# Museums and National Identity: The Case of the Parthenon Sculptures

The controversy over ownership for the Parthenon Sculptures between Britain and Greece questions the role of museums, specifically the British Museum, in the promotion of national identity in the late twentieth century. An analysis of this controversy suggests that museums, while helping maintain a national identity, also promote a global identity, albeit inadvertently. This paper seeks to examine the interaction between nationalism and museums, with a view to assessing what significance the Parthenon Sculptures have in the British Museum. Additionally, it attempts to presents the Greek demand for the return of these sculptures in context of the opening of the new Acropolis Museum in June of 2009 in Athens.

## I

Two key concepts in the dialogue regarding the Parthenon Sculptures are national identity and museums. Reliant upon each other for survival, they generally encourage loyalty to a specific heritage. Museums represent a physical aspect of theories or abstract ideas that are key to the advancement of national identity, however, museums cannot invoke nationalism, rather they enable the advancement and continuation of a nations loyalty to its identity.

Nationalism is a broad term that describes a common denominator between groups of people. A relatively new phenomenon during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it has spread throughout the modern world. Many scholars have attempted to come up with a comprehensive definition for nationalism and nations as well as a workable theory for how nationalism began to develop. Scholars agree that nationalism is not the ancient idea that some national groups have made it out to be, it is something that is created by people. There are numerous theories as to the

origins of nationalism, two prominent authors on the subject are Ernest Gellner with his book, Nations and Nationalism and Benedict Anderson with Imagined Communities, while both books were originally published in 1983, each holds a very different view upon which nationalism began. The two books are very different in their thesis, use of evidence, and periodization.

In this discussion of Gellner and Benedict's theories regarding nationalism, the first step is to identify how they each define nationalism and nations. Gellner gives his definition of nationalism as "a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent,"[1] the nation comes into existence 'if and when the category firmly recognize certain mutual rights and duties to each other in virtue of their shared membership."[2] This definition focuses upon boundaries as represented in maps which is not always the case for a nationalistic boundary, at times a physical boundary is much different than a boundary outlined by a common language, religion, or ruler. While Anderson does not exactly define nationalism, he implies that nationalism is a "cultural artifact" [3] which was created with the introduction of a common language, leading to print capitalism and connection to homeland. Nation, as defined by Anderson, "Is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."[4] Here the idea of a nation is more of an abstract idea and allows for kingdoms such as a multinational monarchy. This variance in definitions leads to two very different theories concerning how nationalism developed.

As with their differing definitions, both had theses that were unlike, but not wholly conflicting. Gellner's book focused upon the origin of nationalism as related to the beginning of industrialization, therefore nationalism is modern. Through an analysis of the switch from agricultural to industrial society, he focused on how industrialization caused either a recognition

of ones nation or an assimilation into a new society for either monetary or social purposes. Also, he pointed out that usually a society's elite were the ones making the distinction of what parts of their identity were nationalized and what was to be weeded out. He considers the idea that a man without a nation today is foreign to many people because to modern society, being a wanderer is repulsive to many; as Gellner surveyed how a switch to industrialization from agriculture brought about this new idea of nation he shows that almost the opposite sentiment is true for them as it is today: a man without a nation then was the norm.

Anderson on the other hand pinned introduction of print capitalism which created imagined communities as the start of nationalism. He used the term imagined communities instead of nation, state, or other terms commonly used to describe a body of people because in his mind a group that had adopted a nationalistic identity for the most part did not occupy the same physical boundary. If they did live within a region as defined by a map, then there was just no way that this group of people could know every person so it was an imagined connection within a boundary that could be better defined as kinship or fraternity. That deep loyalty no matter physical placement is what Benedict said was responsible "for so many millions of people, not so much as to kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings."[5] Regarding museums, Anderson says that they are rooted in politics and were the products of a new archaeological age in which the higher powers used museums to claim right to reign. Beginning with Thomas Stamford Raffles, an eminent British statesman, the collecting of artifacts for personal pleasure and studying frenzy commenced. Following his example, the glory of ancient sites were "disinterred, unjungled, measured, photographed, reconstructed, fenced off, analysed, and displaced," for the pleasure of many. [6] They allowed the ruling group to define what their provinces history was and how they viewed outside nations, also, "Monumental archaeology,

increasingly linked to tourism, allowed the state to appear as the guardian of a generalized, but also local, Tradition." [7] Oftentimes, history was written based upon artifacts and art found by outside powers subsequently displayed in exhibitions which were only open to tourists. The lawns were well manicured and the exhibits were arranged so as appear apart of the rich culture of the concerned society.[8] It was a way to create an identity and reinforce it with historical and archaeological artifacts. It may seem that these theses from Anderson and Gellner are wildly different, but in fact their points of origin are closely related with only a few advancements separating them from being simultaneous.

Both Anderson and Gellner focus upon education in general, but Gellner concentrated on the impact of intellectuals and elite that brought about widespread education for factory workers and migrants from rural communities to the city. Anderson had an element of this, but his main points dealt with development of a common language that enabled widespread education and the printing press that brought with it circulation of newspapers, books, and an attachment to ancestral homeland. An exception would be the Creoles whose homeland in a sense rejected them forcing them to identify with their new home and develop loyalties to that. Gellner and Anderson were along a similar train of thought, however, that new industrialization allowed for the development of a nationalism mentality.

To support their theses, Gellner and Anderson used a wide range of sources. Mainly, they used books written around the same time (1950s to 1980s). Gellner focused primarily upon texts written by philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists which generated a book that was not necessarily an approach congruent with history, but allows for a wide definition of nationalism, its causes, and can be analyzed from an objective standpoint. Anderson, on the other hand, used a lot of primary source material; almost anything from books, poems, state record of censuses and

official government documents, diplomatic speeches, and ancient texts; mainly from Latin America, South America, Greece/Rome, and the Middle East. His approach provides a more historical survey which enables him to give specific examples.

Periodization is something key to both books. Gellner chose to set his period in an imaginary time and place with Ruritania and blue people. This allows for his theory, provided it is homogenous to the current situation or analysis, to be applied without the problem of a nip-and-tuck approach. However, it also makes it so that one situation of nationalism cannot be compared to another one that is similar. On the other hand, Anderson used specific examples knowing that they would eventually be no longer relevant as a whole. Using specific examples can drive the point home without much explanation (if the reader has knowledge of country) and can easily be referenced if a similar situation ignites. Both approaches are beneficial in their own right, and have different uses in different situations.

Together, Gellner and Anderson show that nationalism is a concept that developed in a time period during which greater physical movement of common peoples was blossoming. The desire of a nation or familiar bond gave way to the idea of nationalism, in which individuals had common ground with those nearby and identified with them in a way that developed a strong bond. Eventually the bond became a reality as nationalism emerged as a driving force, especially in overcoming repression.

An institution that is a key part of conveying history to the masses is the museum, which has shaped the way that civilization views history. Children attend events at museums as field trips into a dusty and boring past while adults venture out to museums to assert social standing. In some aspect of life or another, museums have informed and entertained visitors with heroic

stories of ancestors. If origins of a society are often displayed and interpreted to leave no question as to where it all began, then nationalism is essentially a museum that displays history through the eyes of a nation which is not always reality. The idea of a cultural artifact then is the essence of what a museum is constructed to display. Following that reasoning, then nationalism is essentially a museum that displays history through the eyes of a nation which is not always reality. Similarily, museums are institutions which display artifacts with interpretations that are not always reality. In both cases the display is considered fact due to the trust placed in each institution.

The definition of museums, according to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) is:

> A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.[9]

Museums have a long history, beginning with a prototype developed around third century BCE called the Musaeum of Alexandria.[10] This ancient model inspired the Louvre in France that began as a rebellion against the monarchy.

The first public museum, the Louvre opened its doors in 1793, encouraged exploration into foreign lands to gain works of art that would educate as well as please visitors.[11] Refining what the purpose of a museum is over the last 200 years, museums have grown into a widespread institution that have retained their mission as a teaching institute and also expanded its purpose to preserving objects important to human history, specifically culture. Three authors who examine this evolution are Kevin Walsh in *Representations of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern World*, Flora Kaplan in *Museums and the Making of Ourselves: The Role of*

*Objects in National Identity*, and James Cuno in *Who Owns Antiquity?:Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage*.

