



Museum avoids call for Marbles

THE BRITISH Museum yesterday made a stylish attempt to stave off the prospect of an international diplomatic incident.

In the wake of a new book claiming that the Elgin Marbles were damaged 60 years ago while in the care of the museum, the Greek deputy foreign minister, George Papandreou, cut short a visit to the Cardiff summit to see the Marbles.

It was clearly an opportunity to make yet another call for the Marbles to be returned to Greece. But the British Museum was determined only to discuss matters artistic.

Mr Papandreou was shown around the three rooms of Parthenon friezes not by the museum's director but by an expert curator, Dr Dyfri Williams, who dwelt on neither the damage nor the politics, but waxed lyrical about the technique and symbolism of the sculpture.

"Ah," said Dr Williams as Mr Papandreou stopped to examine whether an original hue had been wiped away by suspect

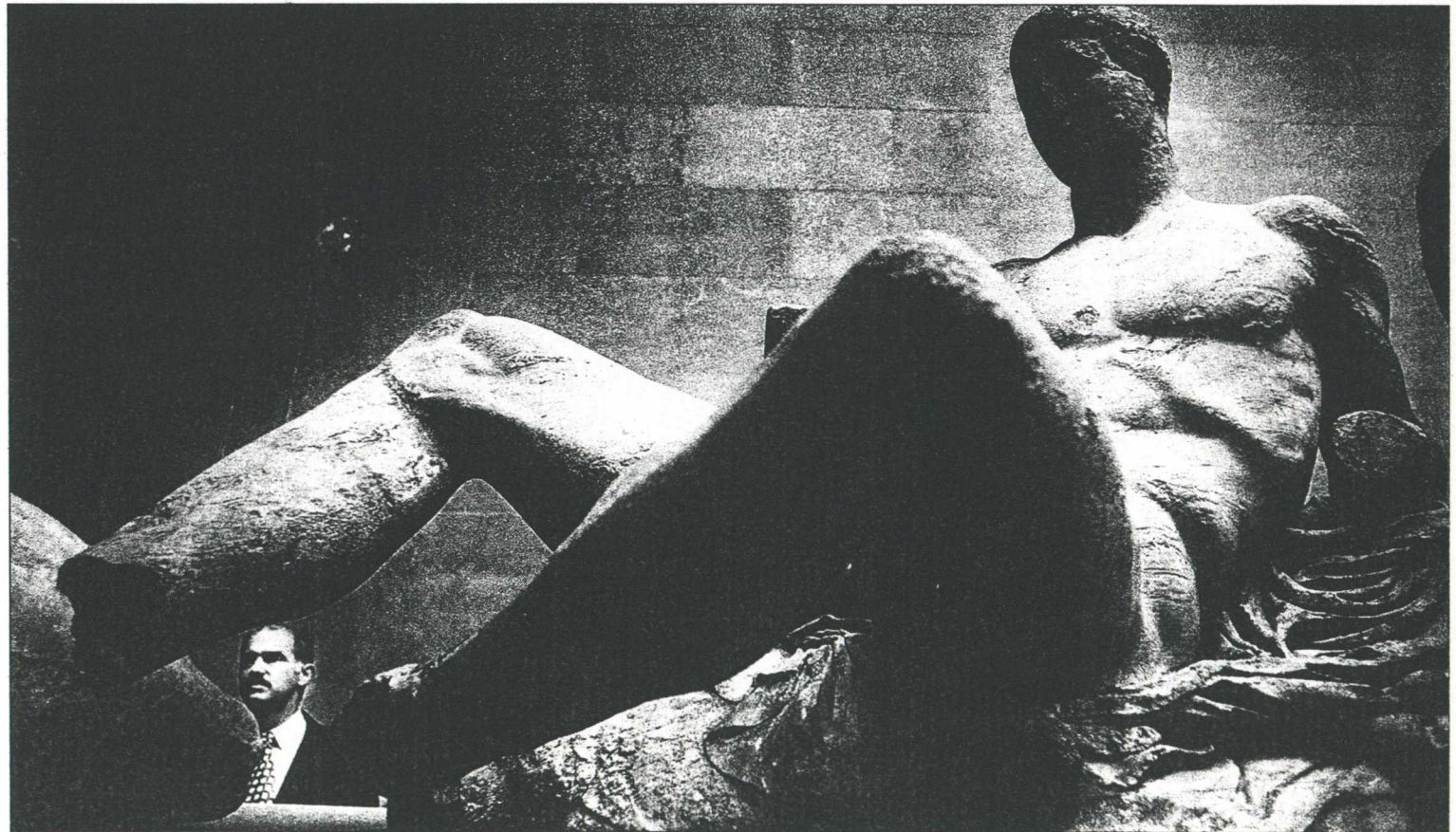
BY DAVID LISTER
Arts News Editor

cleaning methods. "Ah, it's nice to see you stop by one of my favourites. Look at the depth of the carving ..."

But Mr Papandreou was not to be totally deflected. At the end of the tour, he stood in front of the visibly damaged sculpture of the sun god Helios. He announced: "Revelations concerning the damage to the Parthenon Marbles have created a sense of concern ... which reflects on the stewardship of the Marbles."

Lest that sounded too dry and scientific, he added that as he was Greek, learning about the damage and seeing it was "something that touches me and I am sensitive to". He called for an independent inquiry and for the Marbles to be returned to Greece.

For his part, Dr Williams said that the level of damage reported in the new book was "a great exaggeration".



The Greek deputy foreign minister, George Papandreou, inspecting one of the disputed sculptures during his tour of the British Museum

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