

Colloquy 2015: A Report from the International Organising Committee – Australia – for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles (IOC-A-RPM)

Colloquy 2015, held from 27 – 28 July at the Acropolis Museum, Athens, It was the third in a series of ongoing events designed to highlight the need for return of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece. With the theme Unifying the Cause to Unify the Parthenon, its focus was on preparation for the fourth international Colloquy in London on the 200th anniversary of the British Parliament's controversial purchase of the Parthenon Marbles from Lord Elgin.

Colloquy are initiatives of the American Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures (ACRPS), the International Organising Committee – Australia – for the Restitution of the Parthenon Marbles (IOC-A-RPM), and the British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles (BCRPM) and have set a new standard in the international campaigning for return of the Parthenon Marbles.

Opening the Colloquy Mr. Michael Reppas Esq, President of ACRPS introduced the Hon. Nikos Xydakis, Greek Minister of Culture (Alternate), Maria Vlazaki, Secretary General, Ministry of Culture and Professor Dimitrios Pandermalis, Director of the Acropolis Museum, and Irimi Stamatoudi, Esq., Advisory Committee, Ministry Culture for the Parthenon Marbles who all lent their support to the initiative most making brief addresses.

The Keynote Speaker George Bizos OSM from BCRPM, world-renowned human rights advocate and former lawyer to Nelson Mandela stressed the importance of friendship in resolving the issue of the Parthenon Marbles. He reminded us, "Greece has been friends with the people of the United Kingdom for centuries, through good times and bad." Quoting Aristotle he said, "Friendship seems to hold states together, and lawgivers care more for it than for justice; . . . and when men are friends they have no need of justice . . ."

He went on to outline widespread and long-standing support for return of the Marbles in Britain reaching across the British establishment. He identified Prince Charles, Robert Browning, Sir John Mortimer QC, C.M. Woodhouse, Spike Milligan, Judi Dench, Vanessa Redgrave, Sir Ian McKellen and Jonathan Dimbleby as people who are or have been supporters. He observed, "For years, secure in the knowledge that our cause is just and that it carries the support of well-informed and influential members of the British establishment, those campaigning for the reunification of the marbles have believed that our goal will be achieved through political and diplomatic channels."



Michael Reppas, George Bizos and Emanuel John Comino during the opening of the 3rd International Colloquy in the Acropolis Museum of Athens

While not ruling out litigation as a possible strategy for return Mr. Bizos said, "I suggest that it is our duty to ensure that fertile ground is laid to allow litigation (if the decision to litigate is indeed taken) to have the best possible prospects of succeeding. It is my contention that careful planning and execution of such a campaign, not only in Greece, but especially in the United Kingdom, is an appropriate task to which we should commit ourselves in seeking to "Unify the Cause to Unify the Parthenon".

Eddie O'Hara, Chairman of BCRPM highlighted the "tumultuous events of the past twelve months" which he said "have had mixed implications for our campaign. They have brought "unprecedented press coverage" and this is "the oxygen of the campaign and, sure enough, a pair of opinion polls demonstrated an increase in support" but they have highlighted "tensions within the campaign which need be resolved" and "produced reactions from the British Museum which need to be addressed", distracting us from priorities.

Reviewing the current tension within the campaign, the question of litigation, he said that "whether or not to have recourse to litigation is for the Greek Government alone to decide. The responsibility of supporters is to support them in whatever course of action they choose. Personally BCRPM wish to see the Parthenon marbles reunited on cultural and ethical grounds. Nevertheless, pragmatically, if the Greek Government were able to secure a favourable adjudication through litigation we would welcome it."

On reactions from the British Museum he reminded the Colloquy that the museum "appears to be using the Parthenon Marbles to underpin, revamp and relaunch the concepts of cultural diplomacy and the universal

museum in their justification for retaining them. I am not sure that we have yet articulated a clear and adequate response to this. We may however be encouraged by the recent poll by the Museums Journal of its readers in which 81% voted that the response to the UNESCO mediation initiative should have been more positive.”

Eddie O’Hara also identified the importance of working towards a diverse response in the 2016 London Colloquy adding, that” it needs to be fully supported and properly resourced in terms of administration and funding. It need not be seen in isolation. It could be the focal point or climax of a continuous stream of diverse initiatives in the intervening period. I invite a brainstorming of ideas to this end.”

