

BRITISH COMMITTEE FOR THE REUNIFICATION OF THE PARTHENON MARBLES



Dr Hartwig Fischer, Director, British Museum, Great Russell St, London WC1B 3DG

06 March 2020

Dear Dr Fischer

RE Your letter of March 1st in The Sunday Times

That even you, sir, the Director of The British Museum and a respected art historian, could not find a credible analogy for comparison to the Parthenon's dispersed marbles is heartening, since, frankly, there are none. You draw comparison with the sad division of Duccio's altarpieces, but you know well that Italy and the world would be enraptured if they were re-joined and displayed as intended; not least the great cathedral in Siena which would become all the more alluring to visit and admire.

But these beautiful works of Christian art bear no relation to Greece's influence on the European adventure into the ancient world. It was not Elgin's shipment of the Parthenon marbles to London that prompted Europe's first serious interest in the buildings on the Acropolis. Some fifty years previously in 1751, the architects James Stuart and Nicholas Revett had embarked on a two-year project to document all the ancient buildings of Athens; and from 1762 their hugely influential four-volume, *The Antiquities of Athens* appeared in print, with volume 2 dedicated to the monuments on the Acropolis.

It is 204 years since these sculptures were assigned by the British parliament to the British Museum. Greece had no say in this, nor on their removal from the Parthenon. History happened. For the rest, there is nothing to celebrate in a priceless building being so lamentably robbed of its glories. The anguished debates that took place by thinking people in London two hundred years ago, are still at large today. What has changed is the mood abroad that regards colonial acquisitions with an increasingly active disdain.

The Chair of Trustees Sir Richard Lambert wrote in the FT last November, that of the 8 million objects in the British Museum, some are "highly contested [objects] and since the year 2000, there have been half a dozen claims for restitution". The Greeks, in that long interim, have been putting their claim - ever since 1843 in fact. Patience has been exercised and, you will surely acknowledge, with great dignity. However with this latest utterance in defence of the indefensible, that patience is wearing thinner; the Greeks emphatically do not celebrate Elgin's attack on the Parthenon as you seem to. It was not Elgin who first road-tested democracy.

But the relationship between Athens and London could be warmed overnight if only you would, please, find a way forward rather than looking backwards. Uttering the tired tropes about 'creative' acts is so over, especially as destructive acts are clearly visible to the eye on every marble figure you possess in the Duveen Galleries.

The generosity of colleagues in Greece is always available in order for a constructive conversation to be opened instead of this hubristic silence that now sours the air. There is much to be gained for Room 18, and its visitors if only the British Museum, led by a European of your stature and scholarship, would be the first to respond to the zeitgeist and begin it.

Yours in hopes,

Sincerely,

Janet Suzman DBE

Chair of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles