



Marbles
Reunited

Friends of The British Committee for
the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles

Sent by Email & by Post

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Cultural Property Unit
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Consultation on Restitution of Objects Spoliated in the Nazi-Era

On behalf of Marbles Reunited (Friends of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles), I am submitting herewith the following comments on the Consultation Paper for consideration.

Whilst the general proposal of facilitating the restitution of looted artefacts is admirable from both a moral & legal viewpoint, we feel that the current limited terms of reference will lead to anomalous treatment of various cases in the future.

In section 1.4, the Nazi Era (and hence the terms of reference of this consultation) is defined as the period from 1933-1945. Whilst cultural objects, the possession of which was lost during this period would cover any item conceivably looted by the Nazis, it also covers a multitude of other items now in British institutions – many of which have no clear connection to any form of looting carried out by the Nazis. Such legislation creates a special case for restitution, which has no clear specific link to moral justifications. Items lost during the Nazi era, but not involving the Nazis might well be considered relatively weak moral cases, but could still be returned, whereas at the same time, works of art such as those looted by the Bolsheviks (a strong moral case) would not be eligible for consideration.

Section 3.1, refers to the case of the Beneventan Missal. This is a strong moral case, & one that falls within the terms of reference of the consultation, yet there is no evidence to suggest that it ended up leaving Italy because of Nazi looting.

Many museums are prohibited under their charters from de-accessioning items in their collections, but one exception to this has already been made by Section

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47 of the Human Tissue act 2004, which defines human remains as being a special case scenario (albeit with their own exclusion from the terms of reference where the item is more than 1000 years old). A new statute allowing the return of items looted during the period 1933-1945 would create another such special case.

The fact that there exists such a need to create various special cases, would appear to indicate, that rather than piecemeal legislation to deal with specific instances as they arise, what is required is a complete overhaul of the statutes governing institutions, with a thoroughly considered rewrite of their current anti-deaccessioning clauses. Taking a more holistic approach to the problem would have the potential to allow museums to deaccession items in their collections wherever they felt that there was an overwhelming moral obligation, without the need for future legislation to create further categories of special cases when the need arises.

In case of any queries relating to the above, please contact Nicky Artemi using the details below:

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Marbles Reunited : Friends of the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles is a British organisation which lobbies for the reunification of all surviving Parthenon Sculptures in the New Acropolis Museum in Athens, Greece. Our membership includes politicians, lawyers, archaeologists, museum professionals, architects, media figures & leading academics.

Yours Sincerely

Matthew Taylor

Sent for & on behalf of the Marbles Reunited Campaign.