Kevin Walsh wrote *Representations of the Past: Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern World* in 1995. It examines how modernization has distanced people from their heritage by presenting a picture of the past and not allowing there to be any room for change or improvement. Basing his studies in a background in archaeology and research, Walsh writes of how museums are a disservice to the heritage of a people because it prevents an honest understanding of nations, " Museums and heritage have contributed to this distancing from the processes which affect our daily lives, and have promoted an uncritical patriotism which numbs our ability to understand and communicate with other nations."[12] From his postmodern standpoint, Walsh is writing to debunk history. According to him, museums are a translation of history into easily understood terms for the public, so for Walsh, a museum is unnecessary and even counterproductive to advancing through time because it oversimplifies and generalizes. Towards the end of his book, Walsh writes, " The past has been severed from the daily experiences of people, and...is often employed to legitimate the ideas of modernity and progress. Essentially, the past...has been situated within contexts of institutional legitimacy, which remove 'direct access' to the past from the public."[13] The main issue that Walsh has with museums is the industry that has developed around them which has brought a commercialization of the past, such as a gift shop. Written in 1995, Walsh follows the trend of removing history and replacing it with postmodernism which encourages distance from facts and distrusting theories or ideologies. Museums exemplify an ideology, therefore, they are not useful to the postmodern world.

Flora Kaplan compiled a series of discussions regarding the continuing production of the past, and how that has manifested itself in museums. The majority of the papers compiled deal with previously colonized countries that have recently sought independence and recreation of their own history. Kaplan addresses this in the introduction, "This book presents the histories and case studies of some of the ways in which national cultural heritage was and is still being created, transformed and shaped into collective views of the state, its regions, municipalities, constituent groups, values and ideas."[14] The discussions indicates the role that museums play in the continuation of national identity is as a tool that can be used to inspire and unify through the realization of a common past. Written in 1996, Kaplan presents essays that exemplify the countries that once were colonies over the colonizing countries. This focus does not favor global museums, such as the British Museum, because they seek to display a myriad of cultures and enable the visitor to evaluate their identity in relation to everyone else.

James Cuno wrote *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage* in 2008 to address the issue of global museums in an effort to preserve heritage. Global or encyclopedic museums broaden knowledge and prevent a closed understanding of heritage, "I [James Cuno] am arguing against nationalist retentionist cultural property laws. They nationalize and fail to protect our ancient heritage, and they conspire against a greater understanding and appreciation of the world's many diverse cultures."[15] While it seems counter intuitive to preserve heritage through a global museum, Cuno argues that they make knowledge more accessible and helps to create a citizen that is internationally conscious, not only nationally conscious. Cuno gives a new definition for museums, "the museum as a repository of things and knowledge, dedicated to the dissemination of learning and to the museum's role as a force for understanding,

tolerance, and the dissipation of ignorance and superstition, where the artifacts of one time and one culture can be seen next to those of other times and other cultures without prejudice."[16] This encyclopedic museum asks the visitor to grasp the values of other cultures while a national museum encourages biases. Museums have shifted their mission to encompass the world that is changing from a nationalistic focus to a global focus.

While Kaplan and Walsh discuss the limited abilities of museums and the impact they have on the formation and preservation of national identity, they do not propose a solution to their proposed problems. The essays compiled by Kaplan provide examples of how national museums can aid in breaking free from an oppressive past, and Walsh exposed the flaws that museums have in creating history. Cuno presents problems that museum have such as constricting the amount of information given to the public, but he goes one step further by proposing a solution with global museums.

Museums and nationalism are ideologies that are interdependent, but one is not generated by the other. As shown by Gellner and Anderson, nationalism needs a vehicle to inform people, which is what Museums are. Kaplan shows that museums can be used to encourage national identity and Walsh proved it further by attempting to deflate the influence museums hold over people. Cuno proposes that these help to breed prejudices and that global or encyclopedic museums would help to promote acceptance of foreign cultures. This is an idea that has developed unintentionally over the last century, but was never purposely pursued by museum officials until now in an advancing age of globalizationn. The Louvre opened in 1793 in the Palais Royal and developed into the leading museum in art. Similarly, the British Museum had opened in 1753, as a way to fulfill the last wishes of a man who collected 71,000 artifacts. These

museums are acclaimed worldwide and help to promote a national identity in their own countries while educating millions of visitors about other cultures. Disputes over antiquities, such as the Parthenon Sculptures, helps to expose the flaws of museums, and then refine their definitions.

II

The British Museum was originally an estate bequeathed to the nation of England by Sir Hans Sloan whose 71,000 piece collection consisted mostly of literary or archival material. The doors of the museum opened in 1759 with the aims of being mostly a library, with daily affairs supervised by the Principle Librarian with three Under-Librarians. All other aspects of the British Museum were governed by a body of Trustees associated with Parliament.[17] Today, the Museum is administered by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport with departments of the museum arranged by either country of origin or time period. The Museum is run by a curator who supervises a group of directors, each with the responsibility of one of the galleries. Also, the focus of the collection has shifted from archival or literary material to objects from around the world. Essentially, the British Museum is an extension of the British government, and has been since 1753 when the Sloan collection was acquired. Over the last 250 years, its influence has reached to lands near and far through their support of excavations and free admission to the museum.[18] As times changed the Museum has changed, allowing for the entrance of technology to aid in the education of visitors and enhancing every exhibit, the Parthenon Sculptures included.

At the time of Lord Elgin's appointment to Constantinople, England and France were engaged in war; England trying to keep hold of possessions and France trying to expand. One place both countries were vying for was Egypt, and subsequently other Ottoman empire

holdings.[19] Competition with France helped stimulate the archaeology race that has come to characterize the early nineteenth century in Europe. Private citizens continued to acquire artifacts from foreign countries, but many of these antiquities made their way into galleries or museums open to the public. Some scholars went out in search of certain objects, such as mummies from Egypt. Ian Jenkins, director of Greek and Roman Antiquities says of this period:

> Certainly, a great deal of national pride was invested in the British Museum also, and competition with the French provided a constant incentive for archaeological activity. Yet, the material culture of the great civilizations of antiquity was not gathered out of any sustained motive for national self-aggrandizement, but rather through a series of remarkable accidents. The composition of the Museum's collection reflects not so much the acquisition policy of a nation, as the enterprise of a few extraordinary individuals.[20]

As director of the Greek and Roman Antiquities gallery, Jenkins has experienced first hand how the British Museum is an important aspect of British identity as well as allows for a unique commingling of civilizations from the beginning of history until now. The British Museum displays the hard work of philanthropic aristocrats and extraordinary ancestors, together they provide a foundation that informs and entertains the general public. As a result of a few men pursuing great works of art, millions of world citizens can see first hand objects that influence the world today. Whether obtained properly or not, the museums [such as the British Museum] open their doors and encourage people to be curious.

## III

One philanthropist who helped to develop the British Museum's collection was Lord Elgin. In 1799, Lord Elgin was appointed as Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary of His Britannic Majesty to the Sublime Porte of Selim III, which meant he would be moving to Constantinople.[21] Born into a family rich in history (including a relation to

Robert the Bruce, first king of Scotland) Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin, Elgin did not see the appointment to Ambassador as a particularly thrilling circumstance, but rather an opportunity to enrich the saga of his land by bringing to England examples of Greek art and architecture.[22] Prior to leaving for Constantinople, Elgin married Mary Nisbet and made arrangements for a troupe of artists, musicians, a doctor, and Reverend Philip Hunt to accompany them.[23] The Elgins set sail for Constantinople in 1799, Lady Elgin believing the venture vain and Lord Elgin impatient to begin work in Athens.[24]

Following much of trouble in hiring artists and architects willing to work for the menial pay Elgin was able to afford, Giovanni Battista Lusieri was hired as the head of Elgin's crew in Athens to oversee the workers and later to coordinate the removal of sculptures from the building. Also working on the transportation of the sculptures was William Richard Hamilton, Elgin's private secretary, and for spiritual guidance, Reverend Philip Hunt accompanied the ambassador.[25] While Elgin traveled around Greece and performed his diplomatic duties, Lusieri and his men began to document the Parthenon, but they ran into trouble, when the local government began charging an entrance fee and damaging the equipment used by the artists.[26] To solve this problem, Elgin was given an ambiguous writ called a *firman* (or letter of permission) from the then occupying Turks to study and preserve the Parthenon unhindered, which eventually was also taken to include removal of important aspects of the structure.

Lusieri and his crew worked for three years with little to no disruption and had the first part of Elgin's collection ready to transport to England. Facing the dilemma of transporting heavy pieces of marble nearly 1800 miles, Elgin used his position of ambassador combined with family connections to appeal to the British Navy for transportation of his collection. Receiving a

negative response and pressured by the continual advances of the French army, Elgin decided to purchase a ship of his own. Unfortunately, the ship (called Mentor) ran into a storm off the island of Cythera, and sank.[27] Eager to have the collection safely in England, Elgin paid for all the crates on Mentor to be salvaged, then arranged for the salvaged crates along with the rest of the collection to be transported to England, much of it graciously taken on by a British commander and his crew. Once they arrived in England, Elgin's mother quickly ran out of space to store the collection and had to purchase an estate called Park Lane to house the sculptures in.

