

Lord ELGIN, Thomas Bruce

Letter to Lusieri, 1801

“The plans for my house in Scotland should be known to you ... The Hall is intended to be adorned with columns. ...If each column were different ... I should think that the effect would be admirable, but perhaps better if there were two of each kind.

In either case I should wish to collect as much marble as possible. I have other places in my house which need it...

You do not need any prompting from me to know the value that is attached to a sculptured marble or historic piece”.

Letter to Lusieri, 1802

“The least thing from Athens is invaluable... The first on the list are the metops, the bas-reliefs, and the remains of the statues that can still be found. In particular the figures on the pediment of the Parthenon-at least the figure of the man- as many metops as you can obtain.... I beg you therefore to put some on board ship. To sum up, the slightest object from the Acropolis is a jewel.”

Letter to Prime Minister S. Perseval, 1811

“My successors in the Embassy could not obtain permission for the removal ... The Porte denied that the persons who had sold [an act of purchase never occurred] those marbles to me had any right to dispose of them”.

Letter to Sir Charles Long, May 1811

“... I herewith transmit to you accordingly as ample a view of my outlay as the materials still in my possession enable me to furnish, of a transaction so peculiar in itself, and differing from the circumstances attending every other Collection. **Here the objects were not purchased, or got for fixed prices.**”

LUSIERI, Giovanni Battista

Letter to Elgin, 1801

“Everything that has been done up till now in the citadel has been by means of presents to the Disdar, who is the commandant”.

Letter to Elgin, 11 January 1802

“If I cannot get the Pandroseum entire I donot despair of one of the Caryatides. The monument of Philopappus is of poor architecture, it is very big, and the sculpture is not of the best kind, nor well preserved.... The formatori are engaged on the temple of Neptune Erechtheus, of Minerva Polias, and the Pandroseum. The details of these various little monuments are masterpieces. Without a special firman it is impossible to take away the last. **The Turks and the Greeks are extremely attached to it, and there were murmurs when Mr. Hunt asked for it.**

Letter to Elgin, 16 Septentber 1802

“I have, my Lord, the pleasure of announcing to you the possession of the eighth metope, that one where there is the Centaur carrying off the woman. This piece has caused much trouble in all respects, and **I have even been obliged to be a little barbarous.**”

“I much want to try ... so that some barbarism that I have been obliged to commit in your service may be forgotten”.

Letter to Elgin, 1802

“Not being well-sawn [the centrepiece of the east frieze], for want of sufficiently fine saws, and being a little weak in the middle it parted in two in course of transport, in spite of all the precautions taken. Happily it broke on the middle, in a straight line ... so that the accident has helped us to transport it quickly and put it on board”.

“I will also take one [capital] from the Parthenon, but it is necessary to saw it in two. The Propylaea one is fairly large, but this is enormous. The gates of the citadel are not wide enough to let it pass. The three capitals, one Doric of early style, and two Corinthian ... are in the store”.

“Send a dozen marble saws of different sizes to Athens as quickly as possible. I should require three or four, twenty feet in length, **to saw a great bas-relief [the ceutrepiece of the east frieze] that we could not transport unless we reduce its weight**”.

CLARKE, E.D.

Travels in various countries of Europe, Asia and Africa, London 1811

“Some workmen, employed under his (Lusieri’s) direction for the British Ambassador, were then engaged in making preparation, by means of ropes and pulleys, for taking down the metopes, where the sculpture remained the most perfect. The Disdar himself came to view the work, but with evident marks of dissatisfaction; and Lusieri told us that it was with great difficulty he could accomplish this part of his undertaking, from the attachment the Turks entertained towards a building which they had been accustomed to regard with religious veneration, and had converted into a mosque. We confessed that we participated the Moslem feeling in this instance, and would gladly see an order enforced to preserve rather than to destroy such glorious edifice. After a short time spent in examining the several parts of the temple, one of the workmen came to inform Don Battista that they were then going to lower one of the metopes. **We saw this fine piece of sculpture raised from its station between the triglyphs: but the workmen, endeavouring to give it a position adapted to the projected line of descent, a part of the adjoining masonry was loosened by the machinery; and down came the fine masses of Pentelican marble, scattering their white fragments with thundering noise among the ruins.** The Disdar, seeing this, could no longer restrain his emotions; but actually took his pipe from his mouth, and letting fall a tear, said, in a most emphatical tone of voice “Τέλος!” positively declaring that nothing should induce him to consent to any further dilapidation of the building. Looking up, we saw with regret the gap that had been made; which all the ambassadors of the earth, with all the sovereigns they represent, aided by every resource that wealth and talent can now bestow, will never again repair. As to our friend Lusieri, it is hardly necessary to exculpate him; because he could only obey the orders he had received, and this he did with manifest reluctance: neither was there a workman employed in the undertaking, among the artists sent out of Rome for that purpose, who did not express his concern, that such havoc should be deemed necessary, after moulds and casts had been already made of all the sculpture which it was designed to remove.”

