

Who Saved the Parthenon?

A New History of the Acropolis
Before, During and After the
Greek Revolution



WILLIAM ST CLAIR



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Cover image: Figure 2.7. 'View of the Acropolis from the banks of the Illysus, Sep^r 1824.' Chromolithograph from a contemporary amateur picture. From: William Black, L.R.C.S.E., Surgeon, H.M.S. Chanticleer, *Narrative of Cruises in the Mediterranean in H.M.S. "Euryalus" and "Chanticleer" during the Greek War of Independence (1822–1826)* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1900), frontispiece. The chromolithograph was made by McLagan and Cumming of Edinburgh c.1900. Public domain.

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Appendix A

The Firman Obtained by Lord Elgin in 1801 and Related Documents

The diplomatic and political circumstances in which Lord Elgin, as British Ambassador in Constantinople, in 1801 arranged for a 'firman', or more precisely a 'vizieral letter', to be sent by the Ottoman Government to its two most senior officials in Athens have long been known. It was this document that, when taken to Athens, was said to give legal authority to his agents when they obtained the acquiescence of the local Ottoman officials in their project to remove antiquities, including pieces of the Parthenon and of the other buildings on the Acropolis of Athens. Since the Acropolis was legally a military fortress under the direct control of the Sultan in Constantinople, only a specific request direct from the Grand Vizier, or his deputy, could give authority to the Disdar, the low-ranking military commander of the fortress.

Since there continues to be interest in the precise scope of that document, and some of the words are uncertain, I offer a new transcription and a more correct translation into English than were provided in the version that I published in 1998, as well as a reproduction of the document itself.¹ I also add summaries of

1 In St Clair, William, *Lord Elgin and the Marbles* (Oxford: OUP, 1998). I am grateful to Luciana Gallo for her transcription and translation. The circumstances in which the document came to be in the British Museum were described by Dr Dorothy King in her blog 'William St Clair and the Firman' dated 3 June 2008 <https://phdiva.blogspot.com/2008/06/william-st-clair-and-firman.html>. That there was also a version in Ottoman Turkish is confirmed by a remark of John Galt who saw the actual document: 'I saw the firman on which Lord Elgin commenced the dilapidation of the Temples, and as I did not understand Turkish, the person who read it to me said it was only to remove a stone': Galt, John, *The Autobiography of John Galt* (London: Cochrane and McCrone, 1833), i, 160. The provenance of the Italian-language version, and its status as having been issued by the Ottoman Government, was discussed by St Clair, William,

other relevant documents not hitherto taken into account in the histories of the Parthenon.

1. The Firman of 1801

‘Traduzione d’una lettera di S.E.^a il Kaimecam Pascià, diretta al Giudice, ed Anche al voivoda d’Atene.

Dop’ il saluto, vi si fà sapere qualm.^{te} il nostro amico sincero S.E. Lord Elgin, Ambasc.^e della corte d’Inghilterra presso la porta della felicità, avendo esposto esser notorio che la maggior parte delle Corti franche, ansiosa di legger ed investigar i libri, le pitture, ed altre scienze delli filosofi Greci, e particolarmente i Ministri, filosofi, primati, ed altri individui d’Inghilterra essendo portati alle pitture rimaste dalli tempi delli d.ⁱ Greci, le quali si trovano nelle spiagge dell’Arcipelago, ed in altri climi, abbiamo di temp’ in tempo mandati degli uomini e fatto esplorare l’antiche fabriche, e pitture, e che di questo modo li abili dilettanti della Corte d’Inghilterra essendo desiderosi di vedere l’antiche fabriche e le curiose pitture della Città d’Athene, e della vechia muraglia rimasta dalli Greci, e ch’esistono nella part’interiore del d.^o luogo, egli abbia commesso ed ordinato a cinque Pittori Inglesi, già esistenti nella d.^a Città, che abbian a vedere, contemplar, ed anche a disegnare le pitture [*last two words inserted*] rimaste “ab antiquo”, ed avendo questa volta espressamente suplicato acciò sia scritto ed ordinato che ai d.ⁱ pittori, mentre saran’ occupati col’entrar e sortire dalla porta del Castello della d.^a Città, che è il

