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Study demonstrates Greek rights to the Parthenon Marbles

- Since 1817, half of the Parthenon Marbles from Athens have been housed in the British Museum.
- Despite frequent requests from the Greek authorities, the UK refuses to return them to their country of origin.
- According to the work of a CNRS researcher, there is no legal argument to support the UK's refusal to return these sculptures to Greece.

Although negotiations between the British Museum and Greece appear to have reached stalemate, research shows that there is no legal argument to support the UK's refusal to return the Parthenon Marbles to their country of origin. *The Parthenon Marbles and International Law*, published on 25 May 2023 by Springer, is the result of a study conducted by international lawyer Catharine Titi, a CNRS researcher at the Centre d'études et de recherches de sciences administratives et politiques (CNRS/Université Paris-Panthéon-Assas).

The UK's argument for refusing to return the Parthenon Marbles to Athens is twofold: their acquisition in the 1800s by Lord Elgin was legal under the laws and customs of the time, and as the law is not retroactive the current legal order against spoliation of cultural property cannot be applied.

In her new book, Titi refutes these justifications point by point by reviewing the history of the marbles' extraction, and analysing the Ottoman documents, Lord Elgin's correspondence and the British parliamentary report. According to Titi, the appropriation of these sculptures was illegal, even at the time of their extraction, and Lord Elgin could not have removed them without bribing many of the Ottoman officials who administered Athens at the time.

In *The Parthenon Marbles and International Law*, the author points out that international jurisprudence leans towards Greece's claim, and recalls the International Court of Justice's 1962 judgment in the case of the Temple of Preah Vihear, which forced Thailand to return to Cambodia certain objects that had been removed from the temple.

To conclude, Titi turns to customary law, a set of unwritten rules of international law based on state practice. Over the last few decades, this practice, which points to an emerging rule of international law, has seen many cultural heritage masterpieces that were removed illegally or under unethical conditions being returned to their country of origin. It means that ultimately the British Museum too cannot hope to keep the Parthenon marbles in its collection.

Titi hopes that this book will serve to inform debates on the repatriation of cultural heritage and provide arguments both to Greek negotiators and the British intellectuals and politicians who have spoken out in favour of returning the marbles to Athens.





The Parthenon Marbles are on display in the Duveen Gallery, British Museum. The east pediment depicts the birth of Athena.
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Reference

The Parthenon Marbles and International Law. Catharine Titi. Springer, 25 May 2023.

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