Having shut down the embassy in Constantinople, the Elgin family embarked on the return trip home. Lord and Lady Elgin chose to traverse France by land without their children and were quickly captured by Napoleon's army and detained in Paris, spending the next three years interned in various French cities. Allowed to leave because her youngest child had died and needed to be buried in Scotland, Lady Elgin left France before her husband. Once back on English land, Lord Elgin made plans for his collection to be united, but was soon interrupted by the discovery of his wife's infidelity which thrust Elgin into a nasty divorce trial. Facing financial ruin, Elgin resorted to selling his collection which he appraised at £74,240, to the government owned British Museum. The total Elgin had come up with was based on the expenses incurred in the removal and transportation of the sculptures, not the monetary value of the Sculptures themselves. After a long debate, the Select Committee settled on a purchase price of £35,000 in 1816, most of that, however, was allocated for debts that Elgin owed and he saw none of it.[28] After such an illustrious life as a collector, Elgin entered into mild obscurity, having remarried and taken another diplomatic job so he could support his family. His collection

originally dubbed the Elgin Marbles, however, had just begun their story as controversial antiquities and symbols of national identity.[29]

Placed in a temporary room, the sculptures were constantly viewed by artists as well as interested lay people upon their arrival in the British Museum in 1816. At first, the sculptures were housed in the Elgin Room from 1827-1939, then Lord Duveen funded the building of a new room which he named the Duveen Gallery. Slated to open in 1939, the sculptures were not transferred to the room due to the coming of war. However, news of the potential opening of the Duveen Gallery brought an increased interest in the Parthenon sculptures which drew experts hoping to maximize the quality of the sculptures. In 1939, experts had recently discovered evidence they thought proved that the sculptures were originally white, but that years of grime were causing them to change color thus hindering the integrity of the objects. Using instruments too rough for preservation, the museum staff went about cleaning anything that covered the supposedly white marble. After all was said and done, the sculptures had been cleaned by methods too harsh which resulted in irreversible damage. In recent years, experts have discovered that in fact the many statues or sculptures of the time were painted, so removing the grime damaged the Sculptures beyond repair and removed evidence of original coloration. Once the public found out about the disastrous cleaning, an internal inquiry was launched by the British government, however, the outbreak of World War II caused it to be temporarily forgotten. Then, in 1996, author William St. Clair demanded access to the inquiry for his book, “Lord Elgin and the Marbles.” and published the results of the pre-war investigation, re-igniting interest in the Sculptures.

For the duration of the war, the frieze was placed in the London Underground Railway, while the pediments and metopes were placed in the Museum vaults. In 1940, the Duveen Gallery was damaged by bombs, delaying its opening until 1962. Placed in a temporary room in 1949, the sculptures made their reappearance into British society carrying an even deeper meaning. Following the war, the cleaning fiasco was mostly forgotten, replaced by a sense of pride in artifacts that had not only proved the British people had survived World War II, but so had their rich and diverse heritage. It was not until 1984 that the fiasco resurfaced, when the diaries of officials involved in the cleaning were published posthumously, which led to another Greek demand for the Parthenon Sculptures.

Since re-installation in a permanent gallery, the Parthenon Sculptures have not undergone any major damage. There have been instances of minor damage, most of which can be attributed to disruptive children and millions of visitors. Currently, they are on display in a gallery built specifically to accommodate the sculptures by arranging them as they would have been on the Parthenon, and gaps filled by drawings and casts of the originals. The first floor of the museum is designed to be a replica of original arrangement on the Parthenon. Occupying room 18, 18a, and 18b the exhibit is interactive and informative, permitting visitors to gain a full appreciation of the Parthenon and its place in the world. There also are many different multi-media kiosks that cater to any learning type or disability. A self-declared world museum, the British Museums says that the Parthenon Sculptures are a rich addition to their extensive collection because the Sculptures provide an aspect of world history not represented by different objects from other cultures.

At the heart of much controversy, the British Museum's collection of Sculptures from Lord Elgin is still a popular exhibit. To keep visitors up to date, the British Museum has published a series of books and papers and developed several web pages dedicated to information about the Parthenon and its Sculptures. The web pages give a brief history of both the Parthenon and Lord Elgin, share facts and figures and common misconceptions to help keep the issue has clear as possible. There are also references to other works written by both the British Museum and unaffiliated authors, as well as mention of the website for the Hellenic Ministry of Culture for more information on the debate.[30] Compiled as a whole, the various pages from the British Museum website provide a comprehensive view of the history of the Parthenon Sculptures. Concerning the acquisition made by Elgin, they follow the rulings made by the Trustees that the acquisition was legal. The Museum includes multiple pages that cover their stance on the debate of where the Sculptures should be permanently stored. In their entirety, the British Museum's web page dedicated to a diverse recounting of the Parthenon Sculptures' saga is very inclusive and somewhat objective, yet show a bias towards the Parthenon Sculptures remaining in London under careful guidance of the Trustees of the British Museum.

The title Elgin Marbles or Parthenon Sculptures refers to the collection acquired by Lord Elgin which includes artifacts from various places, including the Parthenon which the British Museum holds approximately half the surviving sculptures from. After much debate, the House of Commons determined that removal of the Parthenon Sculptures was by a private citizen and also legitimate. Furthermore, the British Museum Act of 1963 prevents any objects including the Parthenon Sculptures from being removed unless they are duplicates or damaged so as to prevent

academic gain.[31] A mission statement for the Sculptures in the Museum is given in a document found on the British Museum website in 2009:

> The Museum is committed to the permanent display and interpretation of its collection, communicating to a world audience and providing an international context where cultures can be compared and contrasted across time and place. The sculptures from the Parthenon have come to act as a focus for Western European culture and civilization, and have found a home in a museum that grew out of the eighteenth century 'Enlightenment', with its emphasis on developing a shared common culture that goes beyond national boundaries.[32]

Another page says that the Museum is committed to retaining studies of the Parthenon through conferences, seminars, and publications. Also, close ties to the Centre for Acropolis studies in Athens and the preservation efforts in Athens will be sustained. Keeping communication open between Athens and England shows a willingness to share the Sculptures, and even an acknowledgment on the part of the British Museum regarding the importance of the Sculptures to Greece. Yet, there is still an immovable position held by the British museum and its Trustees that they will never be permanently transferred to Greek possession, which is reinforced by the British Museum Act of 1963. Despite disagreeing on where the Sculptures belong, the British Museum and Greek colleagues have a long standing relationship of cooperation and collaboration that has resulted in many casts and duplications of the Museum's collection have been sent to Greece. The British Museum's policy towards their Greek colleagues is that, "the British Museum seeks to collaborate with its Greek colleagues in the widest possible manner by hosting and organizing lectures in London and by inviting their participation in the British Museum conferences."[33]

## IV

Still an issue of whether or not it is sufficient grounds for ownership, the *firman* [letter of permission] is the only document that establishes if the Ottoman empire gave Elgin any kind of access or permission to remove anything from the Parthenon. It was written by Kaimakam Pasha to the local government in Athens concerning a correspondence from Lord Elgin regarding permission of for his artists to access the Parthenon undisturbed. It begins with an outline of the original letter from Elgin in which he had explained his goal of documenting the art of Greece and had already hired artists to accomplish that end, "He [Elgin] has commissioned and ordered five English painters, already present in the said city, to view, contemplate, and also draw the images remaining 'ab antiquo.'"[34] An interpretation of this shows that the Kaimakam Pasha knew Lord Elgin's intentions towards Athens. Also, that Elgin was committed, both academically and financially to the project of conveying Greek art to England.

One reason Elgin chose to present his purpose to the Kaimakam Pasha was to request protection from those who sought financial gain from the English tourists by charging a fee to enter the Acropolis. Theodore Vrettos mentions Elgin received two *firman*s and that even after receiving the first *firman* which had given Elgin's artists permission to document the ruins on Acropolis Hill, the local government (or disdar) still gave them trouble.[35] Learning from the first *firman*, Elgin asked for the wording of the second *firman* to be more specific so as to prevent further conflict. It specifies that the artists were to be left alone as well as their equipment, "...that it be written and ordered that the said painters, while they are occupied in entering and leaving the gate of the Castle of the City...be not interrupted, nor in any way impeded by the Governor of the Castle, nor any other person, and that no one meddle with their scaffolding and

implements...” This not only asserts the authority of the Kaimakam Pasha over the local disdar, it also establishes the willingness of the Ottoman Turks to cooperate with the English. A hint of obligation is seen in a second mention of leaving the artists alone, “...it is incumbent on us to provide that they meet no opposition in walking, viewing, or contemplating the same images, either the buildings they may wish to draw, nor in their scaffolding and implements...” A result of this *firman* demands the Athenians to leave the artists alone as well as puts Elgin in charge of any future decisions made in regards to the Acropolis.

