



The Rt Hon. George Osborne CH
Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the British Museum
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3DG
United Kingdom

Dear Mr Osborne,

We address you today fully aware of the cultural significance of the British Museum as a beacon of human history, knowledge, and civilization. Your institution holds an invaluable collection that spans the breadth of humanity's achievements. However, we stand at a pivotal moment, where the opportunity for a gesture of historical significance can be realized — the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles.

As you well know, the Parthenon Marbles, originally an integral part of the Parthenon temple on the Acropolis of Athens, embody not only the zenith of ancient Greek artistic and architectural genius, but also the soul of a civilization that contributed to the foundations of democracy, philosophy, and the arts. These sculptures are inseparable from the place they were crafted to adorn and the cultural identity they represent.

The argument for their reunification is based on several principles:

1. **Cultural Integrity:** The Parthenon Marbles are not mere artefacts; they were designed to be part of an integrated whole, with each piece contributing to the Panathenaic narrative. Their fragmented existence, scattered across museums in London and Athens, denies the public the chance to experience their full cultural and historical meaning. Imagine Nelson's column broken without Nelson, the Wellington Arch without Nike and her chariot.
2. **The Changing Role of Museums:** Museums across the world are increasingly recognizing the importance of repatriation as a means of fostering mutual respect and cultural understanding. The return of the Parthenon Marbles would signal to the world that the United Kingdom is committed to a future where cultural treasures, regarded as icons of the very identity of the countries from which they originate, can be reunited.
3. **The most meaningful context:** Over the years, Greece has invested in a modern, world-class museum – the Acropolis Museum – which was specifically designed to house the Parthenon Marbles, the frieze, the metopes and the pediments, in a manner that reflects their original purpose and configuration. The Duveen Gallery was created as a home for the Parthenon Marbles, but the transparent glass-fronted gallery on the top of the Acropolis Museum allows enough space for the whole narrative of the frieze to be exhibited together with the metopes and the pediments under the Attic light, in direct visual contact with the monument they belong to.
4. **Historical Justice:** While the purchase of the Marbles may have been considered legally valid at the time, it is important to remember that 30 Members of Parliament in 1816 were opposed to this transaction. Furthermore, recent expert assessments by international and Turkish archivists/historians have shown that there was never any authentic Sultan *firman* issued to Lord Elgin allowing the removal and exportation of the Marbles, thereby proving that his actions were illegal and putting the purchasers in a very delicate position as the



receivers of stolen goods. Therefore, the question now is not about the legality of their removal, but about the ethical obligation to address a historical wrongdoing.

5. **A Positive Step towards Cultural Leadership:** By returning the Parthenon Marbles to Greece, the British Museum would cement its place as a leader in cultural diplomacy and responsible stewardship. This gesture would respect UNESCO's decision in 2021 and set a powerful example for other institutions, highlighting the importance of respecting the wishes of source nations in preserving their heritage, and acknowledging the evolving understanding of cultural ownership in our interconnected world.
6. **Advantages:** The Hellenic government has given assurances that the reunification of the sculptures would be the beginning of an active collaboration with Greek museums, which would concede long term loans of unique and significant artefacts as rotating exhibitions. One could also imagine that the Acropolis Museum would offer free entrance to British citizens and special facilities to British students.

We ask, with deep respect, that you reconsider where the home of the Parthenon Marbles should be. Could one envisage the upcoming renovation of the British Museum as an opportunity to have the Marbles deposited in the Acropolis Museum?

In a war-torn world besieged by democratic threats, the symbolic value of reunification is immense. The Parthenon frieze depicts the Panathenaic festival honouring Athena, the city's patron goddess, chosen, as depicted on the West Pediment, over Poseidon because she offered an olive tree, representing peace. The reunification of the Marbles would celebrate peace, democracy, and freedom—values that so urgently need to be reaffirmed in today's world.

The above arguments cannot be adequately developed in this short letter. We are aware that the intergovernmental negotiations are on the right track, however we believe that the stand of the Trustees is of utmost importance. With this in mind, we are ready to find the means to organize for all the members of the Board of Trustees, a visit to the Acropolis Museum at your convenience, so that you may have a true picture of the mutilated sculptures and the many imperatives which call for those held in the British Museum to be reunited with their marble siblings, in their place of origin.

We are confident that, in time, the reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, which is increasingly favoured by UK citizens, and recommended by international organizations,¹ will be seen as a decision that reflects the shared values of justice, respect, and the enduring power of art.

We would be most grateful, Mr Osborne, if you would ensure that this letter is forwarded to every member of the Board of Trustees.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours sincerely,

¹ At its May 2024 meeting, UNESCO urged Greece and the UK to intensify efforts for a resolution. Additionally, at the UN General Assembly in New York on December 6, a resolution for the restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin was approved by 146 countries.



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