

We must resist the temptation to pervert the course of history for political and ideological reasons. Historical facts, like the removal of the Marbles, occurred for precise cultural reasons that we have a duty to respect and understand. Emotion must not override duty. Trustees of public institutions have legal and fiduciary obligations to the British people, not to foreign governments with whom they may privately sympathise. These obligations include transparency, consultation, and above all, fidelity to the law.

What we are witnessing instead is covert negotiation, driven by ideology and personal ambition. There has been no national consultation, despite claims to the contrary based on selective polling such as recent YouGov surveys. These snapshots of public opinion are no substitute for proper democratic scrutiny. Issues of cultural heritage demand a more rigorous, informed, and participatory process. There has been no parliamentary scrutiny, and no public mandate for the dismantling of one of Britain's most significant cultural treasures.

More seriously still, such secrecy may represent a breach of the fiduciary duties owed by museum trustees to the public.

Under longstanding principles of trust and equity, fiduciaries are bound to act openly and in the best interests of their beneficiaries. Negotiating away cultural property held in trust—especially under conditions of opacity, foreign influence, and political lobbying, risks a clear and actionable breach of duty. There is ample case law affirming that trustees must inform and actively warn beneficiaries of any action that may not serve their best interests. That has not happened.

We therefore contend that any discussions, negotiations, or arrangements already undertaken without full public transparency are tainted and must be declared void. Governance reform will be necessary. Some trustees may need to consider their position. At a minimum, any further activity in this area must cease pending a formal public inquiry and independent legal review.

We reserve the right to seek legal advice on how best to protect the interests of the British public, in their capacity as beneficiaries of the Museum's trust, including by pursuing an injunction to halt any ongoing or future negotiations until the beneficiaries have been fully informed and properly warned of the potential risks and adverse consequences of such actions.

The British Museum is not a private foundation. Its trustees cannot act as philosopher-kings, rewriting history and the law in pursuit of fashionable redemption. We therefore call on Parliament, the Government, and the British Museum's Board to halt all discussions about the transfer, permanent loan, or deaccession of the Elgin Marbles until a full public review is undertaken.

This is not just about the Elgin Marbles. It is about the future of every object in every museum in Britain. If political fashion and foreign funding can erode our legal safeguards once, it can do so again.

We will not stand by while that future is gambled away.

Signed, Lord Hannan of Kingsclere
Lord Biggar of Castle Douglas, CBE
Lord Moylan
Lord Greenhalgh
Right Hon Liz Truss
Sir John Redwood
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