Marlen Godwin from BCRPM stressed that supporters of reunification for the Parthenon Marbles are far greater than the opposition noting that while this is the case the energy of this mass of supporters ”remains largely unharnessed.” She added that internationally, “the lobby is huge and yet largely untapped” suggesting the need for a more effective international response.

Emanuel J Comino Chairman of IOC-A-RPM, echoing Marlen Godwin’s comments, called for a new international approach to the campaign for return stressing the importance of an international response that is “transparent, democratic and welcoming of organisations that have a legitimate interest in restitution of the Parthenon Marbles.”

Adding detail to the need for a rejuvenated International body he suggested the idea of “a rotating chair with the vice chair always drawn from the British Committee when not chairing the international body. Such a body should be supported by a secretariat drawn from the Hellenic Advisory Committee.”

Mindful of the need for an effective international campaign he noted that, “Financial support for the secretariat could be through an affiliation fee structure.” He stressed that such an international body “should always work in consultation with the Hellenic Advisory Committee and the Consulting Committee of the Hellenic Ministry to ensure the highest possible degree of consonance on the issue of the return of the Parthenon Marbles to Hellas.”

He expressed concern about recent emphasis on litigation as a strategy to the exclusion of a broad based campaign observing, “Certainly we’ve thought about it . . . “ but “Any threat of court action must always be supported by effective ongoing global diplomatic and political initiatives. It must also involve a willingness to negotiate. Indeed, at the moment, our major focus must be in the diplomatic and political spheres.

It is of the utmost importance that we lobby British



During the lunch in the Acropolis Museum. Left to Right seating, Eva Green (IOC-A-RPM), Maria & James Tzavaras (IOC-A-RPM), Presvitera Ourania Varvaris, And standing, Left to Right, Father John Varvaris, Matina Comino, Maria Foka (Hellas), Michael Reppas II Esg Chairman USA Committee and Emanuel John Comino AM

politicians rather than going to court. Ultimate success, to a large measure, lies in changes to the British Museum Act of 1963. Such change will benefit from stimulating and encouraging public support in Britain.”

On basic approaches for an international campaign he made a number of suggestions saying that, it is clear the Parthenon Marbles “were illegitimately acquired. Yet, the British Museum and other supporters of Elgin’s misappropriation continue to disseminate disinformation. So, we need a central repository, a clearinghouse perhaps, organised through the Hellenic Advisory Committee that can act as a type of global library of resources that convey the authentic story of the Parthenon Marbles.

He highlighted the importance of Committees throughout the world challenging the British Museum “every time they publish false and misleading information. These challenges should not only be in the more traditional forms such as letters, newsletters and resolutions, but must make full use of mainstream media. It is also most important that effective use is made of social media and websites. Beyond this we must seek to enlist the tools of the educators, the Arts and even temperate and imaginative forms of direct action and public manifestations.

Our actions must not only be reactionary but also proactive in getting out the facts at every possible opportunity.”

Gina Choutis Secretary of IOC-A-RPM drew on the philosophy of Pericles in an inspired paper that reminded us there is still much to learn from this remarkable leader.

Gina reminded us that the “spirit which built the Parthenon was the spirit of purpose and it started within no one other than Pericles who through his leadership and guidance transferred it to its people.”

Pericles “began with the idea of building the monuments

in Athens due to his concern over the number of Athenian citizens who could not benefit from the national income and so set out to create all kinds projects to provide inspiration for every art, find employment for every hand and transform the whole people into wage earners. He created the common goal to decorate Athens by Athenians and he gave each Athenian a purpose.” So in taking this campaign forward we must “Create all kinds of projects to provide inspiration for every art - Use the multiple talents that people bring to this cause and also exploit the full range of tools available to us through media and the arts.”

Drawing on Pericles philosophy she offered these guidelines for future action.

“Let’s take the lessons from Pericles and the Parthenon and put them into action in our campaign.

Resilience – The campaign for the return must be resolute.

Stand tall in times of adversity - Even in the face of British intransigence continue to assert the justice of the cause.

The spirit of purpose - Be confident and clear in the purpose of the campaign.

Create all kinds of projects to provide inspiration for every art - Use the multiple talents that people bring to this cause and also exploit the full range of tools available to us through media and the arts.

Find employment for every hand - Use all of our respective skills, aptitudes and experience.

Transform the whole people - Develop confidence and skill in advocating for the return amongst all of the people who’ve joined this cause.

Create greatness and preserve it - Strive for excellence in conveying our message and keep a repository of all of our best initiatives and strategies.

