

## Vatican, Greece ink deal for 'donation' of Parthenon Marbles

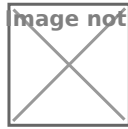


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The Vatican and Greece were finalizing a deal Tuesday for the return of three sculpture fragments from the Parthenon that have been in the collection of the Vatican Museums for two centuries, the latest case of a Western museum bowing to demands for restitution.

The Vatican has termed the return an ecumenical “donation” to the Orthodox Christian archbishop of Athens and all Greece, not necessarily a state-to-state transfer. But it nevertheless puts pressure on the British Museum to conclude a deal with Greece over the fate of its much bigger collection of Parthenon sculptures.

The head of the Vatican city-state, Cardinal Fernando Vergez, planned to sign an agreement Tuesday to implement the “donation” during a private Vatican Museums ceremony with Greek Culture Minister Lina Mendoni and a representative of the Orthodox Christian archbishop of Athens and all Greece, the Vatican said.

The fragments are expected to arrive in Athens later this month, with a March 24 ceremony planned to receive them.

The British Museums has refused decades of appeals from Greece to return its much larger collection of Parthenon sculptures, which have been a centerpiece of the museum since 1816.

Earlier this month, however, the chair of the British Museum said the U.K. and Greece were working on a deal that would see his institution’s Parthenon Marbles displayed in both London and Athens.

The 5th century B.C. sculptures are mostly remnants of a 160-meter-long (520-foot) frieze that ran around the outer walls of the Parthenon Temple on the Acropolis, dedicated to Athena, goddess of wisdom.

Much of the frieze and the temple's other sculptural decoration were lost in a 17th-century bombardment, and about half the remaining works were removed in the early 19th century by a British diplomat, Lord Elgin.

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