

Parthenon Marbles

Summary and Response

Keeping the marbles:

The Parthenon Marbles are a significant example of ancient objects representing humankind's unstoppable desire to express themselves. The construction of the Parthenon temple impacted not only Greece but many countries surrounding it, the marbles reminds current generation of the intricate ingenuity of human endeavors that have been going since the beginning of civilization. According to the British argument the multicultural nature of the Parthenon's construction makes the British Museum the perfect location for the Marbles to rest in display. Unlike the newly built Acropolis Museum, the British Museum offers an extensive catalog of ancient objects ranging from the beginning of mankind to the present day. The museum's eclectic setting amplifies the cultural significance of the Parthenon Marbles by paring it to various other human made objects created in different regions at the same time giving the visitor a more complete history of a particular era.

Another argument made by the British Museum in favor of keeping the Greek objects is their legitimate ownership. Though the Ottoman Empire who then controlled Athens had little bargaining power negotiating with Elgin due to their implied debt to England, Elgin's purchase of the marbles legitimately went into effect under the then current controllers of Athens. On top of the claimed legitimacy of Elgin's purchase the British Museum asserts taking the Marbles served as "one of the greatest acts of conservation rescue in history" (The Elgin Marbles) for under the ottoman empire the Marbles would likely be looted or destroyed.

Returning the marbles:

When questioning the legitimacy of Elgin's removal of the marbles the Greek point of view claims the "conservational" act could be better interpreted as an act of vandalism. In order to remove the marble sculptures a great amount of damage to the Parthenon has to be made. The sculptures were carved on the structural marble blocks meaning in order to extract them it is necessary to saw them off permanently damaging the structural integrity of the monument.

Another key argument for the return of the Parthenon Marbles is its relationship to Greece's cultural heritage. A significant amount of Greek people argue the Parthenon is a crucial monument that represents their ancestral philosophy and democracy. The cultural connection between the monument and the Greek territory suggests the marble pieces are of much greater value for the Greeks than for the British. Under this point of view, the British Museum isn't only an inadequate setting for the pieces but it is also a symbol for a cultural hijacking performed during the colonial era and Elgin's open intents to use the marbles as a method of "educating" the British serves as evidence of his ill intent to steal Greek culture.

Personal Opinion:

It is hard to determine the legitimacy of a deal made over two hundred years ago, not only due to the lack of record but also due to our inability to interpret the culture of power for ancient civilizations. The use of power as a method of negotiation arguably acted as a better method than legislation. Undermining the legitimacy of colonial power is a contemporary interpretation of moral values from the past. However, I believe the Parthenon Marbles should be returned to Athens by the British Museum as an act of appreciation for the supposed values the pieces themselves represent. If the British Museum wishes to display the marbles under the message that they represent the best of humanity in its democratic infancy, returning them would be proof of veracity for these values.