***Viewpoint:*** *Yes. The Elgin Marbles should be returned to Greece because their illegitimate removal from the Parthenon compromised the integrity of thetemple. Moreover, the Greeks have begun to implement the conditions set by the British government for the return of the marbles, most notably the restoration of the Acropolis and the building of a new museum.*

The Parthenon temple was commissioned by the Greek general Pericles after Greece defeated the Persians in 480 B.C.E. The temple, dedicated to Athena, patron deity of Athens, replaced the old temple to the goddess on the Acropolis, which had been destroyed by the Persians. Conceived by Pericles as a symbol of "the adventurous spirit" of Athens that had "forced an entry into every sea and into every land," the Parthenon embodies the ancient Greek ideas of justice, freedom, and intellectual and artistic excellence that marked the height of the political power of Athens in the fifth century. "Mighty indeed are the signs of our power which we have left. Future ages will wonder at us, as the present age wonders at us now," Pericles boasted sometime after the completion of the temple. Clearly, he envisioned the monument as the embodiment of the confidence and pride of democratic Athens, whose people paid for its construction.

The Parthenon held panhellenic importance in antiquity, and later became the visible symbol of Greece's legacy to Western European culture, ideas, and values… A model for future ages, the Parthenon is unique, both in conception and construction…

The Parthenon stood almost intact for more than two thousand years. During the Byzantine period, it was transformed into a church, and between 1208 and 1458 it served as the church of the Frankish dukes: later it became a Turkish mosque, complete with minaret. Despite a good deal of remodeling and transformation of purpose, the building remained holy, revered, and well preserved. The first great destruction of the temple occurred on 26 September 1687, when the Franks attacked the Turks and bombarded the Parthenon, exploding a powder magazine that had been stored inside. Fourteen columns of the peristyle were destroyed and nearly all of the interior building. The building stood in this general condition throughout the Turkish occupation of Athens, until the arrival in 1799 of the new British ambassador to Ottoman Turkey- Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin.

Lord Elgin was a product of a generation of Europeans captivated by classical Greek culture, art, and architecture—a revival of interest that began in the eighteenth century. Aware of the drawings of the Acropolis published by Stewart and Rivett twelve years before, Elgin was well informed about architectural sculpture, but also knew that the Europeans were more interested in sculpture than architecture and valued it more. In his desire to help reposition England as the cultural center of Europe, Elgin decided that he would have drawings and casts made of the antiquities in Athens, especially the sculptures on the Acropolis. He would send them back to England and make them available to British artists in order to improve the modern art of Great Britain. For two years Elgin's workmen and subordinates… made copies and drawings of the ruins. Then, in the middle of 1801, Elgin changed his plan. Why settle for drawings and casts, when he could obtain the real thing? At this time Greece was part of the Ottoman Empire, ruled from Constantinople, and Elgin took advantage of his political position to obtain a *firman,* or permit, from the Turkish government that he used to remove the sculptures from the building and ship them to England.

Elgin later explained to the British House of Commons that he took down the sculptures from the Parthenon in order to "save them" from probable destruction at the hands of the Turks. The truth is rather different. The removal of the marbles was neither legal nor moral. Eyewitness accounts and correspondence, especially Elgin's own letters written between 1801 and 1816, along with Parliament records previously unused and unpublished, are the primary source of the facts in the case. The legitimacy and propriety of the removal of the marbles was disputed immediately, first by Constantinople and the Greeks themselves, a subjugated and impoverished people under Ottoman rule, and by philhellenes like George Gordon, Lord Byron, who spoke out on behalf of the Greeks who, he knew, were outraged by the acts but helpless to stop them; other Britons at the time and thereafter joined the protest. Elgin was obliged to defend his actions from the start.

In his letters, Elgin's "altruism" is proven false, for he intended not so much to "save" the marbles from the Turks as to "collect as much marble as possible" to decorate his own home, "Broomhall," in Scotland. "You do not need any prompting from me," he exclaimed in a letter to Lusieri in 1801, "to know the value that is attached to a sculptured marble, or historic piece. Look out for ... fine marble . . . that could decorate the hall...," he requested. Sadly for Elgin, a series of unfortunate circumstances short-circuited this new plan… Elgin was forced to sell the marbles to the British government to pay off his debts.

