

# Museums and International Co-operation

A new, imaginative approach

Christopher Price, vice chairman BCRPM

**The reunification of the Parthenon Marbles will only take place in a new climate of international co-operation between museums.**

The background to this issue is discussed at length in the latest issue of ICOM, the newsletter of the International Council of Museums (Vol. 57 no 1 <http://icom.museum>), which assesses the current debate between 'universal museums' which seek to keep all their possessions intact in order to compare different world cultures in a single museum and the growing spirit of co-operation between museums, more and more of which are already restoring objects to places where they can be displayed in a more meaningful context. There is now growing international agreement in this debate that all repatriation claims should be dealt with through partnership and international co-operation on a case by case basis; and that the recent declaration of 'universal museums', supported by the British Museum which seeks to



legalistic approach which some museums adopt. Both also urge clarification of the law. The Natural History Museum wants the 1963 British Museum Act (which also governs much of its constitution) amended to give it discretion about what it does with objects in its possession; the British Museum, on the other hand, does not want the Act amended; it wants areas around 'moral' claims and the Attorney General's powers over charity law to be clarified.

MPs should urge ministers to sort out the law on cultural objects; currently it involves outdated legislation (like the 40 year old British Museum Act) which predates new charity law and new legislation on human rights and

regulatory reform. A more positive approach to the whole issue is needed. The objective of the Government and the museum world should now be to empower museums to initiate and develop joint projects both within the UK and internationally.

Marbles Reunited envisages a British Museum outpost in Athens, possibly working closely with the nearby, UK taxpayer funded, British Archaeological School at Athens. This outpost and the New Acropolis Museum in Athens could then cooperate in putting together the architectural pieces and the sculptures which were removed 200 years ago; while the Greeks would supply antiquities hitherto unseen in Bloomsbury. Such a scheme as this would involve money, goodwill, negotiation between two willing parties and above all time.

Time is available. The new Acropolis museum will not open for some years. It would be a good sign if real discussions - and hopefully some gesture by the British Museum - could begin before the Olympic games. Such a project, involving no concept of restitution and no change in the law would be far more imaginative than the various regulatory schemes on the desk of the culture secretary today.

### Visit our website

Information on Marbles Reunited can be found on our new website [www.marblesreunited.org.uk](http://www.marblesreunited.org.uk).

The website is regularly updated with the latest news, press releases, events, and lists of prominent supporters.

Web User magazine has given our website a 4-star review, praising it as being one of the most informative and user-friendly websites launched this year.

### View our video

There is a new Marbles Reunited video describing the history of the Parthenon Sculptures and the aims and objectives of Marbles Reunited.

A free DVD / CD ROM of the video is available on request.

Details below.

### Contact Marbles Reunited

If you would like to register as a supporter of our project to reunite the Parthenon Marbles or if you require further information, please let us know. We welcome your views in this debate.

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## The objective of the government and the museum world should now be to empower museums to initiate and develop joint projects both within the UK and internationally.

demand for itself and a few other museums, immunity from all repatriation claims, is simply not sustainable. The recent close co-operation in the UK, for the first time ever, between the national museums (mostly in London) and those in the regions, over their level of public funding is a welcome sign that the old apartheid within Britain's museum community is rapidly breaking down. This can only help the cause of co-operation between museums both in the UK and abroad; and it can only assist the objectives of Marbles Reunited.

Two recent reports to Parliament also have implications for this debate. The 'Working Group on Human Remains in Museum Collections' - set up by the Department for Culture Media and Sport and published in November last year; and the Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee follow-up report on spoliation and looted art 'Cultural Objects: developments since 2000' (HC59 2003) to which the Government responded in March.

The Government has tried to limit these enquiries to human remains and looted art fearing that longstanding issues like the Parthenon Marbles will engender a 'flood' of requests for restitution. Both reports discount this fear, emphasise the virtues of co-operation and deplore the



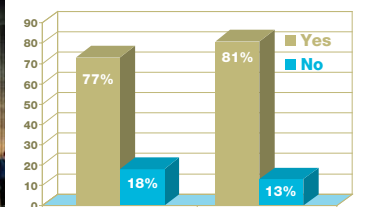
# Marbles Reunited

## THE MARBLES REUNITED REVIEW

SUPPORTING THE REUNIFICATION OF THE PARTHENON MARBLES

# Widening Support for Reuniting the Parthenon Marbles

**Marbles Reunited, the new project to bring together all the sculptures of the Parthenon in a new museum in Athens, launched at two events in London.**



Should the Marbles be reunited and displayed in Athens?

Should the British Museum retain ownership of those sections of the Marbles currently displayed in London while loaning them for extended display in Athens?

