this contrived contextual link is fairly tenuous.

They can still be seen in the same glance as the Parthenon that they used to occupy.

To understand the ideal context for the Parthenon Sculptures today, the best place to start is with their original context. Unlike most sculptures in museums and galleries, the Parthenon Sculptures weren't just designed merely for a specific client, or even for a specific site. They were created with the specific intention that they would become an integral part of the building that they were part of. Some of them were even carved in-situ while the building was under construction and the way in which they could be viewed was dictated by the form and orientation for the building itself. They were designed to form and enrich the Parthenon, with their con-

text generated by the Parthenon (whose context is, in turn generated by the Acropolis). The Acropolis is the only place that they could be truly said to belong to.

The original context of the Parthenon Sculptures was of course far more than this. They are a product of their time & place, with their form dictated by local skills and local materials. They were carved to be seen under the harsh Attic sun – a light with clarity and sharpness that any visitors to Athens will testify is very different to the environment created by the Duveen Gallery in London.

The comparative context ideology put forward by the British Museum is an interesting approach – allowing the artefacts to be understood in terms of their relationship (or lack of) with other artefacts. For the average visitor though, it is unlikely that this connection is noticed. Without a detailed understanding of the dates of different items as well as what preceded them, along with the geography of the area & the social / political situation at the time, connections are as likely to be imagined as real. The British Museum makes little effort to help visitors understand their collection in this way, despite the importance that they attach to this approach. Little thought is given there to the true context of the sculptures – how they inter-relate to one another and to their setting.

Contrast this to the New Acropolis Museum, where every attempt is made to match the original context. While it is not possible to rebuild ancient Athens, or to expose delicate sculptures to the pollution outside, they can still be seen in the same glance as the Parthenon that they used to occupy. It is instantly possible to understand the original positions of the sculptures while they are cast into light and shade in exactly the same way as they would have been on the Periclean Acropolis. This is the true context of the Parthenon Sculptures – not some contrived comparison with Babylonian reliefs & Chinese vases in a museum in Bloomsbury. This is the reason that the surviving Parthenon Sculptures can only ever truly belong in Athens. ■

New Acropolis Museum at World Travel Market

Angela Gerekou, Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Hellenic Republic visited London during World Travel Market 2009 (November 14-17). She found time to meet with Eleni Cubitt, Hon Secretary for the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures.

Mrs Gerekou voiced her hopes for the Parthenon Sculptures during her London visit: "The New Acropolis Museum has given a new perspective not only to the city of Athens, but to the whole of Greece.

Melina Merkouri's vision is gradually being realised.

The Parthenon Marbles finally found their "home" and the reunification is now more crucial than ever.

The return of the Marbles is not only a Greek petition but a petition for humanity. We know that this is what the majority of the British public feels.

With the New Acropolis Museum, the city of Athens has gained a symbolic site for its history and its identity.

Within a few months since its opening, more than 1 million people visited the Museum.

This means that we have a new attraction for our visitors, as well as a very strong argument for the fair petition of the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles.

The visitors of the Museum themselves, unite their voices to support our efforts for the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles.

We remain loyal to Melina Merkouri's vision and we will continue the battle what she passionately started, hoping that the day of the reunification will not be long."



The British Committee arranged for William St Clair and Christina Borg to speak at the World Travel Market event. Mrs Sophia Panagiotaki, the Director for the Greek Tourist Office in London also addressed the audience giving an enthusiastic review of modern Athens, the many reasons for travellers to visit the city including the New Acropolis Museum.

Symposium in Brussels, November 2009

Anthony Snodgrass, Chair of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, writes:

On Saturday 28th November 2009 the Mouvement Réformateur, the Liberal party of French-speaking Belgium, joined with the European Liberal Forum in hosting a half-day symposium in Brussels under the title "Who is the rightful owner of the Elgin (Parthenon) marbles?". Irimi Stamatoudi of the Hellenic

It was most gratifying to hear the issue aired in such a widely international and inter-disciplinary forum.

Ministry of Culture and Anthony Snodgrass were invited as overseas speakers. As often in recent years, the organisers could at first find no one, from either within or beyond the British Museum, who was willing to appear in opposition to these two speakers and, yet again, approached myself for suggested names: I proposed Michael Daley of ArtWatchUK, who accepted. It was most gratifying to hear the issue aired in such a widely international and inter-disciplinary forum.

The first two speakers were both jurists, who addressed the broader issues of property rights in the most interesting way, with all manner of comparisons whether from the past (the history of slavery, for example) or from the present day (modern conflict resolution). The next two were senior museum directors, from the Musées Royaux, Brussels and from the city of Liège: here there was more caution, but Mme. Cahen of Brussels gave a remarkably long list of successful recent restitutions made, on all types of grounds, by her Museums; while M. Chariot of Liège, describing the events of very recent years, coined a memorable phrase: 'the epoch of repentance'. So far, open partisanship had been discreetly avoided, but this could hardly hold for the final session with the three speakers named earlier. Irimi Stamatoudi's address gave priority to the ethical arguments, my own to the aesthetic ones. Michael Daley gave a fiercely political response, reviving such old themes as that of the 'wrecking and clearing' of the archaeological site under the New Acropolis Museum. He saw, behind the current surge of restitution claims, a generally 'leftist' wave of agitation. The proceedings were wound up by Senator François Roelants du Vivier, Chair of the Belgian Committee for the Return of the Parthenon Marbles. ■

Parthenon Day 2010

In 2009 at a meeting of the International Association for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures, it was decided that to raise the profile of the debate, a specific day each year would be devoted to this issue by all the member organisations. The date set for this annual event was 20th June, in commemoration of the opening of the New Acropolis Museum.

June 20th 2010 will therefore be the first International Parthenon Day, and will be celebrated in at least sixteen different countries.

As home of the British Museum, London is the focus of attention on this day, with the intention that bold new initiatives by the International Association will be announced.

In different countries, a wide range of events are planned, from academic debates to public protests. Following a year after the opening of the New Acropolis Museum, the day will also allow reflection on what has been achieved by the opening and how efforts of the campaigns should best be focussed in this new era following the removal of one of the British Museum's previous core arguments.

Big things have already been achieved and public opinion continues to shift against the retentionist approach, yet at the same far more needs to be done if the sculptures are to return.

Make a note of this date in your diary and let us know if you have any suggestions for the day.

A new Committee



In December 2009 Chris Christodolou, Hon Secretary for the South African Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles vis-

A South African Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles was established and launched on 04 November 2009.

ited London and met up with Eleni Cubitt, Anthony Snodgrass and Chris Price of the British Committee.

On the initiative of George Bizos S.C, a South African Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles was established and launched on 04 November 2009.

Advocate George Bizos SC is a Committee Member of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles.

Chris Christodolou commented "members of the South African legal profession are intrigued by the numerous legal issues and research conducted by law professors here and abroad into the refusal of the British Museum to reunite the Parthenon Marbles with their rightful place in the New Acropolis Museum in Athens." ■

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