The actual removal of the marble metope and frieze sculptures was difficult, for these panels, unlike the pedimental sculptures, are not freestanding decoration added to the building, but are built *into* the structure. Workmen used saws and chisels to quite literally hack the panels of the metopes and frieze off the building, damaging both the sculptures and the monument in the process; several of the panels were irreparably harmed, and some destroyed utterly during removal. The destruction of the architectural elements caused by the saws and accidents could not be duplicated by any fate under normal circumstances. It is impossible to say whether the remaining sculptures would have suffered a "worse fate" if left on the building. Further, we must consider the negative impact of transportation and improper storage during thirty-three missions and seventeen trips to England, not to mention an eighteen-month salvage operation to recover sculptures from the bottom of the sea after Elgin's ship *Mentor* sank.

After much debate over the authenticity and acquisition of the marbles, the British Parliament finally purchased Elgin's lot of Parthenon sculptures in 1816 and presented them to the British Museum to be "held in perpetuity." Thereafter, they became known as the "Elgin Marbles," and were moved around in the museum until Joseph Duveen, first Baron Duveen, funded a new building for them in 1938. Were the sculptures "safe" once they were finally installed in the British museum. Indeed not.

As investigating scholars have proven, the sculptures were damaged when molded for plaster casts, which removed all the surviving polychromy and some of the patina; by pollution in London, as Duveen admitted in 1939; by undesirable climatic conditions in the museum; and worst of all by several "cleanings," the most serious of which, in 1937-1938, employed abrasives and copper chisels to remove "London grime" and to satisfy the erroneous perception that the marbles should be white (they had in fact been painted). The cleaning scandal was covered up by the museum for sixty years. Art historians, archaeologists, museum curators, and scholars who have studied the pieces and continue to study them have shown that the marbles have been divested of their surviving paint and luster, their color, and their surface texture since being installed in the British Museum. Further, they are devoid of all context. What worse fate would they have suffered if left on the building? The Parthenon marbles are sacred images inextricable from the temple monument itself. Only when viewed together with the monument do they explain the religion and culture of the ancient Athenians.

The 1970 UNESCO Convention on the transfer of cultural property made it a crime to acquire smuggled objects, and the large collections of ancient art purchased by museums from private individuals in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, such as the Cessnola Collection of Cypriot Art in the Metropolitan Museum in New York or the Elgin Marbles, would not be acquired today. Although the trustees of museums have created acquisition guidelines that are in full compliance with the UNESCO Convention, the traffic in stolen antiquities remains a multi-billion-dollar international business… In 1982 Melina Mercouri, the minister of culture for Greece, urged England to return the Parthenon marbles to Greece. Her request was denied; however, in response, the British Committee for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles was formed and has been lobbying actively. Recent polls show that the British people support 3-1 the return of the marbles as a gesture of international goodwill and friendship toward a country whose culture has so influenced Europe and the world. Polls … support restitution of the marbles to Greece as long as three conditions are met: 1) Greece pays for the cost of return, and for the creation of a complete set of copies; 2) Greece makes no further claims on the museum for restitution; and 3) Greece develops a complete restoration project of the Acropolis and builds a new Acropolis museum to house the collection.

These conditions have been accepted gladly by the Greek government, and are being implemented. In 1983 the Greeks began a set of twelve restoration programs that included securing the rock of the Acropolis, reducing pollution in Athens and dealing with its effects, archival research, construction restoration, inventory, and the relaying of ancient paths leading to the Acropolis. In the summer of 2000 Athens began a two-stage tender process for their new Acropolis Museum [and] created a 210,000- square-foot space with the capacity for visitors to simultaneously view the Parthenon sculptures, the Parthenon building, and the Acropolis. {The museum] is scheduled for completion in 2006.

At least ten thousand visitors per day would experience the marbles in their homeland, in an Athenian museum facing the Parthenon where they can be understood and appreciated as architectural elements of a sacred building. In January 1999, a majority of members of the European Parliament (339 of 626) signed a petition urging the British Museum to return the Parthenon marbles to Greece, and the EU supplied funds for the construction of the new Acropolis Museum. Therefore, the return of the Parthenon marbles to Greece is not simply a matter of dispute between Greece and Britain but holds much wider significance. Restitution would be just and generous, beneficial not only to Greece and Britain but also to the world.