After establishing access to the ruins for Elgin, the *firman* goes farther to extend the welcoming hand to allow removal of stones from the site, “When they wish to take away some pieces of stone with old inscriptions, and figures, that no opposition be made...” Mentioned twice, this indicates that it was not a mistake or something taken lightly. The second reference says, “...that they be not molested either by the Disdar nor by any other persons, nor even by you the above mentioned, and that no one meddle with their scaffolding and implements, nor hinder them from taking away pieces of stone with inscriptions, and figures in the aforesaid manner conduct and comport yourselves.”[36] The Kaimakam Pasha’s decision to end the *firman* with a reminder that the Athenian government was to leave the English artists alone as well as allow them to remove pieces reinforces his intentions of extending hospitality to the English, no matter the way it manifested itself.

The role that this document plays in the current controversy over ownership of the Parthenon Sculptures is  crucial. There are two main aspects of the controversy that relate to the *firman*. First is whether or not the *firman* exists. This has never been resolved because the original *firman* was never produced. The copy of the *firman* examined here comes from the

British Museum who says that it is an Italian translation found among the effects of Reverend Philip Hunt, it is supposed that the original *firman* was destroyed during the Greek War of Independence.[37] When the Special Committee was questioning Elgin about his collection, he told them about the *firman* but said he no longer had it.[38] While it was a complication, the Special Committee decided that Lord Elgin was acting in the capacity of a private citizen because he paid for the whole process from his own funds.

Secondly, the permission allowing Elgin's expensive removal project has been called into question. The main question is whether the *firman* actually allows the removal of what Elgin removed, and then if Elgin surpassed privileges associated with diplomatic positions. While the *firman* says that Elgin's crew should be permitted to remove pieces of stone, this is vague and can be taken to mean two things. Either it means that Elgin can remove stones or debris in and around the Parthenon, or to mean any stone, including those attached to the structure, Elgin and Hunt chose to interpret it as the second. Most of the Elgin collection contains pieces of the frieze, pediments, and metopes that were still mounted on the Parthenon and had to be removed using tools. Elgin has received a lot of criticism from artists and those that support the Greek claim over the years for taking pieces once attached to the building.

While deciding to purchase the collection from Elgin, the Special Committee determined two very important things: the ownership was legal and that while Elgin may have used his diplomatic position for personal gain, he received the Sculptures as a private citizen and without bribes. Establishing that the Parthenon Sculptures are legally owned by the British Museum has not deterred those vying for the return of the Sculptures to Greece. Despite the absence of a copy of the original untranslated *firman*, years of debate have established that Elgin was within his

rights as a private citizen. Existence of a *firman* is corroborated in many places, including letters from Philip Hunt.

One such letter that collaborates existence of a *firman* and the period surrounding its issuance is a letter from Reverend Philip Hunt to his patron, the Earl of Upper Ossory of Ampthill Park. Written in 1801, it recounts how Lusieri and crew were forced to pay bribes to the Governor in order to access the Acropolis, "hitherto access to the Temples in the Acropolis has always been difficult and attained only by bribes to the Governor, demanded in a manner equally arbitrary and insolent, and proportioned according to the supposed rank or eagerness of the individual."[39] This backs up the reasons that Elgin gave for writing to the Kaimakam Pasha and the original purpose of the *firman* and provides important information that might have been in Elgin's letter to the Kaimakam Pasha.

Written after the *firman* went into effect, it rather excitedly explains that, "His Excellency's Artists are allowed not only to model and draw the [p]ublic buildings, but to make excavations among the ruins in search of statues &c, and to clear those parts of the Temple that were defaced by heaps of rubbish or modern walls."[40] In this particular letter, the *firman* is seen to give permission to only explore the sites and clear away any obstructions. However, in a different letter addressed to Elgin, Hunt says, "It would be well, my Lord, to ask for all that is left, or else to do all that is possible to prevent their going on in this fashion."[41] A sentiment like this seems to be prompted by something repeated later on in the letter to Hunt's patron, "It grieved me to the heart to see the destruction made daily by the janissaries of the fortress. They break off the finest bas reliefs & sculptures in search of the morsels of lead that unite them to the buildings, after which they are broken with wanton barbarity."[42] Here Hunt provides a first hand

account of the Parthenon and other buildings being pillaged for materials such as lead and not being appreciated for their artistic qualities. Also, the emotions that prompted Hunt to encourage Elgin to remove important aspects of the building in an act of preservation are strongly expressed.

Also included in letter is a brief reference to the French attempts of acquiring pats of the buildings such as the Parthenon through bribes, "They have been repeatedly refused to the gold and the influence of France in the zenith of her power."[43] France and England were in the midst of an arms race, so to speak, because both were vying for control of the area. England was ahead because Lord Elgin had been able to make piece with the local governments which granted him full access. Elgin's access did not bode well with Napoleon who wanted many of the objects that Elgin eventually took home to England. So began a race between Elgin and Napoleon to gain the most artifacts, which partially explains why Elgin had such a difficult time getting consent in leaving France once he was captured.

The excitement felt by Hunt about the Parthenon and its art is evident also in his descriptions of what scenes are represented on the Parthenon, "Luckily, two of the chef d'oeuvres in the metopes [of the Parthenon] had in some degree escaped their [the janissaries] fangs...they represent the combat of the Lapithae and the Centaurs, by the hand of Pheidias, and one of them is supposed to be Theseus and the other Perithöus."[44] Hunt explains in much detail how they have escaped destruction and even who is supposed to be depicted. Wording such as 'luckily' and 'escaped their fangs' shows that Hunt felt a connection to the metopes, so much so, that he says, "These admirable specimens of Grecian Sculpture I obtained leave to take down for Lord Elgin, and they are now embarked with other valuable (precious) fragments of Antiquity...I

trust they will reach England in safety, where they must prove of inestimable service in improving the National Taste."[45] This passage shows that Hunt, not Elgin, acquired permission to remove certain pieces of the Parthenon. His motivation is first to prevent further destruction of the surviving sculptures. Secondly, his actions have a bonus of imparting Grecian sculpture to the English population. Hunt closes with a description of his travel is while the sculptures were on their way to England. He describes how he is able to obtain admission to any place he deems intriguing because of his position as a part of Elgin's entourage. The amount of enthusiasm Hunt feels over his travels and the part he played in salvaging the Parthenon is too much for him. After describing everything, he closes with, "but as I know that enthusiasm itself is mortal, I shall wait for the moment in which I can write with coolness and detail."[46] Fearing inaccuracy in describing the art, Hunt wanted to be able to share the beauty with a clear head.

This letter reiterates events surrounding the *firman* and initial removal of pieces of the Parthenon. Hunt's own words give witness to the destruction that was being done to the structure as well as the governors taking advantage of Elgin. Here, also, is the overlooked fact that Elgin instructed his artists to only document the art, but that Hunt encouraged them to remove parts for preservation. Over the years, Elgin has received the majority of criticism from opposition to the British Museum owning the sculptures because he is blamed for their removal from Athens. Here, Hunt tells his patron that he urged Elgin to seek permission to remove the Sculptures, and thus undermines any attack on Elgin for malicious intent in removal. From this document, it would seem that preservation was of the utmost importance, and that removal was the only way Hunt and Elgin could conceive of preserving the Parthenon Sculptures. A testament to Elgin's true reasons for removing parts of the Parthenon, this letter gives necessary background in a first

hand account of Elgin's emotions and original letter to the Kaimakam Pasha. Also, it is an account of how the Parthenon was being treated by the locals, most of which resulted in irreparable damage.

V

Constructed in the late 5th century BCE, the Parthenon was built to commemorate Athena, the goddess of wisdom, strategy, and war by the newly victorious Athenians. Pheidias (480-430 BCE) was placed in charge of the building and sculpting by Pericles (495-429 BCE), and over the next sixteen years a temple emerged, which has outlasted the cult of Athena. The Parthenon has two stories entwined in its long and tumultuous history, that of the building and then the sculptures as they journeyed to England.