in ‘Imperial Appropriations of the Parthenon’ in *Imperialism, Art and Restitution*, ed. Merryman, John Henry (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp. 77–80. A discussion of the nature of the document, using the English translation published in 1816, has recently been provided by a scholar of the Ottoman Empire: Eldem, Edhem, ‘From Blissful Indifference to Anguished Concern: Ottoman Perceptions of Antiquities, 1799–1869’, in Bahrani, Zinab; Çelik, Zeynep; and Eldem, Edhem, *Scramble for the Past, A Story of Archaeology in the Ottoman Empire* (Istanbul 2011), pp. 281–329. The Latin phrase ‘ab antiquo’ appears to have been used by the dragoman interpreters at the Ottoman court as a general term for long established rights. The use of the phrase in a vizieral letter of ultimatum in 1715 is noted in Chapter 2. That Elgin and his staff understood that they had contrived to exceed the terms of the firman is given further confirmation by a phrase in a long letter from Philip Hunt to Mrs William Hamilton Nisbet, dated 1805: ‘I conceived that an extension might be given to the words of the ferman; which the Vaivode did not oppose.’ Printed from the manuscript by Nagel, Susan, *The mistress of the Elgin marbles: a biography of Mary Nisbet, Countess of Elgin* (Chichester: Wiley, 2004), 263.

luogo d'osservazione, col formare delle scalinate attorno l'antico tempio dégl'Idoli, coll'estrarre sulla calcina /osia sul gesso/ gl'istessi ornamenti, e figure visibili, col misurare gli avvanzi d'altre fabbriche diroccate, e coll'intraprendere di scavare secondo il bisogno, le fondamenta per trovar i matton'inscritti, che fossero restati dentro le ghiaja, non sia recata molestia, nè apportato impedim.^o dalla parte del Castelano, nè di verun'Altro, e che non si s'ingerisca nelle loro scalinate, ed instrumenti, che vi avranno formati; e quando volessero portar via qualche pezzi di pietra con vecchie iscrizioni, e figure, non sia fatta lor'opposizione, vi s'è scritta e spedita col NN. la presente lettera, afin che dopo compreso il soggetto della med.^a essendo chiaro l'impegno dell'Excelso Impero dotato d'esimie qualità, acciò vengano favorite simil istanze, conforme richiedono l'amicizia, sincerità, Alleanza, e benevolenza ab antiquo esistenti, e colla vicendevol accettazione d'ambe le parti, manifestam.^e crescenti frà la Sub.^e sempre durevole Corte Ottomana, e frà quella d'Inghilterra, e già chè non vi è alcun male che le Sud.^e pitture e fabbriche siano vedute, contemplate, e disegnate, e dop'essere state accompite le convenevoli accoglienze d'ospitalità verso li suriferiti pittori, in considerazione anche dell'amichevol istanza sù questo particolar avvenuta, dal prefato Amb.^{re}, e per esser'incombente che non si faccia opposizione al camminare, vedere e contemplare delli medemi le pittur, è fabbriche che vorranno disegnare, nè alle loro scalinate, ed instrumenti, all'arrivo della presente lettera usiate Attenzione perchè conformem.^e all'istanza del d.^o Amb.^{re}, mentre li soprad.ⁱ cinque pittori esistenti in codesta parte, sarann'occupati coll'entrare e sortire dalla porta del Castello d'Athene, che è il luogo d'osservazione; col formare delle scalinate attorn il tempio antico degl'Idoli; col estrarre sulla calcina /osia sul Gesso/ gl'istessi ornamenti, e figure visibili; col misurare i rimasugli d'altre fabbriche diroccate; e coll'intraprendere di scavare second'il bisogno le fondamenta per trovare i mattoni inscritti che fossero restati dentro la ghiaja, non vengano molestati nè dal Castellano, nè da altri, e neppure da voi sovraccennati, non vi s'ingerisca nelle loro scalinate, ed instrumenti e non si faccia opposizione al portar via qualche pezzi di pietra con iscrizioni, e figure, e nella surifferita maniera operate, e vi comportiate.

/ Sotto.^{lto} / Sejid Abdullah Kaimmecam'

[on verso]

‘Kaimacam’s Letter N°2, to the Governor of Athens.’

Translation

‘Translation of a letter from His Excellency the Kaimacam Pasha, to the Judge, and also to the Voivode of Athens.