“Succeeding travellers speak with concern of the injuries the building has sustained, exclusively of the loss caused by the removal of the metopes. One example of this nature may be mentioned, which, while it shows the havoc that has been carried on, will also prove the want of taste and utter barbarism of the undertaking. In one of the angles of the pediment, which was over the eastern façade of the temple, there was a horse’s head, supposed to be intended for the horse of Neptune issuing from the earth, when struck by his trident, during his altercation with Minerva for the possession of Athens. The head of this animal had been so judiciously placed by Phidias, that, to a spectator below, it seemed to be rising from an abyss, foaming and struggling to burst from its confined situation, with a degree of energy suited to the

greatness and dignity of its character. All the perspective of the sculpture and certainly all the harmony and fitness of its proportions, and all the effect of attitude and force of composition, depended upon the work being viewed precisely at the distance in which Phidias designed that it should be seen. **Its removal therefore, from its situation, amounted to nothing less than its destruction:-take it down, and all the aim of the sculptor is immediately frustrated! Could anyone believe that this was actually done? And that it was done, too in the name of a nation vain of its distinction in the fine art? Nay more, that in doing this, finding the removal of this piece of sculpture could not be effected without destroying the entire angle of the pediment, the work of destruction was allowed to proceed even to this extent also!** Thus the form of the temple has sustained a greater injury than it had already experienced from the Venetian artillery; and the horse's head has been removed, to be placed where it exhibits nothing of its original effect... Yet we are seriously told that this mischief has been done with a view to 'rescue these specimens of sculpture from impending ruin': then, why not exert the same influence which was employed in removing them, to induce the Turkish Government to adopt measures for their effectual preservation! Ah no! A wiser scheme was in agitation! It was at first attempted to have them all mended by some modern artist!!! From this calamity they were rescued by the good taste of Canova."

DODWELL, Edward

A classical and topographical tour through Greece during the years 1804, 1805 and 1806, London 1819

p. 322-348

“During my first tour to Greece I had the inexpressible mortification of being present when the Parthenon was despoiled of its finest sculpture, and when some of its architectural members were thrown to the ground. **I saw several metopae at the south-east extremity of the temple taken down. They were fixed in between the triglyphs as in a groove; and in order to lift them up, it was necessary to throw to the ground the magnificent cornice by which they were covered. The south-east angle of the pediment shared the same fate;** and instead of the picturesque beauty and high preservation in which I first saw it, it is now comparatively reduced to a state of shattered desolation. Some drawings which I made on the spot, before as well as after that event, shew the objects which have been taken away or destroyed, and the lamentable contrast between the present and the former appearance of those venerable and glorious monuments of antiquity!....”

“It is indeed impossible to suppress the feelings of regret which must arise in the breast of every traveller, who has seen these temples before and since their late dilapidation! Nor have I any hesitation in declaring, **that the Athenians in general, nay, even the Turks themselves, did lament the ruin that was committed;** and loudly and openly blamed their sovereign for the permission he had granted! I was on the spot at the time, and had an opportunity of observing, and indeed of participating, in the sentiment of indignation which such conduct universally inspired. **The whole proceeding was so unpopular in Athens, that it was necessary to pay the labourers more than their usual profits before any could be prevailed upon to assist in this work of profanation...**”

“It is an incontestable fact, that the magnificent monuments of the Athenian acropolis suffered more in that single dilapidating year, than during the whole preceding century...”

“When I was first at Athens, the eastern front of the Erechtheion was adorned with an hexastyle collonade of beautiful proportions and exquisite workmanship; but of the six columns, which I beheld, only five remain. The column at the north-east angle has been taken away by the dilapidators, while some of the wall of the cella has been thrown down with part of the architrave and frieze, and the north-east pilaster. Part of the column with its capital are now in the British Museum; but it is not generally known that to obtain this comparatively unornamental mass, which at present serves as a pedestal for a vase, recourse was had to the most shameful and barbarous dilapidations. **Every thing relative to this catastrophe was conducted with an eager spirit of insensate outrage, and an ardour of insatiate rapacity, in opposition, not only to every feeling of taste, but to every sentiment of justice and humanity.**”

SMIRKE, Robert
(english architect)

extract in St. Clair, W.
Lord Elgin and the Marbles, London 1967

p. 139

“It particularly affected me when I saw the destruction made to get down the basso-relieves on the walls...men...labouring...with iron crows to move the stones of these firm-built walls. Each stone as it fell shook the ground with its ponderous weight with a deep hollow noise; it seemed like a convulsive groan of the injured spirit of the Temple”.

