

PARTHENON MARBLES STRATEGY

The British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles

January 2002

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1. THE CURRENT SITUATION

Positive Developments

- Various polls and surveys in recent times (MORI, BBC, CNN) indicate a high level of public support in the UK and internationally for the Marbles to be returned.
- There is now considerably more support within the Government and within Parliament for the return of the Marbles.
- There is now a wider acceptance in the UK cultural community that the Marbles will eventually be returned.
- Expressions of opposition to the return of the Marbles in the UK are now less emphatic than previously.
- The Secretary of State, Tessa Jowell and the Minister for the Arts, Countess Tessa Blackstone are believed to hold a 'neutral' view on the question of the Marbles.
- In June 2000, the then Minister for the Arts, Alan Howarth told the House of Commons Select Committee for Culture Media and Sport that the Government was happy to continue to discuss the issue with Greece.
- In June 2000, the Chairman of the Trustees of the British Museum, Mr Graham Greene told the House of Commons Select Committee the Museum was 'very willing to engage in a discussion' about the Parthenon Marbles.
- The Greek Government has announced details of the building of the new Acropolis Museum which has been designed to house all the surviving Parthenon Marbles.
- The Greek Government has announced a number of concessions designed to assist the return of the Marbles (For example Greece is prepared to waive all other claims for return of cultural property in British museums. Greece is also prepared to put to one side any claim to the title of ownership of the Marbles).

(The current situation continued)

However

- The British Museum's Trustees remain opposed to the return of the Marbles.
- There is no sign of a change of Governments policy on this issue. In May 2001, before the General Election, the Prime Minister Tony Blair indicated the Marbles would not be returned.
- The Government does not see much political value in supporting the return of the Marbles.
- The issue of the return of the Marbles is not a significant domestic political issue in Britain (it 'does not even appear on Downing Street's political radar screen').
- The British Government and British Museum do not believe they have a current claim or request for the Marbles to be returned.
- While there is widespread public support for the return of the Marbles, the support is 'soft'.
- Significant constituent groups in the community remain strongly opposed to the return of the Marbles.
- Some further opposition could be expected from the more nationalistic and conservative sections of the community and media, should the return of the Marbles be seriously contemplated.

2. PROPOSED STRATEGY

AIM

The principle aim of the strategy is to achieve a commitment prior to the Athens Olympic Games in 2004 from the British Government and the British Museum for the Parthenon Marbles to be returned to Athens.

APPROACH

To gain broad community support in Britain and in other countries based on a more informed understanding of the way in which the Marbles might be returned to Greece. The strategy builds on recent statements from the British Museum, and presents the case that their return is consistent with the provisions of the British Museum Act and the Museum's policies, and has the potential to protect and enhance its reputation as a progressive and dynamic international cultural institution.

The strategy will complement and support other initiatives to have the Marbles returned, including representations and discussions by the Greek Government with the British Government and the British Museum.

The approach has been developed with a number of strands of activity, to be implemented concurrently:

A NEW PROPOSAL

- Prepare and promote the British Committee's **Proposal** for the Return of the Parthenon Marbles.

PROMOTE ITS POLITICAL APPEAL

- Demonstrate that the return of the Marbles would have widespread **public support**.
- Demonstrate that the return of the Marbles is consistent with the Governments aspirations for the UK as a **partner in Europe**.
- Demonstrate that the return of the Marbles would be **widely applauded** throughout the world.
- Demonstrate that the return of the Marbles is consistent with modern world **Museum practice**.
- Demonstrate that the return of the Marbles could be achieved while promoting and protecting **Britain's interests**.
- Demonstrate that the return of the Marbles is consistent with the ethical aspirations of the **New Labour Government**.

PROMOTE DIALOGUE BETWEEN GREECE AND BRITAIN

- Encourage and facilitate any **dialogue** between Greece and the British Museum and the British Government that is aimed at the return of the Marbles.
- Provide any **assistance** to the Greek Government and the new Acropolis Museum in any dealings with the British Museum or the British Government.
- **Liase** with the Greek Government (the Greek Embassy in London) and the New Acropolis Museum to maximise the effectiveness of our respective efforts.

DIVERSIFY AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES SUPPORT

- Raise awareness and raise the levels of support throughout the **UK community** generally, including the progressive upgrading of the British Committee website.
- Consolidate and increase support for the return of the Parthenon Marbles throughout the **international community** – including USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia.
- Consolidate and increase support for the return of the Marbles throughout **Europe**, including the European Parliament and the Council of Europe.
- Invite **prominent and eminent** members of the community to support the return of the Marbles.
- Liase with and provide support to the **Parthenon 2004** campaign.