The Parthenon still stands today and will stand long after we are all gone – Recognise the intergenerational nature of this struggle and be prepared to hand on the baton to future generations by avoiding self-importance notions that it must happen in my life time.

Transfer the spirit of purpose - Through involving and developing a great mass of people transfer this spirit of purpose

Lead by example - The campaign must demonstrate the insights, skills and acumen we want to see in others

Pericles’ reputation was built over the course of his whole life – Let’s be consistent in our actions

Indifferent to bribes - Recognise and act on the reality that this is not a struggle focused on personal gain or having our names inscribed at the entrance to the

Acropolis Museum this is something of a much higher order.

Pericles was renowned for his wariness - Be eternally vigilant in this struggle.

Never willingly engaged in a battle with much danger or uncertainty - Be very wary of those suggesting the singular quick fix of litigation as the way forward.”

There were also brief comments from two additional speakers whose full paper are included in the attached collection of published articles, Alexis Mantheakis, from the International Parthenon Sculptures Action Committee and Dr. Nikolaos Chatziandreou, creator of author of AcropolisofAthens.gr in association with Mr. Michael Reppas Esq.

Day two of the Colloquy saw a wide ranging discussion on the way forward and some initial scoping of a program for Colloquy 2016.

Following the Colloquy Emanuel J Comino AM, Mr. James Tzavaras JP and Russell Darnley OAM from IOC-A-RPM joined with the South African participants, Mr. George Bizos OSM and Mr. Richard Moultrie from the Johannesburg Bar, in a meeting with Greek Culture Minister, Mr. Nikos Xydakis. A productive discussion ensued about the future of the campaign and Colloquy 2016. This event will be organised by the BCRPM in association with the ACRPS and

IOC-A-RPM. It will take place in London during the next northern summer. A copy of our report of the Ministerial meeting is attached.

Emanuel J Comino AM
Chairman & Founder
IOC-A-RPM

Russell Darnley OAM
Member IOC-A-RPM



Emanuel & Matina Comino and Russell Darnley from their hotel overlooking the Acropolis

A report on meeting Minister for Culture (Alternate) Mr Nikos Xydakis,

Athens, On Wednesday 29 July

Present:

Nikos Xydakis, Minister for Culture (Alternate)
Alexandra Theodoropoulou, Diplomatic Counsellor
Emanuel J Comino AM JP (IOC-A-RPM)
James Tzavaras JP (IOC-A-RPM)
Russell Darnley OAM (IOC-A-RPM)
George Bizos OMS (BCRPM)
Richard Moultrie (Johannesburg Bar)

Minister Nikos Xydakis said that the preferred style of campaign for return of the Parthenon Marbles was one that adopts a light approach in the knowledge that many people in Britain support return.

He advised that at this stage the Ministry is close to organising a creative team to work on promotion and in particular making far more effective and widespread use of all forms of social media. He emphasised that such use of social media need be creative and employing a joyful theme, reminding us again of the history of strong and friendly relations with the people of the United Kingdom and the high levels of support for return already evident in Britain.

In this context he expressed support for the planned Colloquy 2016 to be held in London next northern summer.

Beyond social media Minister Xydakis mentioned the importance of engaging all of the arts in the campaign.

One example he cited was art exhibitions with works inspired by the Parthenon. As a corollary he suggested exhibitions of works from famous people that were also inspired by Parthenon. In the spirit of a light hearted campaign he expressed interest in the Australian suggestion of T- Shirts promoting return of the Marbles with a simple message in both Greek and English.

The Minister went on to say that there should also be a attention given to obtaining materials removed from the Parthenon that were held in other in other countries, in addition to the United Kingdom. He felt that this was an effective means of changing perceptions and preparing the way for the more substantive return of materials from the British Museum. He referenced the Vatican and Germany in passing as examples of centres where elements of the Parthenon were held.

On litigation as a strategy the Minister pointed to the dangers. He did acknowledge the usefulness of continuing research into sources of evidence but only in the context of a broad campaign that creatively engaged political and diplomatic initiatives.



Seated -Left to Right-Alexandra Theodoropoulou, Diplomatic Counsellor, Adv George Bizos OMS British & S'th African Committee, Emanuel John Comino AM (IOC-A-RPM), Cultural Minister Nikos Xidakis, & Richard Moultrie (Johannesburg Bar) S'th African Committee.

Standing - Russell Darnley OAM & Jim Tzavaras both from the International Organising Committee-Australia- For The Restitution Of The Parthenon Marbles Inc (IOC-A-RPM).