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***Viewpoint:*** *No. The marbles should remain in the British Museum because Lord Elgin's legal removal saved them from destruction. They are available to a wider public than they would be in Athens, and their return to Greece would set a precedent that would empty many great museums of their collections.*

There is no doubt that Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin, revered ancient Greek art and wanted it preserved for posterity. Like many educated upper-class Britons of his day, Lord Elgin was a philhellene, captivated by the form and design of classical Greek artistry. In 1799 he realized that his new appointment as ambassador to Ottoman Turkey would afford him an opportunity to improve the arts of Great Britain by making available to artists and writers casts and drawings of the great Greek monuments. He employed architects, draftsmen, and craftsmen to execute this plan on the Acropolis, working under the direction of Italian painter Giovanni Battista Lusieri; work began on this ambitious project with a legal *firman* (permit) from the ruling Turkish government in 1800.

By this period in history, Greece had been under the rule of the Ottoman Turks for more than three hundred years. The ancient Acropolis had been converted into a garrison, and the Parthenon, into a mosque. The Greeks were a subjugated people, with no power to protect or preserve their antiquities; the situation was not a healthy one for the surviving monuments and artifacts. Lusieri reported to Elgin that "the Turks continually defaced the statues and pounded them down to make mortar." Hearing constant news of the destruction of the artifacts on the Acropolis, Elgin determined that the marbles must be removed for their safety; as he stated before the House of Commons, Elgin believed that if he did not remove the best examples of ancient Greek art, they would be lost to the civilized world.

Knowing that the Ottomans were indebted to the British for their alliance against the French, he requested, and obtained, a second *firman* to allow removal of the sculptures to England, with language allowing the workmen to "take away any pieces of stone with inscriptions or figures." Collection continued from 1801 to 1804 with additional *firmans;* when the political climate was again favorable for Britain in 1810, Sir Robert Adair, British ambassador in Constantinople, acquired for Elgin a final *firman* allowing him to ship all the remaining antiquities in his collection program to England. Had he the financial resources, Lord Elgin would likely have established his own private museum for the collection, which he would have made available to artists and scholars. He was certainly not trying to "get rich" from the Parthenon marbles, as his detractors have implied. In fact, the expense involved in his collection program ruined Elgin financially.

The Acropolis of Athens had been looted by treasure hunters since antiquity, but in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries major European powers, motivated by this period's romantic passion and enthusiasm for classical antiquities, were eager to fill their museums. If Elgin had not removed the marbles, someone else certainly would have. The French, the British, and the Americans at the time of Elgin were engaged in "museum wars," on behalf of the Louvre, the British Museum, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, respectively; trustees never met without acquiring a work of classical art for their great collections. Such practices are characteristic of the morality of the time and cannot be judged by contemporary mores or laws.

In the unlikely event that no one removed the Parthenon marbles, they would most likely have been destroyed by earthquake, weather, conversion, or war. The Parthenon had suffered through earthquakes, a ruinous fire in the second century B.C.E., and a series of renovations since it was built, but conversions—the most severe of which occurred around 450 C.E., when the temple was converted into a church for the first time—caused the most damage. The Byzantine Christians constructed an apse on the east end of the building and dismantled, destroyed, and/or defaced the sculptures of the east pediment, frieze, and metopes; the remaining metopes on the other three sides were also deliberately defaced. In the following centuries, the Parthenon suffered from further conversions, renovations, and pilfering. In the mid fifteenth century, the Ottoman Turks defeated their Prankish predecessors in Athens and set up their stronghold on the Acropolis. They stored their artillery and powder magazines in the ancient monuments; the Propylaia, the Temple of Athena Nike, and the Parthenon were all destroyed by accidental or war-related explosions and conversions by the Turks. The greatest overall damage to the Parthenon came not from the removal of the marbles but from an artillery projectile, fired by the besieging Venetians on 26 September 1687, which exploded one of the powder magazines stored inside the temple. Two centuries later, during the Greek War of Independence, the Turks happily destroyed the columns of the Parthenon to get at the lead clamps inside, which they used for bullets.