After the greeting, this is to inform you that our sincere friend His Excellency Lord Elgin, Ambassador from the Court of England to the porte of happiness, having explained that it is well known that the greater part of the Frankish courts, being anxious to read and investigate the books, images² and other sciences of the Greek philosophers, and in particular the Ministers, philosophers, leading men, and other English persons being drawn to the images remaining from the time of the said Greeks, which are found on the shores of the Archipelago and in other climes, have from time to time sent men to explore the ancient buildings and images, and that the skilled dilettanti of the Court of England being desirous to see the ancient buildings and the curious images of the Town of Athens and of the old wall remaining from the Greeks [Acropolis] and what exists inside the said place, he has commissioned and ordered five English Painters, already present in the said Town, to observe, study and also draw the pictures [*last two words inserted*] surviving ‘ab antiquo’, and he has at this time expressly entreated that it may be written and ordered that the said painters while they are engaged in going in and out of the gate of the Castle of the said Town, which is the place of investigation, setting up ladders around the ancient temple of the Idols, moulding with mortar (that is, with plaster) the said ornaments and visible figures, measuring the remains of other ruined buildings, and undertaking when necessary to dig the foundations to find inscribed blocks that may have survived in the gravel, should not be bothered or prevented by the Governor of the Castle or any other person, and that no one should meddle with their ladders and instruments that they

2 Ottoman Turkish at this time did not normally distinguish between two and three-dimensional depictions, in western terms ‘pictures’ and ‘statues’, both being forms of visual image forbidden by Islamic sharia law at that time, although permitted, in controlled circumstances, to other millets within the Empire, including Orthodox Christians. Figurative images in both two and three dimensions were employed in earlier centuries by Muslim rulers of parts of modern Spain, as displayed, for example in museums in and near Cordoba.

have placed there, and that no opposition be made when they wish to take away some pieces of stone with old inscriptions and figures, the present letter has been written and sent to you [name to be inserted]³ so that once the subject of the same [letter] is understood, the commitment of the Excellent Empire endowed with eminent qualities to favour such requests is clear, in conformity with the friendship, sincerity, Alliance and good will established ab antiquo, and with the mutual acceptance by both sides, which is manifestly increasing on the part of the Sublime and everlasting Ottoman Court and of that of England, that there is no harm in the said pictures and buildings being observed, studied, and drawn, and after having fulfilled the courteous duties of hospitality towards the above-mentioned painters, in consideration also of the friendly request on this point by the said Ambassador, and because it is incumbent that no objection be made to the same [painters] to walk, observe and study the pictures and buildings that they may wish to draw, or to [the implementation and use of] their ladders and instruments, on receipt of the present letter you ensure that, in conformity with the request of the said Ambassador, while the above-mentioned five painters present in the said place are engaged in going in and out of the gate of the Castle of Athens, which is the place of investigation, setting up ladders around the ancient temple of the Idols, moulding with mortar (that is, with plaster) the said ornaments and visible figures, measuring the remains of other ruined buildings, and undertaking when necessary to dig the foundations to find inscribed blocks that may have survived in the gravel, will not be bothered by the Governor of the Castle or by anyone else, not even by you the above-mentioned, and that no one will meddle with their ladders and instruments and that no objection will be made to the removal of some pieces of stone with inscriptions, and figures, and in the aforesaid manner you should act, and conduct yourself.

(Signed) Sejid Abdullah Kaimmecam'

*The document was issued in the name of Seyyid Abdullah Pasha kaimakam, identified from Ottoman records as Ömer Paşade Elmac Abdullah Pasha, who held the office from 8 December 1799 until his death on 5 February 1802.*⁴

3 'a common convention in formal documents of the time when the name of the beneficiary is not yet known and a place is left for it to be inserted.

4 Eldem, 284.

Traduzione d'una lettera di S. E. il Naimecan
Persia, diretta al Giudice, ed anche al vivenda
d'Athene. —

Dopo 'il saluto, vi si fa sapere qual^{te}
il nostro amico sincero S. E. Lord Elgin, Ambasci^{te}
della corte d'Inghilterra per la porta della
felicità, avendo esposto per notorio che la
maggior parte delle corti franche, ansiosa di
legger ed investigar i libri, le pitture, ed altre
scienze delli filosofi Greci, e particolarmente
i Ministri, filosofi, primati, ed altri
individui d'Inghilterra spendo portati alle
pitture rimaste delli tempi delli d. Greci, le
quali si trovano nelle spiagge dell'Acrópolis,
ed in altri climi, abbiamo di tempo in tempo
mandati degli uomini e fatto esplorare l'
antiche fabbriche, e pitture, e che di questo modo
li abili dilettanti della corte d'Inghilterra
spendo desiderosi di vedere l'antiche fabbriche
e le curiose pitture della città d'Athene, e
della vecchia muraglia rimasta delli Greci,
e che esistono nella part' interiore del d.
luogo, egli abbia commesso ed ordinato a
cinque Pittori Inglese, già esistenti nella d.
città, che abbian a vedere, contemplar, ed
anche a disegnare ^{le pitture} rimaste "ab antiquo", ed
avendo questa volta espressamente supplicato
accio