Since the final touches were placed on the Parthenon in Athens, the friezes, metopes, and pediments have been transplanted from the Acropolis to the British Museum, the Parthenon has had a long and intricate tale of foreign rule and changing religions. Built from 447 BCE to 432 BCE to celebrate the victory of Athens over Persia, the Parthenon commemorates a society that is characterized by its remarkable advancements that are still key in contemporary societies. Athens gave birth to the words that run the contemporary world such as democracy and politics, creating a city that is seen as the mecca of civilization.[47] The Parthenon served as a temple of Athena for years, and in 162 BCE the King of Syria built a new statue to replace the one burned in a second century BCE fire.[48] Around 360 BCE, repairs were made by emperor Julian as a way to conquer the ever growing religion of Christianity.[49] Closed by the government in the fifth century CE, the Parthenon was converted into an orthodox christian church dedicated to the Holy Wisdom. After undergoing many alterations in order to accommodate the church, there were also

those who defaced the building itself. Replacing the church of Holy Wisdom was the Church of Our Lady of Athens in 1204 AD, when few changes were made.[50] Turkish rule of Greece began in 1458 and lasted until the nineteenth century during which time much changed for the Parthenon.

Using the Acropolis as a fortress, the Parthenon was employed as a mosque for the soldiers, and in order to transform the once christian church into a mosque, the walls were whitewashed. From the seventeenth century come the best, and some of the few surviving, accounts of the Parthenon from visiting dignitaries.[51] By the 1680s, the Parthenon became a gunpowder store, which was disastrous when in 1687 a Venetian siege resulted in cannon balls exploding through the roof and igniting the stored gunpowder.[52] Laying in ruins until 1799 when Lord Elgin visited and removed many sculptures, the Parthenon was a dilapidated reminder of a diverse history. Lord Elgin, the man credited with removing the sculptures, first brought the sculptures and their illustrious building to the attention of the British public.

Not to be dismissed as an object of antiquity, in 1821 the Acropolis was attacked separately by both the Greeks and the Turks. Then, from 1824-1826, the Parthenon served as a girls school for children of soldiers fighting in the Greek War of Independence.[53] 1834, however, marked the year when the Parthenon officially was deemed an archaeological ruin, when it also gained meaning as a "political symbol of the new Greece".[54] In the February 2008 issue of the Smithsonian nicely sums up what the Parthenon endured, "during the past 2,500 years, the Parthenon- the apotheosis of ancient Greek architecture- has been rocked by earthquakes, set on fire, shattered by exploding gunpowder, looted for its stunning sculptures and defaced by misguided preservation efforts."[55] A widely visited site, the Parthenon and its neighbor buildings

on the Acropolis had been pillaged since their inception, by builders and looters for monetary gain, while tourists visited for academic gain and entertainment purposes.

VI

When the sculptures were sold to the British government, they were moved from the Elgin home Park Lane to the British Museum. From the moment Lord Elgin began assembling his collection in England, the sculptures were controversial because there were many artists and aristocrats that believed Elgin had not only destroyed an historic monument but also removed a symbol vital to Greek culture. Once the public was aware of the arrival of Elgin's collection in London, they were split in support. Some artists, such as the poet Lord Byron were opposed to not only the legality of Elgin's possession, but also the destruction of ancient property; while others, did not approve of the removal of the Sculptures yet were supportive of the presence of them in the British Museum. Beginning in 1833, the repeated demands began again in earnest in 1974 and were constantly backed by supporters as well as met by an equally strong opposition.[56] Even the Select Committee was divided on whether or not to purchase the sculptures, but their decision to buy the collection was for academic gain, and not monetary gain or vengeance they claimed. The suggestion was placed to the British Museum concerning the legality of their possession which is under dispute, but in 2000 the Trustees determined the issue to be moot and the acquisition legal. There have been many calls for their return to Greece, but the Trustees and House of Commons have no interest in removing them from the Museum because they are an integral part of their objective of being a museum that displays world cultures in the hopes of understanding the whole of human history. Housing the Sculptures amidst other collections held by the British Museum enables visitors to see a magnificent example of Greek culture, but also

understand how the visitor fits into the world culture. While the Museum Trustees welcome the opening of the New Acropolis Museum, their decision to keep the Sculptures is not altered because they argue that the Sculptures "are part of everyone's heritage and transcend cultural boundaries."[57]

Ranging from demanding the Parthenon Sculptures be returned to Greece based on historical significance to fear of a family curse, there is quite a lot of support for repatriation of the Parthenon Sculptures to Greece. The solution that the Sculptures remain in the British Museum is also well supported by many around the world. Professor Evangelos Venizelos, Greece's Minister of Culture provides a thesis for repatriation, "The request for the return of the Parthenon Marbles is not made merely by the Greek nation, or in the name of history, but in the name of the world's cultural heritage. Indeed, until restitution is made, the mutilated monument will be seen as a sad reproach to that heritage."[58] The issue of which country deserves the Sculptures more, is riddled with emotion and potential ramifications. Insults are freely slung back and forth regarding the legitimacy of Greeks today and the no longer existent British Empire, which color the issue. At greater stake, is the millions of artifacts possessed by nearly every country which are not of their own physical history. As long as the Sculptures remain in England, the sanctity of possession is preserved over ownership. If the Sculptures are ever returned to Greece, then there will be many countries vying for the return of their artifacts lost in years past. This aspect shows that the symbolic nature of the Parthenon Sculptures goes beyond one associated with national identity, but spans also to the nature of possession of artifacts that have shaped history. Symbolically, each claim is as pressing as the other, and equally backed by

public and celebrity support. England and Greece have a claim to the Sculptures based on how their history is symbolized in them, which is a factor in why the debate is still raging on.

What could have been a simple issue between the British Museum and the Greek government has become an international scandal with the potential for more and more instances to follow. People from around the world have used this debate to attack both Greece and the United Kingdom. Supporting the Greek claim, one man from the United Kingdom said "The British Empire is dead. Give all the treasures back to their original countries,"[59] and someone from Cyprus said "No matter what, the marbles belong to the Parthenon…For those that profess their 'protection in the BM, why then do they not claim possession of all the Acropolis Monuments, for the same reason? Return the Marbles or else the BM is accessory to international pillage!".[60] The distance between these two supporters is evidence of how widespread and mixed the support for the Greek claim is. From the United States comes the quote, "is theft permitted in the UK? I'll assume that it isn't and suggest that the UK applies its laws to itself," this lays the blame on Elgin for acquiring the Sculptures and then upon the British government for purchasing them.[61] Speaking for her Greek heritage, Eleni Eleftheriou said, "To claim that modern day Greeks are not connected to their ancestors of ancient Greek…is ridiculous," with this statement, she speaks directly against those making false claims about the Greeks today not being directly related to those responsible for the Acropolis.[62] Lastly, a story run in *The Guardian* in 2002, which said that the Parthenon Sculptures were not actually Greek because an archaeologist had discovered that the man who carved them was actually Dutch and he had changed his name to Phidias to 'ingratiate himself with his ancient Athenian patrons."[63] The article goes on to say that the British government was demanding that the entire Parthenon

be sent to Britain where it would become apart of a new shopping center and multiplex in the West Midlands. The discovery and subsequent demands turned out to be false, but it proves that the debate has reached a new level of mud-slinging and grown out of proportion.[64]

Due to a growing awareness, a few solutions have been proposed. First there is that Britain gives back the Sculptures outright. Second there is that Greece could pay Britain for the Sculptures or that Britain gives compensation as an apology as well as the Sculptures. Thirdly, Britain could give back the Sculptures but Greece promises that a traveling exhibit will visit the British Museum. Fourthly, a copy of the Sculptures could be made and the originals be returned to Greece while copies are displayed in the British Museum. Finally, the marbles stay in the British Museum. A decision will most likely not be made because neither country can agree on any terms or compromise, and because the British Museum is run by Parliament, which means that only the passing of a law will change the current state of ownership. If a law were to be passed, it has the potential to jeopardize any antiquities held in any museum that were not given with proper documentation.

As more information becomes available to scholars, controversies emerge because of shaky deals made many years prior at the time of acquisition of objects. This calls into question the legality of whoever possesses the articles. There never is an easy solution to this dilemma because not only is the history of a peoples involved, but so are governments and public emotions. The Parthenon Sculptures are a part of this issue due to the ambiguous nature of their removal in the early nineteenth century. Many solutions to this particular case have been proposed, such as returning the sculptures to Athens so they can be properly viewed in the shadow of their original home, loaning them to the Greek government for viewing purposes

while the British government retains ownership, and lastly that they remain in England as a part of the permanent exhibit in the British Museum. There is equal support for all three positions and equally strong evidence to back them all.