Museum professionals, academics and representatives of the media came together on January 14th at the ICA in the Mall to hear Robin Cook MP put the case for reuniting the Parthenon Marbles (The Parthenon Marbles are the sculptures, removed from the temple by Lord Elgin 200 years ago. Half are now in Athens, half in the British Museum). Robin Cook said the time was right for a

## "The time is right for a fresh new initiative to reunite the Marbles and return them to Greece"

**Robin Cook**

fresh new initiative to reunite the Marbles and return them to Greece for display in the New Acropolis Museum now being built in Athens.

Later that day MPs and peers packed the Jubilee Room in the House of Commons to pledge support for the campaign. Speakers included Andrew Dismore MP and Robin Cook MP and support came from across the political spectrum; Tony Banks MP (Labour), Richard Allan MP (Liberal Democrat) and Roger Gale MP (Conservative).

Robin Cook told his parliamentary colleagues that both the Government and Parliament should address this issue and support a fresh new initiative for resolving the long-running dispute over the Parthenon Marbles (Elgin Marbles).

The launch received widespread coverage in the British media and throughout the world. Many respected commentators and editorial articles

wrote in support of the campaign and the reuniting of the unique work of art that is the Parthenon Sculptures.

Since the launch, Marbles Reunited has been taking its message to a wider audience with a series of exhibitions, receptions, meetings and displays throughout the UK.

Already, Jack Straw MP, the Foreign Secretary, has pointed the way forward - closer co-operation on the project between Britain and Greece.

Speaking on the issue in January Straw said that "The best way of taking this forward is by way of discussions between the two cultural ministers".

## 8 in 10 of the British Public Support Reunification

A new opinion poll shows over 80 per cent of the British public support the reuniting of the Parthenon Sculptures for display in Athens. In addition, an exit poll was conducted, by Fieldwork UK, outside the British Museum in December 2003, showing strong support for reuniting the Sculptures in Athens. When asked if the British Museum should make a commitment to display the Marbles in Greece during this Olympic year, 63% agreed. Only 33% disagreed. Furthermore only 1 in 5 visitors said they had come to see the Marbles.

Since the poll was conducted the opinion of the Parthenon Marbles being jointly curated by the British Museum and the Acropolis museum is currently being canvassed (see article on back cover).

# The new proposals: how the marbles could be reunited

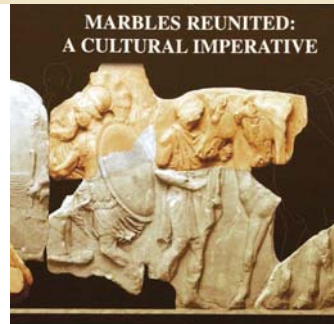
The new initiative for reuniting the Parthenon Sculptures proposes that:

- A new cooperative relationship is developed between Britain and Greece over the future display of the Parthenon Sculptures.
- Within this new relationship, the sections of the Marbles currently in London are reunited with those in Greece for display in the New Museum of the Acropolis currently being built in Athens.
- The London sections of the Marbles could remain in the ownership of the British Museum but be located in the new Museum now being built within sight of the Parthenon itself.
- Greek museums would provide in return, on loan, a flow of important antiquities for display both in the British Museum and in other

museums throughout the UK.

Speaking at the launch of "Marbles Reunited" at the ICA, The Mall, London, Chairman of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, Professor Anthony Snodgrass said: "For 200 years Britain and Greece have been locked in argument over the question of who owns the sections of the Parthenon Sculptures currently housed in London."

This fresh initiative is seen by many as the best solution to this long-running dispute. It would enable the Parthenon Sculptures, a unique work of art that makes sense only as a whole, to be reunited and displayed in its original city of Athens for the first time in hundreds of years in the new museum at the foot of the Acropolis.



**Unique exhibition graphically illustrates how the divided sculptures can be reunited.**

Using digital technology, the exhibition uses photographs of the dismembered Parthenon Sculptures, to combine and create virtual images of what will be achieved if the sculptures are reunited. Professor Anthony Snodgrass noted "It is more than 300 years since anyone has been able to see, in reality, the unified sculptures which this Exhibition will show in a virtual form."

Much of the display includes images of the Marbles that are in Athens and have never before been exhibited in the UK. These samples are recombined with pieces of the sculptures currently in the British Museum.

**Hellenic Centre, London**  
19th April (with reception) to 23rd April

**St. John Higher Education College, York**  
week beginning 26th April

**Oxford (Greek Week)**  
5th May to 12th May

**Staff House, Birmingham University**  
June/July, dates to be finalised.



"There is more that should be done to ensure that the original be set up as a whole."  
Professor Anthony Snodgrass, British Museum, London  
"You have the right Marbles."  
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## Co-operation and interpretation The new priorities

Freddie New, BCRPM

Museum directors and professionals from across the UK met in the National Gallery and Tate Britain on the 9th March to present a manifesto for their future aims, ambitions and activities.