FURTHER REPRESENTATIONS TO THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND BRITISH MUSEUM

- Make new representations to the **British Museum** proposing the return of the Marbles.
- Make representations at senior levels of the **UK Government**, including Cabinet Ministers, Ministers etc.
- Make representations to relevant **Government advisers**, including Parliamentary Private Secretaries, Ministerial advisers and Downing Street advisers.
- Make representations to Civil Servants in relevant **Government departments** and agencies, including the Department of Culture Media and Sport.

ESTABLISH ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS SUPPORT

- Make representations to important **cultural institutions** eg. Museums Association, Resource, ArtResolve, UNESCO. and the Joint Parliamentary Heritage group.

CONSISTENT MEDIA MESSAGES

- Make representations to the British **media** (including the preparation of a media information kit) and to particular Editors, Political reporters, Arts journalists and selected columnists.

BUILD ON EXISTING POLITICAL SUPPORT

- Progressively build support within **Parliament** (both the House of Commons and the House of Lords) and within the various political parties.
- Continue to seek cooperation of and work with **MP Eddie O'Hara** and other supporters in Parliament on Early Day Motions and other Parliamentary initiatives, including the possibility of Private Members Bills.

3. IMPLEMENTING STRATEGY – PROGRAM OF ACTIVITIES

- British Committee to approve new Proposal for the Return of the Parthenon Marbles (being drafted by David Hill and the Australian Committee).

- Representations to be made to the following starting January 2002:

Liaison with Greek Government, new Acropolis Museum, Greek Embassy (London)	EC
Charles Clarke, Cabinet Minister	DH CP
Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State, Culture Media and Sport	CP
Countess Tessa Blackstone, Minister for the Arts	CP
Government advisers, Parliamentary Private Secretaries, Downing Street advisers	DH
Department Culture Media and Sport (Hilary Bauer)	DH
Museums Association, Resource, ArtResolve, UNESCO	DH EC
Key media (including preparation of media information kit)	DH
Submission to the British Museum	British Committee
Neal McGregor, Director (elect) British Museum	DH CP
Joint Parliamentary Heritage Group	CP
Liaison with ‘Parthenon 2004’	EC NA
Liaison with Parliamentarians and Political parties	EC CP, DH
Liaison with International Committees	EC
Building Community Support	EC NA

STRATEGY REVIEW

Progress and implementation of the Strategy will be reviewed on a six monthly basis. The review will also provide an opportunity to adjust as required the priority given to elements of the strategy, to take account of changing circumstances in Greece and Britain. The review committee will be made up of David Hill, Eleni Cubitt and Chris Price.

Members of the House of Commons who support the Return of the Parthenon Marbles

(Compiled by British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles)

Database Update - 23 January 2002

The Database includes current MPs who at some stage have signed motions or surveys supporting the return of the Marbles. The motions/surveys include a survey conducted by the British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles in 1984, Early Day Motions in 1996 and 1998, a further survey by the British Committee in January 2001 and an Early Day Motion 2000-1.

The total:

190 MPs (148 Labour, 25 Liberal Democrat, 7 Conservative, 10 Other)

which includes:

- **4** Members of Cabinet (Prescott, Beckett, Straw and Cook)
- **6** Ministers (Boeteng, Bradley, Foulkes, Harman, Twigg and Whitehead)
- **6** Whips or Assistant Whips (Ainger, Heppell, Sutcliffe, Fitzpatrick, Kemp, Smith)
- **14** Parliamentary Private Secretaries (Blackman, Blizzard, Cawsey, Fitzsimons, George, Hall, Hope, Ladyman, Love, Moffat, Purchase, Stewart, Thomas, Watts)

Also

- **13** are Privy Councillors (Beckett, Boateng, Bradley, Cook, Davis, Foster, Gummer, Harman, Kennedy, Prescott, Smith, Strang, Straw)

RENEWABLE LONG TERM EXCHANGE LOANS BY THE BRITISH MUSEUM

- **“... the Museum has in the past explored the possibility of a reciprocal exchange of objects as renewable long term loans to alleviate such restitution claims as the Parthenon Sculptures...”**

British Museum submission (Section 5:2) to the House of Commons Culture Media and Sport Committee, 2000

- **“... ideally, these [the separated pieces of the Parthenon Marbles in London and Athens] should be rejoined...”**

Evidence by Dr Vivian Davies, British Museum to House of Commons Select Committee, June 2000

- **“We could possibly examine the possibility of exchange loans [involving the Parthenon Marbles.] This has been brought up by the Museum before. Where two countries have two halves of two individual objects, there is the possibility for a long term long between them. That does seem to me to be sensible.”**