Over the last 200 years, the main reason given for the return of the Sculptures to Athens have been that they are a vital aspect of Greek history and are symbols of a greater and more advanced time. This is not a valid argument any more because the Sculptures have weathered the last 200 years in England, infusing themselves into British history. Greek history values the time period in which the Parthenon was constructed because it has become the foundation of civilization, and also represents a time when Greeks where independent and self determining, a time that quickly faded and was reflected upon until the 1970s when they became an independent state again. For Britain, however, the Sculptures are physical reminders of a time of prestige and quick advancements, not seen since. The age of exploration helped to stimulate the economy and British spirit, and objects retained from that time are reminders. While housed in the British Museum, the English empire fell and its people survived through two world wars. As much as any other object in the Museum acquired during such tumultuous times, the Parthenon Sculptures are a testament to the strength of British national identity as they are a symbol of Greek national identity.

## VII

The general position of the British Museum in the debate of returning the Parthenon Sculptures to Greece is that they will remain in the possession of the Museum because of their role in British history and the world culture. While the British Museum does not contest the Greek nation's claim to the Parthenon as a symbol of national identity, it asserts that the symbol

has grown in influence because it was moved to England. With regard to the current state of the controversy and the many demands made upon the British Museum to return the Parthenon Sculptures to Greece, the British Museum has made a statement, "The British Museum acknowledges the right of the modern state of Greece to claim its most spectacular ancient building as a symbol of national identity...the sculptures, and by extension the building itself, have over the last 200 years acquired a European and worldwide significance."[65] This significance transcends the debate over Elgin and his *firman*, and aids in the creation of a world culture that is aware of is roots, "The claim for restitution revolves not around the question of the 'Parthenon Sculptures' but...whether collections like that of the British Museum are seen to have a valid role to play in world culture. It calls into question the whole notion of a world collection in which visitors can learn about the cultures of the world, ancient and modern."[66] For many years, the debate has centered around Elgin and his abuse of power, dragging his name through the mud because he removed pieces of a great monument. Here, the British Museum is suggesting that Elgin is not at the heart of the issue anymore, rather, the issue of where antiquities belong is. To the argument that the Parthenon Sculptures are a unique incident and will not impact other antiquities, the Museum replies that is untrue.[67] If the Sculptures are deemed a Greek possession and returned, thousands of other objects will be demanded back, causing the diverse world museums to become bland, simple, and repetitious museums.

Further evidence of the position held by the British Government can be found in the minutes produced by Parliament over the last 190 years. Several times during that period, letters and speeches have been made to Parliament that have revived discussions concerning the Parthenon Sculptures. Many of these documents are available to the public; three such

documents come from 1816, 1986, and 1998. The document from 1816 focuses upon the initial purchase of the Parthenon Sculptures from Lord Elgin, and provides the basic reasoning behind retaining the Sculptures that has prevailed over any opposition. 1986 marks the first year in which the Greek suggestion of return is discussed in Parliament. In 1998, Parliament revisited the issue, eventually upholding the decision of the original debate in 1816.

The original debate unfolded in two sessions, February 23, 1816 and June 7, 1816; which followed the final deferment of Elgin's request that the Parthenon Sculptures be purchased which occurred on February 15, 1816. Members participating in the debate faced a conundrum because while many knew and supported Elgin, they did not approve of the means used to acquire the Sculptures. Ultimately charged with upholding the virtue of England, the debate centered around the question of whether or not Elgin had superseded his power as ambassador to obtain the Sculptures rather than the legality of acquisition, "It was of the greatest importance to ascertain whether this collection had been procured by such means as were honorable to this country."[68] After much discussion from men supporting both sides of the issue, it was decided that Elgin acted within his rights and that he was unopposed by the Turkish government and the citizens therefore indicating their support. They concluded, "With respect to the manner in which the Elgin Marbles had been acquired, the object certainly could not have been attained, had Lord Elgin not been a British ambassador; but it was not solely as a British ambassador that he obtained them. No objection had ever been made to the operations of lord Elgin...nor did it appear that any person had ever been superseded on that account."[69] Deciding on this, the debaters indicated that Elgin legally owned the Sculptures and that if the British Museum were to purchase them, they too would be legal owners.

Next, the significance of owning such objects was important to ascertain. With an understanding of Lord Elgin's character, one participant said, "Every person acquainted with that noble lord must be aware, that his object had been solely directed to the advancement of the arts...he was naturally anxious that the public should enjoy the advantage of his labors."[70] Another speaker upheld this character assessment:

> The noble lord had shown no principle of rapacity. He laid his hand on nothing that could have been preserved in any state of repair: he touched nothing that was not previously in ruins. He went into Greece with no design to commit ravages on her works of art, to carry off her ornaments, to despoil her temples.[71]

Both of these statements reflect a confidence in the moral character of Lord Elgin, resulting in the belief that there was no malice aimed at the Greeks in removing parts of the Parthenon. Feeling that Elgin had acted within his legal rights, unopposed by local government, and without malice, the debate turned to if the Parthenon Sculptures would benefit the British Museum. A decision on this can be found throughout the debate, but is nicely summed up at the end by Mr. J.P. Grant who "declared in favor of the original motion, observing, that that would be a mistaken economy, as well as bad taste, which would deprive this country of such valuable works of art as lord Elgin had collected."[72] After deciding to their satisfaction that the Parthenon Sculptures were legally Elgin's and that the cultural potential was endless, the decision was passed down to purchase the collection from Lord Elgin and install them into the British Museum. This entered the sculptures into a legal contract with the British Museum as objects key to the Museum as a whole, also they became an object entered into the system which could only be removed by another decision made by the Trustees.

In October of 1985, the Greek government made another request for the return of the Sculptures which led to another special debate convened in July of 1986 to discuss the validity of

the demand and what position the Trustees held. Mainly, there are two men, Mr. David Atkinson and Mr. Luce who participate in the discussion, but additions are also made by Mr. Robert Sheldon, Mr. Jessel, and Mr. Buchan.[73] Overall, the main concern was to make sure that Britain still legally owned the Sculptures and understanding the potential gravity of returning them to Greece. Regarding the request made by the Greeks, Mr. Atkinson remarks that Greece's request might be more credible if they were to make the request to countries other than England, because their are parts of the Parthenon in six other countries.[74] This might help it not seem like a personal vendetta held by Greece against England. Mr. Luce states that the issue has the potential for going beyond a feud between England and Greece over ancient marble, but could impact the entire world, especially museums. This is reflected in his fear that nothing would be left in national collections, and reiterated by Mr. Sheldon, "Is the right honorable Gentleman further aware that if we were to pursue that line of cultural apartheid many works of art might leave our shores, and all that we would get in return would be a few statues of Queen Victoria and possibly old London Bridge?"[75] While the issue still possess a question of legality, in 1986 the debate began to include future problems over antiquities obtained legally. Knowledge of the ramifications is spoken by Mr. Luce, "That would set a precedent, which would lead to a major reduction in our great national collections, in which all the objects, including the Elgin Marbles, have been legally acquired."[76] Following this statement, there is a little parlay over legality, which shows that even after multiple committees decided that the Sculptures were legally acquired and owned by the British Museum, some still did not think it to be true. All of it is summed up in the last speech made by Mr. Luce, "It is firmly established that the Elgin Marbles were legally acquired under the sovereignty of the Ottoman empire as it was at that time. In

1816 the British Parliament passed an Act of Parliament that gave the authority to the British Museum to retain the Elgin Marbles."[77] There is no new development or decision concerning the Parthenon Sculptures in this debate, just a reiteration of what had been decided before.

Twelve years later, in 1998, a series of question and answer sessions presented the question to Parliament of their policy of retainment. The question that Parliament was contemplating was, "if the Government will make it their policy not to allow the Elgin Marbles to leave the custody of the British Museum."[78] In response, Mr. Fisher said, "It is for the Government's policy that the Parthenon Sculptures should remain in the British Museum. More generally, the retention or disposal of objects in our national museums and galleries is a matter for the trustees of those institutions...The Government have no powers to intervene and no plans to change the law."[79] Still adhering to the decision made in 1816, this official statement announces that the original decision is upheld 180 years after it was established. Mr. Fisher's statement also shows that the government has no interest in interfering with the authority of the museums.