acciò sia scritta ed ordinato che ad S.ⁱ pittori,
 mentre saran' occupati col' entrar e sortire
 dalla porta del Castello della S.^a Città, che è il
 luogo d'opirazione, col formare delle scalinate
 attorno l'antico tempio degl' Icoli, coll'entrare
 sulla calcina (ovvia sul gesso) gl'idei
 ornamenti, e figure visibili, col misurare gli
 avanzi d'altre fabbriche diroccate, e coll'
 intraprendere di stavare secondo il bisogno, le
 fondamenta per trovar i matton' inscritti, che
 fossero restati dentro le ghiaja, non sia recato
 molestia, né apportato impedim.^o dalla parte del
 Castellano, né di verun' altro, e che non si
 s'ingrossa nelle loro scalinate, ed instrumenti,
 che vi avranno formati; e quando volsero
 portar via qualche pezzi di pietra con vecchie
 iscrizioni, e figure, non sia fatta lor opirazi-
 -one, vi s'è scritta e spedita col N.^o la presente
 lettera, affin che dopo compreso il soggetto della
 med.^a spenda chiaro l'impegno dell' Eccell.^o Imper.
 dotato d'ovvie qualità, acciò vengano favorite
 simil istanze, conforme richiedono l'amicizia,
 sincerità, alleanza, e benevolenza ad antighi
 esistenti, e colla vicendevol accettazione d'amba-
 le parti, manifestam.^o crescenti fra la Sub.^a
 sempre durevole Corte Ottomana, e fra quella
 d'Inghilterra, e già che non vi è alcun male
 che le Sud.^e pitture e fabbriche siano vedute,
 contemplate

contemplate, e diseguate, e dop' essere state
 accompite le convenevoli accoglienze d'ospitali-
 tà verso li suriferiti pittori, in considerazione
 anche dell' amichevol istanza Su questo
 particolar avvenuta, dal prefato Amb.^{no}, e per
 esser' incombenza che non si faccia opposizione
 al camminare, vedere e contemplare dell' medesime
 le pitture, e fabbriche che vorranno disegnare, ni
 alle loro scalinate, ed instrumenti, all' arrivo
 della presente lettera usate l'attenzione perche
 conformem.^a all' istanza del 2.^o Amb.^{no} mentre li
 Soprad.ⁱ cinque pittori residenti in codesta parte,
 saranno occupati coll' entrare e sortire dalla
 porta del Castello d' Atene, che è il luogo d'
 osservazione; col formare delle scalinate attorno
 il tempio antico degl' Isole; col estendere sulla
 calcina [o sia sul gesso] gl' istessi ornamenti,
 e figure visibili; col misurare i rimasugli d'
 altre fabbriche diroccate; e coll' inta prendere di
 scavare second' il bisogno le fondamenta per
 trovare i mattoni iscritti che fossero restati
 dentro la ghieja, non vengano molestati ni
 dal Castellano, ni da altri, e neppure da vi
 sovraccennati, non si s'ingerisca nelle loro
 scalinate, ed instrumenti e non si faccia
 opposizione al portar via qualche pezzo di pietra
 con iscrizioni, e figure, e nella stifferita maniera
 operate, e vi comportate.

[Sotto.^{no}] Sijid Abdullate
 Naumucam.

