

English with photos

Should looted treasures from other countries be returned?

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© Robert Hextall (*Part of the Parthenon Marbles collection in the British Museum, London*)

Vocabulary

surreptitiously: *secretively, avoiding attention*

to carve: *to cut a hard material in order to produce an object*

quarry: *a place from which stone or other materials are extracted*

to loot: *to steal property from a place, typically during a war, an occupation or riots*

Introduction

This week's picture shows part of the Elgin Marbles collection (also known as the Parthenon Marbles). These sculptures decorated the 2,500-year-old Parthenon temple at the Acropolis in Greece and were 'acquired' by Lord Elgin in the early 19th century when he was the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. At one

point he intended to use them to decorate his home in Scotland, but, due to financial problems, he eventually sold them to the British government. Currently on show in the British Museum, Athens has repeatedly requested the UK to return them.

The British government has always refused to repatriate the Marbles, but a recent innovation might make their return more likely. After **surreptitiously** scanning the originals and then programming a giant 3D robotic machine tool, the Oxford-based Institute for Digital Archaeology has been able to **carve** a near-exact replica of one of the Marbles using marble from the same **quarry** in Greece that was used for the originals in the 5th century BCE. The institute says that it has developed the technology to create "faithful copies of large historical objects" and they believe the museum should exhibit their replicas and return the originals.

Countries including Nigeria, Egypt and Greece, as well indigenous peoples from around the world, are increasingly demanding the return of artefacts and human remains. Perhaps innovations like this will allow the large metropolitan museums in Western countries to find a way to return the **looted** objects they have on display while, at the same time, retaining their reputations as the curators of the world's architectural and cultural history.

Let's chat!

1. Describe the picture in as much detail as possible.
2. What looted objects have you seen in museums?
3. What are the arguments for and against returning these objects to their original countries?
4. Do you enjoy visiting museums? If so, why and what kinds? If not, why not?
5. How can curators and directors of museums make them more interesting?

Activity

Think about the different museums that there are in your area. Write brief descriptions of them that could be included in a tourist brochure.