These documents are important to understanding the role that the Parthenon Sculptures play in the continuing advancement of British national identity because the two latter documents uphold the decisions made by the committee in 1816. In 1816, the committee decided that the Sculptures were an exceptional example of Greek art and should be easily accessible by the public. Their cultural value is stated in an annex to a discussion dated March of 2000:

> What should...be stressed is that the acquisition of the Parthenon Sculptures in 1816 helped to promote the surge of philhellenism in Britain that led to the involvement of the European powers in the freeing of Greece...As a result, they have become part of this country's heritage and have acted as a focus for western European culture and civilization. They have found a home in a museum that

> grew out of the eighteenth century 'Enlightenment', whereby culture is seen to transcend national boundaries.[80]

The Parthenon Sculptures are a key part of expressing the long and diverse history of England, and is a representation of ideas that developed in the nineteenth century.

There are many misconceptions relating to the acquisition, care, and possession of the Parthenon Sculptures. Careful to prevent misconceptions from becoming truth, the British Museum lists the most common misconceptions and what the position of the British Museum is on that particular subject. Most often referred to is the way in which Elgin acquired the Sculptures and then sold them to the British Museum. To this the British Museum declares that the issue of legality has been decided upon by the Trustees and that Elgin was deemed within his rights as a private citizen in acquisition, although he may have abused some of his diplomatic power in securing the *firman*. The other most popular misconception is that the Parthenon would be better understood if all of its pieces were reunited. Complete recreation of the Parthenon is not possible because of all the damage done to it over the last 2,500 years, and the surviving sculptures would be lost forever if re-placed on the original structure. Lastly, the issue of damage done to the Sculptures while in transit and in the possession of the Museum has been called into question by those investigating the history of the Parthenon Sculptures, however, the British Museum argues that prior to their purchase of the Sculptures more damage was done as a result of nature and war, than by the ship sinking, cleaning, and hazards of display combined.

The British Museum acknowledges that in 1938 there was a cleaning incident, but that it was an honest mistake and was later proven to have also been made in Greece. Following the discovery of the incident in London, the museum officials responsible resigned and an official inquiry was launched. Despite this incident, the British Museum claims that they have taken

great care of the artifacts and are they only safe place for them to reside. Visibility is also higher in London because it is a mecca for travel, this is one of many reasons why the Sculptures should remain in England, according to the British Museum.[81] While the Greeks began seeking the return of Sculptures from the Parthenon around 1833, it has never been given much consideration by the Museum Trustees. According to the Trustees, this is mainly because until very recently Athens did not possess a place to put the Sculptures which would continue to preserve them, and because the ramifications of retribution are unknown and could possibly jeopardize existence of  Museums such as the British Museum.

Another popular argument presented in opposition to British ownership is that the Sculptures were stolen from Greece and continued possession by Britain is a violation of "traditional British virtues of decency and fair play."[82] Britain is no longer an empire nor can it claim a monopoly on civilization, so to honor the pain it has brought to smaller, less powerful countries throughout its past, Britain should begin sending pillaged artifacts home, as demanded by international relations. For Britain, the Sculptures hold no historical significance, and value placed upon them by the Greeks can never be understood by the English which causes poor preservation. This point is reinforced by accounts of mistreatment and improper techniques of preservation and exhibition of the priceless objects by the British Museum. Reports of the cleaning fiasco have strengthened the argument that the British Museum is not the proper home for the Greek antiquities. To counter arguments made by preservationists that Britain is a better environment to store them in, a museum in Athens is being built with areas designed specifically for the Sculptures with proper lighting and in close proximity to the original Parthenon, which is

believed to help create a complete understanding of the significance that the Parthenon Sculptures possess.

Another aspect of the acquisition is that the act must be looked at in the context of history. Julian Skingley of England states, "I would not be surprised if, by modern standards, the vast majority of such artifacts in museums around the world were obtained in less than satisfactory manners."[83] Objects similar to the Sculptures from the Parthenon are common in Greece due to their history, but in England there are far less artifacts that are so rich in history. Continuing to display them in Britain gives visitors a slice of what the modern world is founded on. While acknowledging that the acquisition of the Sculptures is dubious at best, "the world's great art transcends national ownership. If it did not, all museums would be morally under pressure to return the majority of art and artifacts to countries of origin, which would be impractical and culturally impoverishing."[84] These works of art give a foundation for civilization today and have inspired some of the greatest minds in history to build, create, and write monuments of their own. The Greeks no longer can claim a monopoly on the objects due to the fact that they have influenced every culture, not just that of Greece.

England has an altogether different claim to the Sculptures, they represent the height of their country as an international power referring to the age of exploration which has increased British territory, knowledge, and economy simultaneously.[85] While the Sculptures are not a symbol of national identity, they are a symbol of a golden era when they were metaphorically speaking, on top of the world. In private collections and the emerging public museums, artifacts from around the new territories which advanced knowledge of science and technology could be found. For many, this was a period unmatched by any other in history and is key to British

national identity as a common foundation of excellence. If it were not for the debate, however, these important articles would get lost in the mix of so many other cultural remnants that reside in the British Museum.

On the other hand, the British Museum, it is argued, saved the Sculptures from certain destruction by war, fire, gunpowder, explosion, and pillaging by removing them to their current location. While this cannot be definitively determined, the state of the Parthenon shows the neglect that pieces removed by Elgin did not receive. Also, around four million people a year come to view the Sculptures in the museum and appreciate their significance, despite the fact that they are not near the Parthenon. As far as pillaging on the part of Lord Elgin goes, there is a document that proves he received a writ from the Sultan to remove them, and is further supported by the help of nearby residents, as well as their lack of protest at the time. It is true that he did a poor job in protecting them in the early years of his possession, but he did sell them to the British government which in turn has cared for them for close to two hundred years to the best of their ability. If ownership can be determined by original possession and not a history of possession then the return of the Sculptures, some fear, will set an ugly precedent and set off a chain reaction and reduce multicultural awareness "as each country only presents its history to its population."[86]

## VIII

Through the process of creating a stable government in the 1970s and collective national identity based on that government, the Greeks have begun to build a new museum near the Acropolis, in the shadow of the slowly eroding Parthenon, to make strives at preserving their rich heritage. Since 1975, Greece and its citizens have petitioned in nearly every way possible for the

return of the Parthenon Sculptures to their rightful homeland. Many who claim Greece as their own, have come to see the Sculptures as a visual cohesion of Greek national identity as well as a representation of an ethnic history separate from any other history. Appeals have been made to powerful outsiders such as President Clinton, as well as to the people in opinion polls and even official statements.[87] Some pieces of the friezes which had been in other countries, such as France, have been return to Greece, as a gesture of support of the endeavor to present a unified Greece. Despite mild success, those supporting the return of all parts of the Parthenon are still fighting diligently oftentimes against governments, as is the case with the British Museum. Slated to open in June of 2009, the New Acropolis Museum endeavors to allow visitors an experience of what the Acropolis was like as it once was through an open floor plan with stunning views of the Acropolis. The museum sees its purpose as building a new appreciation for Greece's diverse history, and also showing that it is capable of properly taking care of its own antiquities.

One oft repeated reason for repatriation is based on history. Ancient Greeks are widely acknowledged as the people responsible for advancements which benefit society and are believed to have metaphorically catapulted civilization into an ever-increasing search for more knowledge and planted seeds for democracy, as is evidenced by a quote from Alexandra of the United States, "by keeping the marbles away from their home we are denying future generations the right to explore and experience a culture that gave birth to democracy, philosophy, and aesthetic beauty."[88] It is also believed that the Parthenon (and its statues) represents the spirit of Democracy and their current separation challenges the completeness of democracy which sends the message that it is not strong. To re-adhere the Parthenon and Sculptures atop the Acropolis

would re-strengthen democracy in the world. The return according to Victor Houghton of England would also be "a gesture of goodwill from the mother of modern democracy to the cradle of Western Civilization."[89] As apart of this modern democracy is the idea of self-determination and self-preservation, so the responsibility for preservation of heritage belongs to Greece, the original home of the Sculptures, not Britain.

Traditionally, arguments which support the Greek claim, have centered around Lord Elgin, but he no longer is a leading character, nor can he be blamed for malevolent intentions. While there is no way to determine if the Sculptures would have suffered the same fate as the rest of the structure, most who have evaluated the legality of the Sculptures agree that had they had not been removed, they would have been lost. As a result of Elgin and Hunts' passion for art and history, people around the world can take part in a rich and vital history, so Elgin should be the hero of the Parthenon, not the villain.