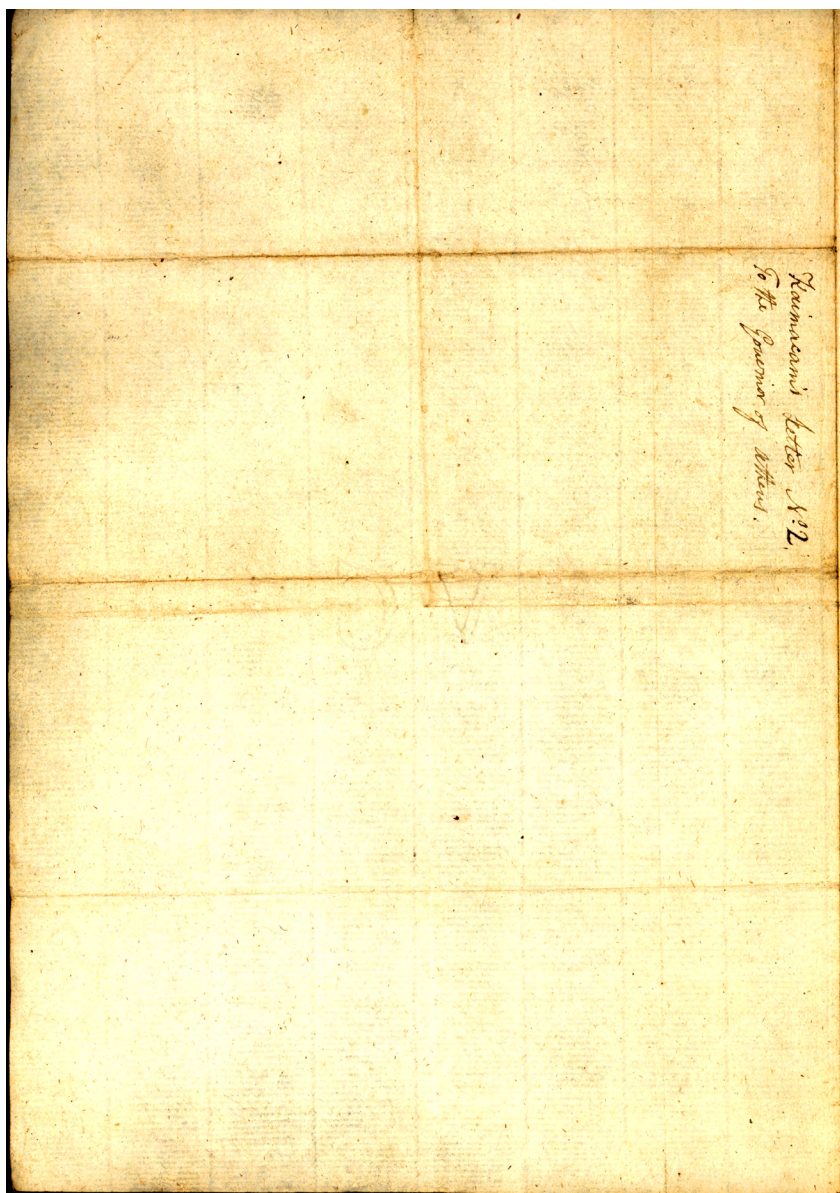


Figure 26.1. Scanned from the document.

2. The Firman of 1805, Instigated by Fauvel and Maréchal Brune, the French Ambassador, that Put a Stop to the Removal of Pieces of the Parthenon from the Building

As the end of his appointment as ambassador approached, Elgin feared that the French Government, whose influence at Constantinople was on the rise, would frustrate his plans before they were completed. In a letter dated from Smyrna on 9 August 1802, that may have been kept cryptic in case it was intercepted, Elgin wrote to Lusieri: 'It seems clear to me, according to many ideas I have collected here, and on the way, that the French have it in their minds to occupy themselves immensely with Greece both in the matter of the arts and in politics. I do not know if any public steps have yet been taken in this respect. But I have reason to believe that from the moment that the Ambassador and the Consuls go to their posts in these countries artists will be sent into Greece not without the hope of preventing the completion of my work, and of my collections, and not even without the hope of presenting the same subjects to the public before my works can appear.'⁵

At this stage Elgin's priorities were to ship as many of the pieces already in the storerooms in Athens as he could, to obtain as many more as circumstances permitted, and to be the first to publish an update to the work of Stuart and Revett and their successors. He especially wanted Lusieri to obtain 'a capital of the Temple of Minerva [Parthenon]' which Lusieri succeeded in doing, along with one from the Propylaia, but when it proved to be so big that 'the gates of the citadel are not wide enough to let it pass' it was sawn in two.⁶ Being deemed to be 'architecture' not 'sculpture', and as a result, removed from the Elgin gallery in the later nineteenth century in accordance with the rhetorics of Western romanticism as discussed in Chapter 9, the capital was inadvertently saved from the whitening by being scraped with harsh tools instigated by Lord Duveen. It now sits forlorn in a corner of the slip gallery to the Duveen Gallery that was financed by an American family who had acquired a large collection of 'unprovenanced' antiquities. A request

⁵ Smith, *Lord Elgin*, 227.

⁶ *Ibid.*

from the Greek authorities to allow it to be put back on the building as part of the current conservation programme was refused.

