A Last Farewell
A tribute to Christopher Hitchens 1949-2011

A sunny day in June 1987, and Ele-
ni Cubitt had invited me to the press
launch of Christopher Hitchens’ ex-
cellent book “The Elgin Marbles” –
later reprinted and revised in 2008 as
“The Parthenon Marbles – the case
for reunification”. When we were intro-
duced, he made the connection with my
film on ‘Lord Elgin & Some Stones of No
Value’ and wrote the above touching ded-
ication there and then. We discussed how
valuable the letters were both for my film
and his book, and also how damning they
had been to Elgin’s cause. He thought that
the firman, (the permission the Turks were
supposed to have given Elgin to take the
sculptures away), was not as important as
the sheer undisputed vandalism of the act
of hacking down the sculptures and ship-
ing them back to England. How could
the then dominating Turkish imperialists,
his said, give another imperialist country
permission to purloin the most important
jewels in the subjugated country’s crown?

As philhellenes, we talked about his
fondness of Cyprus, and mine for the
Peloponnese. We discussed Melina Mer-
cour, Jules Dassin and other Greek friends we
had in common.

That morning his confrontational style, of
which I had heard so much, was absent. How-
ever I could see the spark of his wit and humour.
Later, on reading his book for the first time, I
realised how well organised it was, and how
brilliantly his arguments elucidated the natural
justice and the weighing of the well researched
evidence for the return of the Parthenon sculp-
tures to their rightful home.

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How right therefore were the BCRPM and
Eleni to invite him to write the book, and how
generous of her to sponsor it.

However there was always a chink in the
armour of his argument. For the marbles could
not be put back in situ on the temple itself, nor
could they rest in the cramped and already
overcrowded old Acropolis Museum built in the
1870’s. However, by 2007, the new Acropo-
lis Museum was complete, which Christopher
got to see. He then realised there was now
an ideal opportunity to re-state the case for the
reunification of the marbles, not only could they
now be next to the temple itself, but also be
seen in the Attic light in the impressive space
reserved for them by the architect Bernard Ts-
chori. So a year later, after Christopher’s dis-
cussions with the BCRPM, the new edition of
his book, now called “The Parthenon Marbles
– the case for reunification” was printed in which
there was an introduction by the Nobel Laureate
Nadine Gordimer, and a new one by Christo-
pher, both of which made a more forceful case
for reunification.

We will greatly miss Christopher’s
challenging, argumentative, and often
wittily abrasive style, we will miss his
hatred of hypocrisy and cant and above
all his erudite defence for the reunifica-
tion of the Parthenon Marbles. Finally,
knowing he championed “anti-theism”
and his views of the afterlife, he is now
in the unique position to know the truth,
as to whether or not he will be able to
read my written gratitude for all he has
done ...

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By
Christopher
Miles

Photo by José Ramírez
We have a new recruit! We mourn the loss of the great Christopher Hitchens. But it brought a silver lining in the form of Stephen Fry who immediately published a brilliant essay in support of the return of the Parthenon Marbles and in honour to the memory of Christopher.

Without hesitation, Marbles Reunited congratulated Stephen. We agree that the increasingly feeble arguments used to defend the retention of these stolen artefacts can be easily rebutted.

Stephen came over to Parliament for an initial chat with Treasurer, Matthew Taylor and I, and would like to support future activities of Marbles Reunited. Unfortunately, Stephen is currently away in New Zealand until May, filming The Hobbit! However, he is keen to be more involved on his return. More news to follow...

Greece made us. We owe them. They are ready for its return and have never needed such morale boosting achievement more. And it would be so graceful, so apt, so right. Stephen Fry
It was a bitterly cold Sunday morning and as we exited the Acropolis underground station an icy blast of wind hit our faces. Making our way up the cobbled road to the New Acropolis Museum (NAM), I wondered how successful our attempts would be at convincing museum visitors to oblige us for a 5 minute interview, in the cold.

We soon reached the white marble steps that lead into the museum courtyard. Standing there, looking at the museum, it was impossible not to surrender to its architectural beauty but also to the feeling of renewed hope for the reunification of the Parthenon sculptures, which it has come to represent. A short turn to my right, and there was the awe-inspiring Acropolis situated on the hill above me. But as I stood there, on that Sunday morning, I was overcome by sadness at the thought of the crude way in which it had been stripped bare.

Though this damage can never be reversed, standing in front of the new purpose-built Acropolis museum, the answer appeared to be so simple. These sculptures should return to their point of origin. To be housed in the new museum and put on exhibit so that visitors can marvel at both the sculptures and the view of the Acropolis, visible through the museum window. What better way to fully appreciate this ancient monument! I wondered if the visitors shared my thoughts.

Several hours later, and in spite of the unusually cold Athenian weather, we had managed to interview visitors from Brazil, Austria, Iran, Australia and the US.

The visitors were quick to praise the New Acropolis Museum. Maria-Regina, a professor from Brazil, was especially taken with the glass floors through which the excavated ancient city was still visible. Renatta, also from Brazil, expressed her appreciation for the reconstruction of sculptures held elsewhere, but explained she would much rather see the originals reunited with the fragments currently held in the museum. Stefan from Austria indicated that he regarded his visit as a rich cultural experience, but was saddened by the absence of certain sculptures and believed it right that these should return to the country they originated from.

Their message was clear. They all felt that the sculptures should be returned to Greece and reunited with their counterparts in the New Acropolis Museum. In an effort to support this message, the first of our edited videos was posted on our YouTube channel, with the aim of informing and inspiring an even larger audience. Our next set of interviews have been scheduled for spring when the weather will be more welcoming. Until then, please visit our YouTube channel to view and share the first of the videos. And, please, don’t lose faith!

You can find the video at the following link: http://youtu.be/ufvTtx5Ss_s

By Maria Koutsikou
Interviews filmed by Lazaros Filippidis

We say to the British government: you have kept those sculptures for almost two centuries. You have cared for them as well as you could, for which we thank you. But now in the name of fairness and morality, please give them back. Melina Mercouri
Shame on you, trustees of the British Museum!

Today, Lord Elgin would be guilty of Misconduct in Public Office. 200 years ago one could get away with such actions, especially when being judged by the beneficiaries of your plunder. Notices at archaeological sites around the world forbid and warn you not to remove anything; guides advise you to “take away your memories and leave only your footsteps”. Nobody wants another Lord Elgin!

Is it acceptable to do nothing about what went on just because it was so long ago? No, it most certainly is not! And if the Trustees of the British Museum could do something about it and don’t, does that make them as morally guilty as Lord Elgin? Instead of rectifying this wrong, they fall back on the British Museum Act 1963: you need an Act of Parliament. Go to the House of Commons. The Commons then tell you it’s up to the Trustees of the BM to determine the fate of its contents. Very neat, and very like a burglar covering his tracks!

Shame on you, Trustees! Excuse after excuse, the current one feeblest than the rest: the Marbles in London are part of a world context, unlike those in Athens. Time for a little honesty. How about “We stole ‘em fair and square”? Irrefutable!

By Angelos Economou

Marbles Reunited

Friends of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles.
c/o Time & Tide Shipping Ltd
180 Piccadilly, London W1J 9HF
Tel: +44 (0)845 5194 574

campaign@marblesreunited.org.uk

Honorary President: Eddie O’ Hara
Chairman: Andrew George MP
Deputy Chairman: Dr Christopher Stockdale
Treasurer: Matthew Taylor
Secretary: Angelos Economou

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campaign@marblesreunited.org.uk

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