DOUGLAS, Frederick S.

An Essay on certain points of resemblance between the Ancient and Modern Greeks, London 1813

p. 85

“An illiterate servant of the Disdar of Athens...assured me that when the five other *κορίτσια* (girls) had lost their sister, they manifested their affliction by filling the air at the close of the evening with the most mournful sighs and lamentations, that he himself had often heard their complaints, and never without being so much affected as to be obliged to leave the citadel till they had ceased; and that the ravished sister was not deaf to their voice, but astonished the lower town where she was placed, by answering in the same lamentable tones. **We cannot refuse to acknowledge that the Athenians are not so indifferent as it has been some times represented to the wanders and monuments of their city.**”

“I wonder at the boldness of the hand that could venture to remove what Phidias had placed under the inspection of Pericles”

HOBHOUSE, John C.

Travels in Albania and other Provinces of Turkey in 1809 and 1810, GCB
1858

p. 347

“Yet I cannot forbear mentioning a singular speech of a learned Greek of Joannina, who said to me: *‘You English are carrying off the works of the Greeks our forefathers; preserve them well; Greeks will come and re-demand them’.*”

“On the plaster wall, on the west side of the chapel, these words have been very deeply cut:

*QUOD NONFECERUNT GOTI,
HOC FECERUNT SCOTI.*

The mortar wall, yet fresh when we saw it supplying the place of the statue now in Lord Elgin’s collection, serves as a comment on this text. This eulogy of the Goths alludes to an unfounded story of a Greek historian (Zosimus) who relates that Alaric, either terrified by two phantoms, one of Minerva herself, the other of Achilles, terrible as when he strode towards the walls of Troy to his friends, or struck with a reverential respect, had spared the treasures, ornaments and people of the venerable city.”

HUGHES, Th. S. Revd

Travels in Sicily, Greece and Albania, 1820

“In passing to the south side of Minerva’s fane we were struck forcibly by the lamentable overthrow and ruin occasioned during the last spoliation. Shaftes, capitals, and entablature lie heaped together in masses capable of furnishing materials to build a palace of marble. Though an Englishman may exult in the possession of these unrivalled specimens of ancient sculpture, and yield to many of the arguments that have been urged in defense of their deportation, still, if a spark of enthusiasm exists in his bosom, he cannot but grieve at the wanton devastation committed in their removal, at that avidity for plunder which in carrying off parts of little comparative value, but which helped to sustain the fabric, has exposed this venerable structure to premature ruin, and has removed from their ancient sites -whence most of them acquired their beauty and all their interest- numerous monuments not at all necessary for the improvement of the arts in that nation which now possesses them.”

WILLIAMS, Hugh William

Travels in Italy, Greece, and the Ionian Islands, Edinburgh 1820, Vol. II

p. 307

“While studying this gem of architecture, a Turkish gentleman pointed to the rude support of the roof, which occupies the space of the last caryatid which was taken down, and with a mournful and significant expression of countenance, exclaimed, more than once, ‘mi Lor Elgin!’ These words from the mouth of a Turk, appeared to me more severe than all that has been said at home or here against the proceedings in the Acropolis”

“That the Elgin marbles will contribute to the improvement of art in England cannot be doubted. They must certainly open the eyes of the British artists...But had we a right to diminish the interest of Athens for such motives, and prevent successive generations of other nations from seeing these admirable sculptures? The temple of Minerva was spared as a beacon to the world to direct it to the knowledge of purity of taste. What can we say to the disappointed traveller who is now deprived of the rich gratification which would have compensated his travel and his toil? It will be little consolation to him to say, he may find the sculptures of the Parthenon in England.”

Lord BYRON, George Gordon

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, a Romaunt and othrer poems, London 1812

“But most the moderm Pict’s ignoble boast
To rive what Goth, and Turk, and Time hath spared :
Cold as the crags upon his native coast,
His mind as barren and his heart as hard,
Is he whose head conceived, whose hand prepared,
Aught to displace Athena’s poor remains :
Her sons too weak the sacred shrine to guard,
Yet felt some portion of their mother’s pains,
And never knew, till then, the weight of Despot’s chains...”