Elgin had intended to remove the whole of the Parthenon frieze, and more pieces were found on the ground. The longest section to have survived was, however, the west frieze that was situated still in place on the building within the western porch, by far the largest part of the Parthenon still standing and of which Elgin's agents had already made moulds. Lusieri obtained one slab, but to obtain the others more of the surviving building would have had to be thrown to the ground than had occurred hitherto. To destroy the remaining part of the Parthenon in order to be able remove part of it would have been the reduction to absurdity of what later became the 'saving' claim, as was clear at the time, but evidently Elgin and his agents had intended to go ahead with the help of further 'gifts.'⁷

A new historical point, that requires the history of the Parthenon to be revised, has recently been brought to light from the archives of Fauvel, the French antiquary and antiquities dealer, who arrived back in Athens in January 1803 and witnessed what was occurring. Although there was almost no consular work for him to do, no French merchant ship having visited Piraeus between 1803 and 1810, Fauvel had been appointed vice-consul in Athens. Lusieri, instead of obtaining a new firman that would allow the removals, as he had hoped, he was obliged to stop all work.⁸ Two 'very rich Englishmen' had offered 50,000 piastres for the frieze, a figure Elgin's agents could not match.⁹ 'Happily I was told of it,' Lusieri wrote, 'and I made them see that it was necessary to have firmans, but that in any case I would not let your Excellency be second to anyone.'¹⁰ There is no other plausible candidate for one of these potential rival collectors than Lord Aberdeen, who as British Foreign Secretary and later Prime Minister, was to play a role in the negotiations for the independence of Greece in the closing stages of the Revolution, as well as in other debates discussed in the book.¹¹

7 *Ibid.*, 234.

8 *Ibid.*, 257.

9 *Ibid.*

10 *Ibid.*

11 Notably the shift to a rhetoric of romanticism discussed in Chapter 9; the 'Silence' discussed in Chapter 19; and the 'Saving' narrative discussed in Chapter 20.

As Fauvel wrote in a letter of which an extract has recently been published from the French National Archives: [Translation] 'Elgin would have taken everything if Marshal Brune [the French Ambassador in Constantinople, whom I told about the vandalism, had not obtained an order that stopped him. That one can still see any sculptures [on the building] is due to that ambassador.'¹²

Brune is said to have approved of a plan to seize the cases of antiquities that contained the portion of the Elgin collection that had not been shipped, and it appears to have been mainly logistical considerations, lack of credit and the difficulties of transporting by mule the cases that contained marble pieces of the Parthenon that prevented them from being moved far. One hundred and twenty vases were taken, but for reasons unknown, they never arrived in France.¹³ Instead of Elgin having 'saved' the sculptured pieces of the Parthenon from the French, as was to be a main plank of the justification for Elgin's removals at the time and down to the present day, it can now be said that it was the French who 'saved' the main part of the Parthenon from Elgin.¹⁴ They therefore also saved the primary evidence needed to enable future generations to understand how the Parthenon, and the stories that it offered, were encountered and interpreted by viewers in classical Athens.¹⁵

3. The Proposal to Seize the Sequestered Antiquities

In 1807, when the Ottoman Empire was for a short time at war with Britain, a large part of the Elgin collection was still in Athens, mostly already packaged ready to be exported. In 1808, William Richard Hamilton, who had been Elgin's private secretary and played a large part in the acquisition, wrote on Elgin's behalf to Edward Daniel Clarke, the author of a book of travels in which Elgin's actions were severely criticised, asking him for a favour. Since he was a professor at the

12 'Elgin emportrait tout si le maréchal Brune, a qui je fis connaître ce vandalisme, n'avait obtenu un ordre qui l'arrêta, Ce qui se voit encore de sculptures est dû a cet ambassadeur.' Quoted by Zambon, Alessia, *Aux origines de l'archéologie en Grèce -Fauvel et sa méthode*, Preface by d'Alain Schnapp (Paris: INHA, 2014), 40, from BNF, ms, Fr.22877, 1, f.49r. My translation.

13 Zambon, 41.

14 As discussed in Chapter 20.

15 As discussed in *The Classical Parthenon*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>.

University of Cambridge, Hamilton asked, could Clarke find a suitable young man or men, who would be willing to go to Athens, all expenses paid, to help arrange a ruse. Elgin's proposal was that he would arrange for a British naval vessel to be sent to the Piraeus as a show of force. The presence of the warship would give political cover to the Voivode to concede to a request to allow the collection to be shipped that would be put to him by the young man. The Voivode would also be offered 'considerable Sums of Money' an expense that would also be met by Elgin.¹⁶

4. Documents Relating to the Obtaining of a Firman that Allowed the Export of the Sequestered Antiquities

It is not known if the planning for the ruse suggested by Elgin was proceeded with. Hamilton had remarked that it was not 'at all impossible that in the course of the next summer a Reunion between this country and Turkey would at once do away with all the difficulties of the undertaking ...' As the following documents show, it proved to be unnecessary.