Constructed with the specific intentions of having the Parthenon Sculptures displayed in it, the new Acropolis Museum is well equipped for such artifacts as the Parthenon Sculptures, but understanding of the Parthenon Sculptures will not be enhanced by viewing them in the shadow of the Parthenon, although it could be a unique and exquisite experience, that can be simulated by recreations of pieces owned by the British Museum, and the other museums that hold them combined with those held by the Acropolis Musem. In no way can the Parthenon be recreated as they once were because of restrictions set by years of erosion and damage, and the danger artifacts face when removed from the proper environment.

## IX

There is no simple solution to this debate because a lot is at stake. If the Sculptures are returned to Greece then it gives the possibility that countries who see another country as possessing their artifacts will demand the return of their historical artifacts that currently reside elsewhere. According to those supporting the British claim, this is not good because the artifacts are first a testament and reminder of the ages of Imperialism and exploration for the most part. There are exceptions such as the looted Nazi art, but objects obtained rightfully during the ages of imperialism and exploration should remain where they lay. Secondly, the Parthenon Sculptures have spent upwards of two hundred years in the British Museum, so the Greek claim that they are not significant to British history untrue because for two hundred years they have been apart of British history and demanding their return to Greece on grounds that their continued residence in England violated Greek heritage also violates English heritage for the same reason. Every culture in the international community has benefited from the advancements that the Parthenon Sculptures represent, so one solution that has been presented suggests that each nation should receive a piece of the Parthenon or statues to ensure that all that the heritage belongs to are duly compensated.

Advancements in technology and transportation have enabled millions of world citizens to travel and relocate to lands far away from their ancestors. This has not dissipated identities based on ideas such as nationalism, rather it has reinforced cultural traditions and identities through the existence of museums and diverse tolerance. Many who emigrate develop areas that are recreations of their homelands, examples include little Italy in New York. A trend towards globalization questions the ability of national identities to withstand the test of distance. There is value in a world culture as well as individual cultures, for they are a reminder that all of

humanity is connected. One example of this strong connection is the controversy that surrounds ownership of the Parthenon Sculptures: housed in England, removal of the Sculptures was given by the Ottoman Turks, and they were created by ancient Greeks. However, the diversity of museums allows for nationalism to survive.

[1] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithica:Cornell University Press, 1983),1.

[2] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 7.

[3] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London:Verso, 1983), 4.

[4] Ibid., 6.

[5] Ibid., 7.

[6] Anderson, 179.

[7] Anderson, 181.

[8] Anderson, 184.

[9] ICOM, *"Definition of a Museum," http://icom.museum/definition.html.*

[10] Paula Young Lee, "The Musaum of Alexandria and the Formation of the Museum in Eighteenth Century France," *Art Bulletin 79 (1997):385.*

[11] Ibid.*, 385.*

[12] Kevin Walsh, *The Representation of the Past: Museums and heritage in the post-modern world* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.

[13] Ibid., 176.

[14] Flora Kaplan, E.S, ed. *Museums and the Making of "Ourselves": The Role of Objects in National Identity*, (New York: Leicester University Press, 1996), 1.

[15]James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008)*,* xxxv-xxxvi.

[16] Ibid.*,* xxxi-xxxii.

[17] Ian Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes in the Sculpture Galleries of the British Museum: 1800-1939* (London: British Museum Press, 1992) 16.

[18] The British Museum, "History and the Building", www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/history_and_the_building/general_history.aspx (5/4/09).

[19] Theodore Vrettoes, *The Elgin Affair; The Abduction of Antiquity's Greatest Treasures and the Passion it Aroused* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1997), *Elgin Affair*, 12.

[20] Jenkins, *Archaeologists and Aesthetes*, 13.

[21] William St. Clair, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles: The Controversial History of the Parthenon Sculptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.

[22] Vrettoes, *Elgin Affair*, 3.

[23] St. Clair, *Elgin and Marbles*, 4; Vrettos, *Elgin Affair*, 8.

[24] Vrettos, *Elgin Affair*, 7.

[25] St. Clair, *Elgin and Marbles*, 5, 24-25.

[26] Vrettos, *Elgin Affair*, 50.

[27] St. Clair, *Elgin and Marbles*, 115-116.

[28] St. Clair, *Elgin and Marbles*, 246.

[29] Originally, the collection was referred to as the Elgin Marbles, but as the issue has developed their name has changed often. They are also referred as the Parthenon Marbles, however, the preferred title is Parthenon Sculptures.

[30] The British Museum, " Statement on the Parthenon Sculpture" www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press_releases/statements/the_parthenon_sculptures.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[31] In 1963, Parliament met to discuss the state of the British Museum. A summary of what they decided can be found at the beginning of the document, "An Act to alter the composition of the Trustees of the British Museum, to provide for the separation from the British Museum of the British Museum (Natural History), to make new provision with respect to the regulation of the two Museums and their collections in place of that made by the British Museum Act 1753 and enactments amending or supplementing that Act, and for purposes connected with the matters aforesaid. [http://www.britishmuseum.org/PDF/BM1963Act.pdf (accessed May 31, 2009)].

[32] The British Museum, "The Parthenon Stewardship," www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/p/the_parthenon_stewardship.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[33] The British Museum, "The Parthenon Sculptures Facts and Figures," www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press_releases/statements/the_parthenon_sculptures/facts_and_figures.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[34] ab antiquo means from ancient times

[35] Vrettoes, *Elgin Affair*, 54.

[36] The British Museum, "*Firman*-Lettter of Permission," www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlight_objects/gr/f/firman_-_letter_of_permission.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[37] Ibid.

[38] Vrettos, *Elgin Affair*, 152.

[39] The British Museum, "Transcription of a letter by Philip Hunt" www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/article_index/t/transcription_of_hunts_letter.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Christopher Hitchens, *The Parthenon Marbles: The Case for Reunification* (London: Verso, 2008), 3.

[48] Ian Jenkins, *The Parthenon Sculptures* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 21.

[49] Hitchens, *Parthenon Marbles*, 7.

[50] Ibid., 8.

[51] Ibid., 9.

[52] Ibid., 10.

[53] Ibid., 12.

[54] Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity*, xi.

[55] Evan Hadingham, "Unlocking Mysteries of the Parthenon," *The Smithsonian*, February 2008, 38.

[56] Parliament, "House of Commons, annex iv" www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmcumeds/371/0060806.htm (accessed April 27, 2009).

[57] The British Museum, "The Parthenon- Trustees Statement," www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press_releases/statements/the_parthenon_sculptures/parthenon_-_trustees_statement.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[58] "The Parthenon Marbles," http://www.uk.digiserve.com/mentor/marbles/ (accessed April 27, 2009)

[59] "Should the Parthenon Sculptures Stay in the British Museum?," *BBC News*, December 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/543413.stm (accessed May 14, 2009).

[60] Ibid.

[61] James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[62] "Should the Parthenon Sculptures Stay in the British Museum?," *BBC News*, December 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/543413.stm (accessed May 14, 2009).

[63] Fiachra Gibbon, "How the Belgians Lost Their Marbles," *guardian.co.uk, December 7, 2002, www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2002/dec/07/arts.artsnews* (accessed May 14, 2009).

[64] Ibid.

[65] The British Museum, "The Parthenon Sculptures Facts and Figures," www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press_releases/statements/the_parthenon_sculptures/facts_and_figures.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[66] James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

[67] The British Museum, "The Parthenon Sculptures Facts and Figures," www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press_releases/statements/the_parthenon_sculptures/facts_and_figures.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[68] Hitchens, *Parthenon Marbles*, 132.

[69] Ibid., 134-135.

[70] Ibid., 128.

[71] Ibid., 142-143.

[72] Ibid., 149.

[73] The men in this document, and many other English documents, are only addressed by their last name.

[74] Hansard, "Parthenon Marbles," http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1986/jul/07/parthenon-marbles#S6CV0101P0_19860707_HOC_132 (accessed April 27, 2009).

[75]Ibid.

[76]Ibid.

[77]Ibid.

[78] Parliament Publications, "House of Common Hansard Written Answers for 19 March 1998," www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmhansrd/vo980319/text/80319w01.htm (accessed April 27, 2009).

[79]Ibid.

[80]Parliament Publications, "House of Commons-Culture, Media and Sport-Minutes of Evidence," www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199900/cmselect/cmcumeds/371/0060806.htm (accessed April 27, 2009).

[81] The British Museum, "The Parthenon Sculptures Facts and Figures," www.britishmuseum.org/the_museum/news_and_press_releases/statements/the_parthenon_sculptures/facts_and_figures.aspx (accessed April 27, 2009).

[82] "Should the Parthenon Sculptures Stay in the British Museum?," *BBC News*, December 1999, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/543413.stm (accessed May 14, 2009).

[83]Ibid.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid.

[86]Ibid.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.