Evidence by Dr Robert Anderson, British Museum to House of Commons Select Committee, June 2000

- **“The British Museum may lend for public exhibition (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere) any object comprised in the collections of the Museum: provided that in deciding whether or not to lend any such object, and in determining the time for which, the conditions subject to which, any such object is to be lent, the British Museum shall have regard to the interests of students and other persons visiting the Museum , to the physical condition and degree of rarity of the object in question, and to any risks to which it is likely to be exposed.”**

Section 4, British Museum Act (1963)

- **..”There is no reserved list of objects that can never be lent.”**

British Museum, Working Document on Loans, Guidelines (Section 6)

- **“....We are very willing to engage in a discussion.”**

Evidence by Mr Graham Greene, Chairman of Trustees, British Museum to House of Commons Select Committee, June 2000

Argument for the return of the Parthenon Marbles

The Parthenon Marbles are widely regarded as the world's finest surviving ancient works of art. From the high period of Classical Greece the marbles, which formed an integral part of the Parthenon, are of outstanding historic, artistic and cultural significance. The marbles have made a profound impact on the development of western art and culture and have greatly advanced the knowledge and appreciation of the Greek achievement.

The British Museum holds more than 100 magnificent sculptures, fragments and architectural pieces from the Parthenon that were taken by the then British Ambassador Lord Elgin from 1801.

- **Re-uniting the surviving Marbles.** Returning the collection would allow the marbles to be reunited with the other surviving marbles and to be presented in their original configuration and original context in the new Acropolis Museum now being built in Athens to house them. The Marbles in the British Museum are diminished for being separated from their architectural, spatial and cultural context. They are fragments of a larger whole.
- **Public Support.** There is now growing public support for the return of the Marbles. In 1996 a Channel 4 viewer's poll resulted in nearly 100,000 telephone calls and over 90% supporting return. Also in 1998 a MORI poll and in 1999 a BBC Internet poll both revealed support at a ratio greater than 8:3 for return.
- **Members of Parliament support.** A survey of nearly 200 members of the House of Commons by The Economist in March 2000 revealed that 66% of MPs - and a staggering 84% of Labour MPs - said they would vote for the Marbles to be returned. This is consistent with the database of the British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles, which shows widespread support within the Government, including at the most senior levels of Cabinet.
- **Returning the Marbles will strengthen Britain's relations with Europe.** The Prime Minister said last November at the European Research Institute 'Britain's future is inextricably linked with Europe ... we must be wholehearted partners in Europe'. Returning the Marbles would be widely applauded throughout Europe. Last year Germany announced it is to return the significant sections of the Temple of Philippeion at Olympia.
- **The aspirations of the new Labour Government.** Returning the Marbles is consistent with all the stated aspirations of the PM for the new Labour Government: 'ethical', 'responsible', 'progressive' 'cooperative' 'forward looking' 'fair and just'. To continue to deny the claim for return is at odds with the aspirations of the new Labour Government: unethical, unfair, reactionary, imperial and uncooperative.

- **Modern Museum Practice.** In January 2000, the UK Museums and Galleries Commission published '*Restitution and Repatriation: Guidelines for Good Practice*'. The guidelines were commended by the Government, by a House of Commons Select Committee and by the Museums Association. Any reasonable application of the guidelines would result in the Parthenon Marbles being returned. Increasingly, major museums around the world are recognising there are special cases where the return of significant cultural items is warranted. In recent years significant items have been returned from museums in USA, Europe, Australia and Scotland.
- **Modern Heritage practice** now recognises the connection between places and objects. Contents, fixtures and works of art that are an integral part of a significant place, are best understood and interpreted within the context of the place and culture that created the whole work. The significance of the Parthenon as one of the world's most important buildings is diminished by the loss of so much of its sculpture.
- **Greece has started to build the new Acropolis Museum.** The design of the new Acropolis Museum has been approved. On November 20 the Greek Culture Minister announced the foundation stone will be laid next June and the building completed by 2004. The principle reason for the new Museum is to display the reunited Parthenon Marbles and its principle gallery will remain empty until they are returned.
- **Greece has made further concessions.** Last year the Greek Foreign Minister told a House of Commons Committee that Greece would put to one side its historic argument of ownership or title to the Marbles. This would leave open the possibility of ongoing British involvement in the exhibition, management and scholarship associated with the Marbles should they be returned to Greece.
- **The British Museum could benefit.** Greece has offered to make suitable alternative exhibits available to the British Museum and has agreed to waive all other claims for items from Greek antiquity in museums and private collections.