Foreign Office 29 July 1809 to Mr Adair

Sir, Lord Elgin having represented to me that there are now lying at Athens several very valuable Antiques which his Lordship collected in the Levant, & which he has hitherto been prevented by the war with the Porte from transporting to this Country, I am to desire that Your Excellency will use your utmost exertion to prevail upon the Ottoman Government to permit the Transportation of these Articles, and that you will take such Measures as may appear to you to be the most advisable to ensure their safe conveyance to England. I am &c signed Geo. Canning.¹⁷

Robert Adair, British Ambassador, to Secretary of State Wellesley, Pera, 22 February 1810, private

16 Summarized from Hamilton, William Richard, a letter to Edward Daniel Clarke, dated only '1808.' BL, Add. ms. 56486. An episode in the history not hitherto noticed.

17 Kew FO 78/64, 22.

My Lord, I have the honour of informing your lordship that I have at length succeeded in obtaining an order from the Caimakam to the Vaivode of Athens for the embarkation, without further obstruction, of the Antiquities collected by Lord Elgin, and now lying at Athens.¹⁸

5. The Ottoman Side of the Correspondence on the Release from Sequestration

Documents relating to the Ottoman Government's consideration of the request have recently been found among the Ottoman archives in Istanbul, including a copy of the firman sent to the Voivode of Athens. They have been described and commented on by Edhem Eldem in a publicly available videocast.¹⁹ It emerges that the Ottoman authorities accepted that Elgin was the owner of the antiquities, and treated the request as one of numerous property claims that had to be settled now that peace was restored. The text of the letter from the Ottoman Government to the Voivode requiring him to allow the export has also survived. It includes the sentence, as translated by Professor Eldem, 'as stones of this kind decorated with figures are not held in consideration among Muslims but are appreciated by the Frankish states there is no harm in granting permission for their transport and passage.'

6. The Sale of the Elgin Collection to the British State in 1816

A point not previously noted is that in 1816, shortly before the sale was completed, the British Government's Treasury accountant drew attention to the fact that Elgin still owed the Government money from his time as ambassador, amounting to £18,652 2s. 6d. On legal advice, and with the consent of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, an arrangement was made 'without actual Seizure and Sale of the marbles', whereby Elgin conveyed the Marbles in trust to the

18 Kew FO 78/68, 137. Frequently quoted, from other copies in the Elgin archives and elsewhere, for example by Smith A.H., 'Lord Elgin and His Collection', 279.

19 Discussed by Edhem Eldem at the conference 'The Topography of Ottoman Athens' held in Athens on 23–24 April 2015: 'The Ottoman discovery of Athens: 1780–1830.' Videocast at: <http://www.ascsa.edu.gr/index.php/News/newsDetails/videocast-the-topography-of-ottoman-athens.-archaeology-travel-symposium>

*tax authorities. It seems likely that the outstanding debt was netted from the £35,000 voted by Parliament for the purchase.*²⁰

Where the accountant, acting on the law and custom of the time, drew the line between the personal and the public in the expenditures incurred by Elgin is not recorded, but the personal side of the line evidently did not include costs of sea transport in naval vessels and other publicly provided benefits in kind that in modern terms would normally have to be paid or repaid. Although Elgin's collection was the biggest, the same benefits were enjoyed by other collectors of antiquities.

7. Note on the Phrase 'Elgin Marbles'

On 12 June 1986, the late Melina Mercouri, then the Greek Minister of Culture, declared in a much-publicized speech: 'And the Parthenon Marbles they are. There are no such things as the Elgin Marbles. There is a Michael Angelo David. There is a Da Vinci Last Supper. There is a Praxiteles Hermes. There is a Turner Fishermen at Sea. There are no Elgin Marbles!'²¹

In defining her terms, Mercouri was picking up a point on the nature of language that was then becoming more fully appreciated, namely that the naming or renaming of an object is a speech act, and can therefore also be an appropriation, an annexation, and an attempt to normalize a new status. Since Mercouri's speech, the phrase 'Elgin Marbles' is seldom heard. However, the phrase 'The Sculptures of the Parthenon', which has replaced it in common usage, also tends to legitimate a particular way of seeing, namely, that the sculptural components of ancient buildings are of greater value than the architecture of which they once formed a part, prolonging an eighteenth and nineteenth century western romantic notion of autonomous 'works of art.' The rhetorical tendency of the current phrase would therefore be only partially offset if it were modified to, say, 'The Sculptures *from* the Parthenon.' Since both phrases tend to undervalue the geographical, display, and performative contexts within which the civic public buildings of ancient Athens, including the Parthenon, were commissioned, constructed, and then employed in the

²⁰ Kew TS 11/981, 5 July 1816.

