

Lifestyle

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2019



This combination of pictures taken and made on April 15, 2019 shows women wearing traditional outfits posing as they arrive to pray at Wat Xianthong pagoda during new year celebrations in Luang Prabang. — AFP

Greece: Free our marbles from British Museum's 'murky prison'

Greece's president called on Monday for Britain to free the Parthenon marbles from the "murky prison" of its national museum, upping the rhetoric in a near 200-year-old campaign for the sculptures' return. President Prokopis Pavlopoulos spoke at Athens' own glass-fronted Acropolis Museum, which campaigners hope will one day house the classical reliefs and figures taken by a British diplomat in the early nineteenth century. "Let the British Museum come here and make the comparison between this (Acropolis) museum of light and the murky, if I may say, prison of the British Museum where the Parthenon Marbles are held as trophies," Pavlopoulos said.

There was no immediate response from the British Museum. Britain's Lord Elgin removed the 2,500-year-old sculptures from the Acropolis temple in Athens during a period when Greece was under Ottoman rule. They have been placed in a gallery inside the British Museum in London, lit by a long skylight. Greece has repeatedly requested their return since its independence in 1832, and stepped up its campaign in 2009 when it opened its new museum at the foot of the Acropolis hill.

That building holds the sculptures that Elgin left behind alongside plaster casts of the missing pieces, lit by the sun coming through a glass wall looking over the original site. "This museum

can host the Marbles," Pavlopoulos said. "We are fighting a holy battle for a monument which is unique." The British Museum has refused to return the sculptures, saying they were acquired by Elgin under a legal contract with the Ottoman empire. The museum and other British institutions have also resisted other repatriation campaigns citing legislation preventing them from breaking up collections and arguing that they can preserve items and present them to an international audience. — Reuters



The 5th Century BC Parthenon temple atop the ancient Acropolis hill, while in the background ferries sail in the Saronic gulf, in Athens.



Tourists take pictures in front of the temple of the Parthenon atop the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.



A man looks at the Parthenon Marbles, a collection of sculptures, also known as the Elgin Marbles, on show at the British Museum in London.

— Reuters photos

'Hunchback of Notre-Dame' tops bestseller lists after fire

Victor Hugo's "The Hunchback of Notre-Dame" shot to the top of the Amazon bestseller list yesterday as firefighters damped down the embers of the blaze which ravaged the ancient cathedral. The original French version of the gothic novel, "Notre-Dame de Paris", became the fastest-selling book in France and is also a number one bestseller worldwide in English in two sub-categories of historical fiction. The Disney animated movie version of the story also rocketed into the top 10 of family films. When Hugo began his sprawling 11-volume tale in 1829, Notre-Dame—the "majestic and sublime edifice" which he adored—was crumbling and neglected.

But his epic about the tragic fate of the Gypsy girl Esmeralda who captures the heart of Captain Phoebus, the poet Pierre Gringoire, Archdeacon Frolo—and most of all the hunchback Quasimodo—helped mobilize the mammoth 19th-century restoration of the monument. One passage, from chapter four of the penultimate volume of the novel, was widely quoted on social media as a prophetic description of Monday's fire, which tore through its roof, sending its spire crashing down into the nave. "All eyes were turned to the top of the church," Hugo wrote as if describing the millions of people who gathered along the banks of the Seine or watched agog on television as the great 850-year-old structure burned.

'Gargoyles vomited fiery rain'

"What they saw was most strange. Upon the top of the topmost gallery, higher than the central rose-window, a vast flame ascended between the two bellfries with whirling sparks. "A vast flame, fierce and strong, fragments of which were ever and anon borne away by the wind with the smoke. "Below this flame, below the dark balustrade with its glowing trefoils, two spouts, terminating in gargoyles, vomited sheets of fiery rain, whose silvery streams shone out distinctly against the gloom of the lowers

part of the cathedral front." French people have a tendency to turn to literature at times of national crisis.

Sales of the American writer Ernest Hemingway's ode to Paris in the 1920s, "A Moveable Feast", soared after the November 2015 Paris attacks. Hugo set his high-blown romantic story in 1482 during the reign of Louis XI, but much of "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" is a rumination on the architecture of the building itself. Many critics have argued that the cathedral is in fact the novel's central character. In another famous passage from the novel, Hugo bemoans how the medieval landmark at the heart of Paris has been left to crumble.



In this file photo taken on July 12, 1956 shows American actor Anthony Quinn playing the role of Quasimodo in "Notre Dame de Paris" (The Hunchback of Notre Dame), a film by Jean Delannoy, 1956. — AFP

"Much beauty as it may retain in its old age, it is not easy to repress a sigh, to restrain our anger, when we mark the countless defacements and mutilations to which men and Time have subjected that venerable monument, without respect for Charlemagne (the Holy Roman emperor), who laid the first stone, or Philip Augustus (1165-1223), who laid the last." A tireless campaigner, Hugo—who many regard as the intellectual godfather of the European Union—lived to see the massive restoration of the cathedral completed by the architects Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Lassus and Eugene Viollet-le-Duc. — AFP