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Acropolis now: The Greek PM said the request was about “reunification not ownership”.

Should the Parthenon Marbles go back to Greece? More than 200 years after they were first taken, the future of the Greek treasures is still uncertain.

What’s happening?

Britain and Greece normally have a good relationship. But today, things may be a little awkward.

On Monday, British leader Rishi Sunak **refused** to meet Greek leader **Kyriakos Mitsotakis** in London. The refusal came after Mitsotakis said once again that Britain should return the Parthenon Marbles to Greece.

Find out more

The Parthenon Marbles, also known as the Elgin Marbles, are ancient Greek sculptures that once stood in the **Parthenon** in Greece.

They were taken from the Parthenon by Earl Elgin in the early 1800s, then sold to Britain. Elgin said he was allowed to take the marbles by the **Ottomans**, who ruled Greece at the time.

Now, the Greeks want the marbles back. And politicians in the UK cannot agree on whether to say yes.

Some say it is right to give the marbles back. Others warn that if the Parthenon Marbles were given back, other countries might start asking for more and more treasures to be returned. Meanwhile, more people visit the British Museum than the Parthenon in Greece.

And not every case is clear cut. Many objects have several people who claim to own them. It is not always easy to say who they should be given back to.

Should the Parthenon Marbles go back to Greece?

Some say

Yes! They are a part of Greek history, taken from them without asking. Returning them is the right thing to do.

Others think

No! The marbles are part of the history of the world, not just Greece. More people will see them in Britain than in Greece. They should be left where they are.

Some people say

"The Elgin Marbles were supposed to be on the Parthenon. For many works of art, a museum is an artificial setting — a zoo, not a natural habitat."

Virginia Postrel (1960 –), American writer

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What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Do you think Sunak made the right decision in refusing to see Mitsotakis?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: Should objects ever be taken from the country they were found in?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure from this story.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - You are made the head of the British Museum. Do you give the marbles back?

5. Express

What do others believe? - Get in a small group and work together to come up with a plan ensuring that everyone in the world can see the Parthenon Marbles.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - You are a journalist covering the day the marbles are returned to Athens. Write a newspaper article describing the scenes.

Glossary

Refused - Said no.

Kyriakos Mitsotakis - The Greek prime minister since June 2023.

Parthenon - An ancient Greek temple in Athens that was once dedicated to the goddess Athena. It was built around 440 BC. It is regarded as the highest example of ancient Greek architecture.

Ottomans - Members of the Turkish dynasty that ruled the Ottoman Empire.