Footnotes

“When the last of the Metopes was taken from the Parthenon, and, in moving of it, great part of the superstructure with one of the triglyphs was thrown down by the workmen whom Lord Elgin employed, the Disdar, who beheld the mischief done to the building, took his pipe from his mouth, dropped a tear, and in a supplicating tone of voice, said to Lusieri, ‘Telos!’ (the end)- I was present.”

“At this moment (January 3, 1810), besides what has been already deposited in London, an Hydriot vessel is in the Pyraeus to receive every portable relic. Thus as I heard a young Greek observe, in common with many of his countrymen- for lost as they are, they yet feel on this occasion- thus **may Lord Elgin boast of having ruined Athens.**”

The Curse of Minerva

“Daughter of Jove! in Britain's injured name,
A true-bom Briton may the deed disclaim.
Frown not on England; England owns him not:
.....
And thus -accursed be the day and year!
She sent a Pict to play the felon here...”

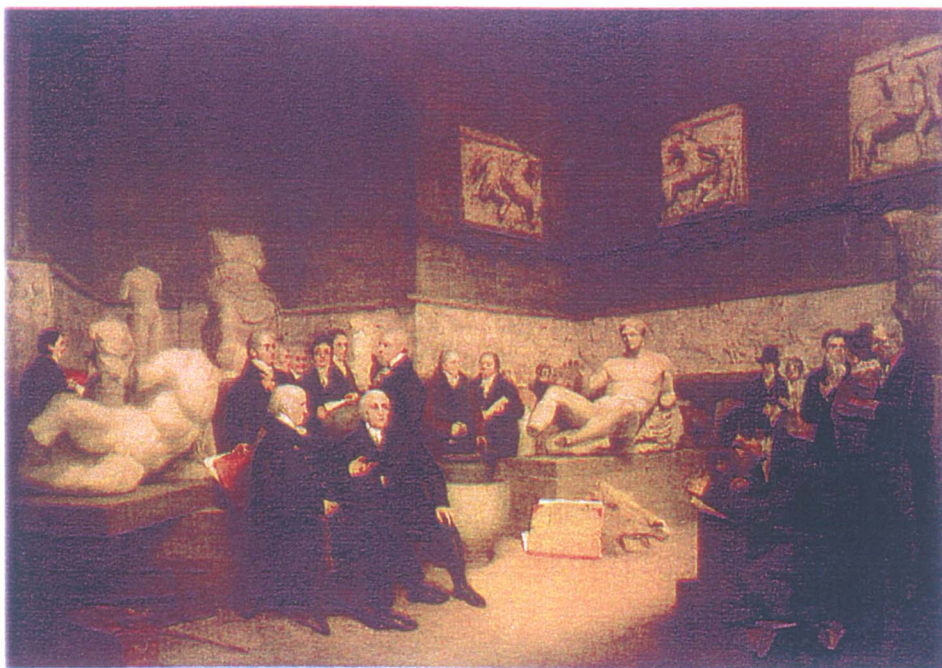
Letter 1821

“I opposed, and will ever oppose the robbery of ruins from Athens to instruct the English in sculpture; but why did I do so? The ruins are as poetical in Piccadilly as they were in the Parthenon; but the Parthenon and its rock are less so without them. Such is the poetry of art.”

1816 Select Committee - John B.S. Morritt of Rokeby

Committee : Do you think the Greeks were anxious that those marbles should not be removed from Athens?

J.B.S. Morritt: they were decidedly and strongly desirous that they should not be removed.



The temporary Elgin Room in 1819. Old painting by A. Archer, shown seated in the right foreground. Also seated are Sir Benjamin West, PRA, and Joseph Planta (Principal Librarian). In the extreme left is Benjamin Robert Haydon.

HARRISON, Frederick

“Give back the Elgin Marbles”, *The Nineteenth Century* (1890)

“The Parthenon Marbles are to the Greek nation a thousand times more dear and more important than they can ever be to the English nation, which simply bought them. And what are the seventy-four years that these dismembered fragments have been in Bloomsbury when compared to the 2,240 years wherein they stood on the Acropolis?...

Athens is now a far more central archaeological school than London.

Of course the sneer is ready, “Are you going to send all statues back to the spot they were found?” This is all nonsense. **The Elgin marbles stand upon a footing entirely different from all other statues. They are not statues: they are integral parts of a unique building, the most famous in the world...** When civilised man makes his pilgrimage to the Acropolis...he goes on to the Parthenon, and there he marks the pediments which Lord Elgin wrecked.

Of a single group... London shows half in marble and half in plaster cast, and the Acropolis shows the other half in marble and the rest in plaster. Surely it were but decent, if we honestly respect great art, that the original be set up as a whole ...

We value the good name of England more than unjust plunder”.