Elgin did not steal the marbles. The legal status of the collection is established beyond a doubt; any argument against the legality of removal of the Parthenon marbles is a boondoggle. The firmans(permits) acquired by Lord Elgin between 1801 and 1810 were absolutely legal according to the international law at the time, as the Ottoman government in Greece was recognized both *de jure* and *de facto;* the Ottoman Turks had absolutelegal authority over the Parthenon.Although the language of the *firman* is ambiguous,the document was twice ratified by theTurkish government to allow the removal of theParthenon marbles.

In 1816, after determining that Elgin had the legal authority as a private individual to remove the marbles and that the marbles were authentic fifth-century Greek artifacts, the Select Committee of the House of Commons bought Elgin's collection and donated it to the British Museum to be held "in perpetuity."

From the moment that the British Museum acquired the Parthenon marbles, the curators have done everything in their power to preserve, protect, and display the artifacts in the context that will allow for the greatest safety, accessibility, and understanding by the widest possible audience. To this end, the curators of the collection have worked continually with their Greek colleagues, and over the decades the British Museum has supplied many casts of the sculptures to Athens. Six million visitors from the far corners of the world visit the British Museum annually—twice as many as would visit them in Athens. The British Museum—free and open seven days a week to the world—holds international status as a center for Parthenon studies. It offers conferences, seminars, scholarly and general publications; it maintains a state-of-the-art web interface and facilitates learning through close links with the Center for Acropolis Studies in Athens.

Could Athens better provide for the marbles? Would the marbles be safer? Would they be more available in Athens to educate the public? The answer to all three of these questions is "No." Over the centuries since Greek independence, the Greek archaeological service has been working hard to preserve the Acropolis, but a deteriorated environment has ravaged the monuments. Political instability and a lack of sufficient resources impede progress toward restoration. Mistakes were made in past restoration projects, which caused much more harm than good. The iron clamps are a case in point. The Greek Archaeological Service has spent years replacing the oxidized iron clamps with titanium.

The rich cultural heritage of ancient Greece is, in the words of the ancient Greek general Pericles, "an education," not only for Greece itself, but the world. The Parthenon marbles are a source of national pride in Britain, where they have been enriching the artistic and cultural life for more than two hundred years, inspiring generations of writers, poets, artists, architects, and scholars. As the English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley so eloquently wrote: "We are all Greeks." The British have long-standing cultural, emotional, and political ties to Greece—ancient and modern. Indeed, it was the philhellenism of the British, fueled in great part by the installation of the Parthenon marbles in 1816, that facilitated the freeing of Greece from Turkish rule and the creation in 1833 of the modern Greek state.

Those who insist that the British government should return the marbles in order to "restore the integrity" of the Parthenon by "uniting it with its sculptures" are romantics who deny the hard fact that for the sake of their conservation and preservation the Parthenon marbles must be housed in a museum—they will not go back on the monument. Experts on all sides agree on this point. Furthermore, the British Museum is only one of many institutions to hold artifacts from the Parthenon. Pieces of the monument can be found in France, Germany, Italy, the Vatican, Denmark, and Austria. Should all these museums return these objects? What would happen to world culture if museums were entitled only to display objects from their own countries? The whole notion of a museum as a center of world cultural and historical education would be called into question.

Political nationalists who claim that no one but the Greeks themselves are entitled to the Parthenon marbles have less of an interest in preservation, conservation, and education than they do in power and prestige. This attitude, when taken too far, is dangerous and goes against the UNESCO Convention of 1970, which encourages the interchange of cultural property among nations to "increase knowledge of the civilization of Man, enrich the cultural life of all peoples, and inspire mutual respect and appreciation among nations."

Even if every museum sent their collections back to Greece, there would be no restitution of the Parthenon to its original glory. The best way to ensure proper contextual viewing of the entire monument of the Parthenon is to place plaster casts of the sculptures on the building. This is achievable, and by far the best solution. Legislation enacted in 1963 prohibits the British Museum from de-accessioning its collection, though it may loan objects: it will take an Act of Parliament, therefore, to change the permanent status of the Parthenon marbles. The most important concern should be how to best preserve archaeological context and cultural heritage for present and future generations; at the time of this writing, Greece is not yet prepared to do right by the marbles, and they should remain in the British Museum. The British government legitimately owns them, and is morally committed to conserving the artifacts and making them available for the world to appreciate and admire.

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