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Greek PM will tell Liz Truss now's the moment to return Elgin Marbles

A deal to return the sculptures would help Rishi Sunak. Mitsotakis is made to a spot of further after being passed off spring on rivals. Will Charles help?

Ownership of the sculptures has been a source of bitter tension Britain and Greece since 1801 PAUL TOMKINS/VISUAL HELLAS

Matthew Campbell, Athens | Saturday October 01 2022, 6:00pm, The Sunday Times

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Yet Greek prime minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis believes that Britain is edging closer to returning the Elgin Marbles and will raise the subject with Liz Truss on a visit to Greece this year.

"In a few when Truss will be looking to build her credibility and when the UK is and of comment in terms of its overall image after the Queen's funeral, it will be a fantastic gesture, and that's what I'll tell her," said Mitsotakis in an interview with The Sunday Times last week in Athens.

Ownership of the sculptures, part of a spectacular frieze, has been a source of bitter tension between Britain and Greece since 1801 when Thomas Bruce, seventh the Parthenon in 1801, claiming to have permission from occupying Ottoman authorities to send workmen to quarries to saw off marble figures of warriors, centaurs and gods.

Mitsotakis, 54, is heartened by his quest to get back the 2,500-year-old sculptures by joint conversations with the new monarch.

A favourite pronouncement of these energy — "a question of owner" — the Greek premier has a "good personal relationship" with King Charles. While accepting that this will be neutral", he believes the King is supportive based on discussions "in his previous capacity as the Prince of Wales" when they met at Dunfermline House, part of the Prince's Foundation, six months ago.

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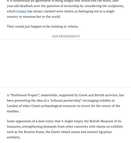

Charles: "Princes, when Queen Elizabeth Queen is Regal after an extension from Charles. The girl can wait to have a great personal relationship

"I think the mood is changing in the UK," said Mitsotakis, referring to reports that, after decades of deterioration, the British Museum may be ready to do a deal.

Mitsotakis, a Harvard-educated former banker who worked in London in the 1980s and speaks impeccable English, had thought Boris Johnson might be ready to do a deal. Johnson, who was London mayor when the Parthenon sculptures were on show at an Oxford classics student society, "The Elgin Marbles should be displayed where they belong, in a country of bright sunshine and the landscape of Achilles, the Oxford classics society, said.

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However, in a meeting with Mitsotakis last November in London Johnson simply reiterated the longstanding UK view that this was a matter for the trustees of the British Museum, which has always maintained the sculptures were legally obtained.

"Boris changes his mind," said Mitsotakis, when asked about that encounter. He declined to go into details about the talks, which have been bedeviled by Unesco, the UN's cultural agency. "We're actively pursuing our options and want to be transparent about it," said the British Museum, "and we continue to work with London late last month.

It is understood an agreement is being sought that would end the Elgin, 200-year-old deadlock over the gateway to Greece by considering the sculptures which Greece has always claimed were stolen, as belonging not to a single country but to the world.

They would just happen to be residing in Athens.

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A "Parthenon Project", nonprofit, supported by Greek and British activists, has been promoting the idea of a "national partnership" envisaging exhibits in London of other Greek archaeological treasures in return for the return of the marbles.

Some opponents of a deal worry that it might empty the British Museum of its most iconic and longstanding treasures. Other countries with claims on exhibits such as the Rosetta Stone, the Easter Island statue and ancient Egyptian artefacts.

Antonis Tsipras and Syriza, the left-wing party that ousted the pro-austerity Greek governments thought the marbles belonged in Greece and only 40 per cent wanted them to stay in Britain (the rest had no opinion).

Liz Truss: Planned her image conscious visit for the summer, now largely wasted ALAMY

The Acropolis Museum at the foot of the Parthenon was purpose built to display the marbles and already houses some of the sculptures that were assembled by Greek nationalists in the 1800s, who not ambassador to the Ottoman Empire between 1796 and 1801.

Steadily, first and tenses of the same figures can be seen in London and Athens. Restoring them at the Acropolis Museum is another "personal journey" and Mitsotakis, as he set bedeviled his deals in an office the size of a tennis court in Maximos Mansion, the Greek No 10.

On a table at one end of his office was a basketball signed by Magic Johnson, the former American superstar who was among a flowing of celebrities lobbying Mitsotakis to release Greek footage on social media about a "life-changing experience" at the Acropolis.

A museum at the foot of the Parthenon was purpose-built to display the marbles GETTY IMAGES

Mitsotakis, 54, had an extraordinary experience this year, bestowing the first Greek leader in addition a joint session of the American congress in Washington, where he won multiple standing ovations for his forthright defence of Ukraine.

He is the man who lobbies Biden and Johnson to campaign for a reduction next spring. Relations with Greece's larger neighbour are at their lowest ebb in decades. Mitsotakis accused Turkey of attempting "destabilisation" and growing fears of military conflict.

President Erdogan, he said, was pursuing a "grandiose Ottoman vision. He wants to be a regional player and respects everybody in accept Turkey's greatness, but Turkey must respect the rules of the international system, and it is unacceptable." The Nato allies are in tension over various hotbed islands in the Aegean Sea.

He also accused Russia, which shares the same Orthodox religion as Greece, of trying to undermine its democracy, citing a report by the US Department of Justice regarding the indictment of an oligarch alleged to have illegally funneled $60 million into the country in 2018 in violation of US sanctions.

The date, said Mitsotakis, was in fact a TV network sympathetic to Moscow and the far-left Syriza party he defeated in 2019. The network's "head of programmes was a former member of the Communist Party and a relative of Mitsotakis. "He wrote a newspaper that was set up with the express purpose of going after me and my wife," he added.