Much was made of the success of the Renaissance in the Regions project, which has been piloted in three of the nine proposed regions. This was used throughout the conference as an example of the positive effect museum activities can have on local communities, and as further justification for increased long term investment by the Government.

At an afternoon session, Dr. Lindsay Sharp (Director, Science Museum) reiterated the observation that this was the first occasion on which both national and regional museums were uniting to describe how quality

of life can be raised as a result of their efforts.

Dr. David Fleming, Director of National Museums Liverpool, addressed the question of the role of national museums, which he said was rarely asked and seldom answered. He stated that the initial experiment with opening branches of the nationals in other locations seemed to have passed. However, the new strategy for the nationals is in terms of partnerships with other museums. Fleming stressed the importance of collaboration and partnership in future, and that making and maintaining partnerships between museums should now form a core activity for those in the profession, but he indicated that there are still those in the Museums profession who resent change and are elitist.

Ricky Burdett, from the London School of Economics, pointed out

that many museums are now carrying out activities that would have recently been unthinkable, making it clear that their social function is evolving. One factor which he highlighted in view of the special place occupied by museums in this respect were that they are largely neutral places, not tinged by overt association to school, for example.

Speaking at an evening reception, Minister for the Arts Estelle Morris said that 'interpretation' should be at the heart of museums. She stressed her pleasure that the national museums were talking to the smaller regional institutions. From the viewpoint of Marbles Reunited, the support that is being shown for further partnerships between museums opens the prospect of a new era of co-operation.

# MPs and local councils support the initiative in England, Scotland and Wales

**British Members of Parliament have been showing their support for Marbles Reunited.**

Over 60 MPs, Peers and Parliamentary staff attended the launch.

Nearly 100 MPs have signed a House of Commons motion calling for the Parthenon Sculptures to be reunited and the British Government to take a lead on this issue. Support for this has come from leading MPs in all parties and all areas of the UK.

Over 100 MPs have publicly declared their support for Marbles Reunited. Their names can be found on our website [www.marblesreunited.org.uk](http://www.marblesreunited.org.uk) and the list will be updated regularly as more MPs confirm their support.

Please check the list of supporters on the "Supporters" pages of the Marbles Reunited website [www.marblesreunited.org.uk](http://www.marblesreunited.org.uk) and if your MP has yet to sign, please ask them to do so.

**UK Councillors demonstrate their support.**

Councillors have been calling on the British Government and British Museum to accept the terms of the fresh initiative for resolving the long-running dispute over the future of the Parthenon Marbles. Strong support for the proposal has also come from City Councillors in Glasgow, the UK's last European City of Culture, and from Councillors of all parties in other areas of the UK.

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On 10th March, Liverpool City Council became the first local council formally to support the Marbles Reunited initiative.

Delegates who attended the Scottish Labour Party Conference in Inverness, the Labour Spring Conference in Manchester and the Welsh Labour Party Conference in Llandudno pledged their support. Councils throughout the UK are being invited to support the project and urge the Government to open negotiations with the Greek Government.

**Campaign heads for the regions.**

Politicians and people involved with museums have welcomed the offer by the Greek Government to loan antiquities for extended display at regional museums throughout the UK. Touring exhibitions could prove to be major attractions at regional museums throughout the UK, boosting visitor numbers and providing much-needed extra revenue for those museums. Marbles Reunited has hosted a series of regional events to highlight the benefits of the loan proposal to regional museums and tourist centres.

**Liverpool.**

The well-attended Marbles Reunited reception recently held in Liverpool, the UK's next European City of Culture, gave strong support for the loan proposal. Local MP Eddie O'Hara who spoke at the event said the people and City of Liverpool could only gain from the proposals. Others present including the Deputy Lord Mayor and leading City Councillors all said there was a strong case for reuniting the Parthenon Sculptures on long-term loan in Athens, and attracting other exhibitions of important Greek antiquities to the UK for display in cities like Liverpool.

**Scottish Launch.**

In February Marbles Reunited launched the initiative in Scotland at the Scottish Labour Conference.

The event was hosted by David Stewart, the MP for Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber and attendees, which included Jimmy Hood MP, heard about the potential benefits the new initiative would bring for Scottish museums. Coverage of the launch

included David Stewart MP giving interviews to both BBC Scotland TV and Radio.

**Welsh Launch.**

Marbles Reunited chose the Welsh Labour Conference in Llandudno to launch the campaign in Wales. A reception was held, attended by several Assembly Members, including briefly the First Minister Rhodri Morgan who expressed his support for Marbles Reunited.



Cherie Blair visiting the Marbles Reunited stand at the Labour Spring Conference in Manchester.



David Stewart MP with Professor Anthony Snodgrass at the Scottish Launch of Marbles Reunited.