²¹ Available in full at the time of writing on the website of the Melina Mercouri Foundation, noted in Bibliography.

life of the classical city, their rhetorical tendency is therefore to concede more than they need to the rhetorics of the defenders of the present situation.

The phrases, 'Elgin Marbles' and 'The Sculptures of the Parthenon' do not refer to the same objects. Although from the nineteenth century the 'Elgin Marbles' was commonly used loosely in Britain and elsewhere to mean the sculptured pieces of the Parthenon, the collection of antiquities made by agents of Lord Elgin, and purchased for the British nation by funds voted by the British Parliament in 1816, included pieces of all four of the classical buildings on the Acropolis summit, Athena Nike, Propylaia, and Erechtheion as well as the Parthenon. The 'Elgin Marbles' included pieces of the temple to Rome and Augustus on the summit and of the Monument of Thrassylos on the south slope as well as pieces of the classical period Theseion/Hephaisteion in the lower town, most of which can only be seen at present on request, in a basement devoted to architectural fragments, an arrangement that, by itself, reinforces the hierarchical distinction.²² The 'Elgin Marbles' also included many other moveable antiquities from the Acropolis and its environs, such as inscriptions, vases, jewellery, and grave goods, and antiquities from places other than Athens. Formally, the phrase does not include some sculptural pieces from the Parthenon that were purchased or gifted by others later and were incorporated into the public collection.

A further confusion has recently been introduced in a political intervention in defence of the *status quo* by Tiffany Jenkins. In *Keeping Their Marbles: How the Treasures of the Past Ended Up in Museums — And Why They Should Stay There*, (Oxford: OUP, 2016) Jenkins decided to use the term 'Elgin Marbles' to refer to the sculptural pieces of the Parthenon held in the British Museum and 'Parthenon Marbles' to refer to the pieces that remain in Athens. Although Jenkins may have thought her renaming was a matter of convenience, her suggestion, that has not been adopted by others, would revive the normalizing tendency of acts of re-naming against which Mercouri successfully protested.²³

22 For example the phrase was used in that limited sense to describe the casts displayed at the Crystal Palace in London from the 1850s. See Nichols, Kate, 'Marbles for the Masses: the Elgin Marbles at Crystal Palace Sydenham,' in Coltman, Vicky, (ed.), *Making Sense of Greek Art* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2012), pp. 179–202.

23 'I call the sculptures that Elgin acquired and sold and which are in the British Museum the Elgin Marbles, in order to distinguish them from the Parthenon Marbles

The Elgin collection was acquired and publicly justified to and by the British Parliament in accordance with a way of seeing that was specific to its own time, namely the provision of specimens to be used as models by modern architects and artists, the transferrable decontextualized aesthetic. That practical aim, whatever validity it may have had in Elgin's day, has long since been made rendered unnecessary by modern online and other media and the comparative ease of visiting the monument itself.

Looking back we can see that the justificatory and legitimating narratives employed by defenders of the *status quo*, have subsequently been changed at least twice, first to put the main weight on 'rescue and stewardship', and then on 'universal or encyclopaedic museum', the latter an unlawful attempt by a public trustee body to pursue a foreign policy of its own. We also see new justificatory and legitimating discourses being experimented with, market-tested we might say, including a consumerist mélange of Victorian romantic discourses that was used to justify subjecting a large piece of the Parthenon to the well-known risks of damage from the rapid changes of temperature, humidity, and air pressure inseparable from road and air transport.²⁴

in the Acropolis Museum in Athens, and because, upon acquisition by the British Museum, this was their given name. It is also normal nomenclature — Madonna Litta, Medici Venus, etc.' Jenkins, Tiffany, *Keeping Their Marbles: How the Treasures of the Past Ended Up in Museums — And Why They Should Stay There* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 1 and 325.

24 Discussed in Chapter 9.