Mitsotakis worries that such skullduggery could put at risk the Greek transformation. In spite of harassing an encyclopaedia in a world of giants, "we still have to be careful", he said. "If the US can shake if you get the policy wrong, imagine what's going to happen to Greece."

He lengthened at the thought of the comparison. Alluding to Britain's fiscal woes under Truss's new administration, he joked: "If you need experience in dealing with the IMF, we've been in help."

Liz Truss

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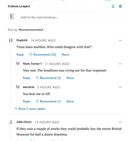

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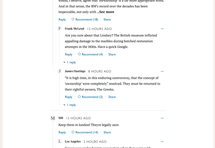

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Fabian Lampert

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Hopkirk · 14 HOURS AGO

Truss loses marbles. Who could disagree with that?

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Mark Turner1 · 11 HOURS AGO

Nice one. The headlines was crying out for that response!

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mirrlees · 10 HOURS AGO

You beat me to it!

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John Orme · 14 HOURS AGO

If they can't comply of entry they could probably buy the entire British Museum for half a dozen drachma.

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John Orme · 14 HOURS AGO

Before anyone says - I know, it's Euros now, but "drachma" is much more fun as a word.

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Lindsay Hall · 14 HOURS AGO

It's high time, in this contemporary, that the concept of 'ownership' was completely abandoned. Even the most patriotic Greeks would, I believe, agree that 'ownership' is a few more appropriate word. And in that sense, the RM's record over the decades has been impeccable, not only with... **See more**

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Frank Worrall · 13 HOURS AGO

Are you sure about that Lindsay? The British museum inflicted appalling damages to the marbles during botched restoration attempts in the 1930s. Have a quick Google.

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James Hastings · 8 HOURS AGO

"It is high time, in this enlighting contemporary, that the concept of 'ownership' were completely" marlock. They must be returned to their rightful owners, The Greeks.

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S. · 14 HOURS AGO

Sorrotide · 11 HOURS AGO

NO NOO. Greece did not exist as a country when Elgin got permission from Turkey to remove these artefacts. Which, in turn was under local customs or destruction. By rights the Bayeux Tapestry belongs to the UK. Finance to be rightful guardian too. The Marbles are an internationale organ... **See more**

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MR · 14 HOURS AGO

Turkey did not exist when Parliament sanctioned the removal, and allegedly given by the Ottoman governor appointed by Sultan before the Turks. Greece was a Turkish province, ruled by Turkish Sultan.

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Lucy · 14 HOURS AGO

Yes, they did not exist when Parliament sanctioned the removal, and allegedly given by the Ottoman governor appointed by Sultan before the Turks. Greece was a Turkish province, ruled by Turkish Sultan.

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(edict) allowing the 7th Earl of Elgin,...**See more** *(Edited)*

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R **robert Hagan** · 4 HOURS AGO

Feeble. Athens existed many centuries before Elgin made an appearance on this earth.

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C **Costas Evripides** · 11 HOURS AGO

Time for the Parthenon marbles to come home.

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W **Weirdbeard** · 9 HOURS AGO

Astonishing ignorance being displayed in the comments about the marbles - such as the belief that they were legally bought (they were not, Elgin bribed a local policeman to turn a blind eye), that Elgin had been given permission to remove them by the Turks (no record has ever been found that Elgin ...**See more**

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M **Mr AJ Pryer** · 1 HOUR AGO

I am afraid your account is full of errors ('policemen'? 'No documents'? etc). A the very least you might want to read Mary Beard's little book on the history of the Parthenon

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R **robert Hagan** · 4 HOURS AGO

Whatever, they should be in Athens.

Reply · Recommend (1) · Share

D **Desperate Searcher** · 14 HOURS AGO

I love the Marbles. I'm pretty sure if Elgin hadn't taken them they would have been taken by others, in bits and pieces, and it would now be impossible to reunite them. I think it's time for them to return home. No, this mustn't set a precedent, they are an exception - and exceptional.

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F **Frank McLeod** · 12 HOURS AGO

You're probably right. Furthermore the Athens air pollution wouldn't have done the marbles any favours had they remained in place. That said, of course, the BM carried out a botched restoration ruining many of the pieces in the 1930s. All water under the bridge now and a new museum built in Athens....**See more**

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1 reply

N **noemon** · 13 HOURS AGO

It's doubtful that they would have been removed if not for Elgin. These marbles were not decorative standalone objects, they were part of the walls themselves. Near impossible to remove and when Elgin hacked them off he caused irreparable damage to the building.

Besides Greece took over Athens for g...**See more** *(Edited)*

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2 replies

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F **Frank McLeod** · 12 HOURS AGO

The return of the Elgin Marbles at some point in the future is looking inevitable, especially now the technology to carve identical pieces by robot exists. It makes sense to get the timing right and get maximum credit from the global community, part of a charm offensive to win back friends for the ...**See more**

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M **Mary Rathke** · 10 HOURS AGO

". . . now the technology to carve identical pieces by robot exists." Exactly. So we can give the Greeks a very satisfactory replica.

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A **Alistair Moore** · 13 HOURS AGO

Ownership of the sculptures, part of a spectacular frieze, has been a source of rancour between Britain and Greece ever since Lord Elgin removed them from the Parthenon in 1801

Nonsense.
No one cared until 1981 when the then Minister for Culture, Melina Mercouri, wrapped the Greek flag around the issue and made a big fuss.
(Edited)

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W **WithInk** · 12 HOURS AGO

Alistair. Please.

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