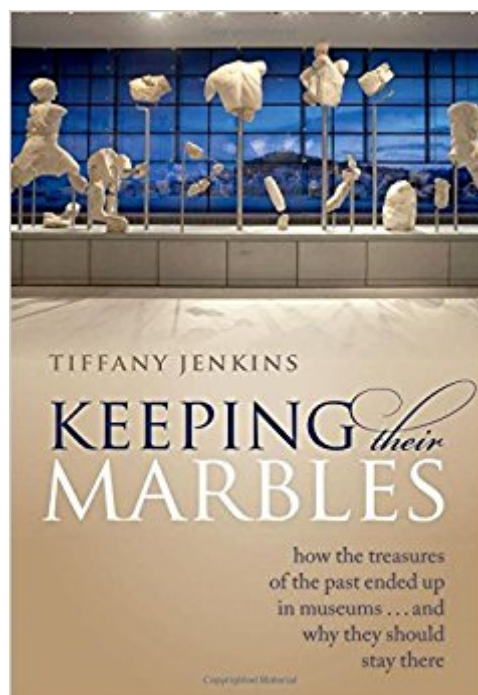




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# Keeping Their Marbles: How The Treasures Of The Past Ended Up In Museums - And Why They Should Stay There



## Synopsis

The fabulous collections housed in the world's most famous museums are trophies from an imperial age. Yet the huge crowds that each year visit the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, or the Metropolitan in New York have little idea that many of the objects on display were acquired by coercion or theft. Now the countries from which these treasures came would like them back. The Greek demand for the return of the Elgin Marbles is the tip of an iceberg that includes claims for the Benin Bronzes from Nigeria, sculpture from Turkey, scrolls and porcelain taken from the Chinese Summer Palace, textiles from Peru, the bust of Nefertiti, Native American sacred objects and Aboriginal human remain. In *Keeping Their Marbles*, Tiffany Jenkins tells the bloody story of how western museums came to acquire these objects. She investigates why repatriation claims have soared in recent decades and demonstrates how it is the guilt and insecurity of the museums themselves that have stoked the demands for return. Contrary to the arguments of campaigners, she shows that sending artefacts back will not achieve the desired social change nor repair the wounds of history. Instead, this ground-breaking book makes the case for museums as centres of knowledge, demonstrating that no object has a single home and no one culture owns culture.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Anyone who thinks that issues of cultural property and "repatriation" are simple should read this book. Jenkins elegantly explores the complexity of individual cases such as the Elgin Marbles and of the big overarching question: who owns culture?" --Mary Beard, author of *SPQR: A History of*

Ancient Rome "The question of how best to protect the world's cultural heritage, and what role museums, nations states, and international bodies play in doing so, or in not doing so, is a vexed one. And in the time of IS, it is an urgent one. Tiffany Jenkins sets out a clear, compelling, and at times controversial case for, and sometimes against, museums as repositories and interpreters of the past in a time of nation building. She argues that we are asking too much of our museums, that we want them to serve narrow ideological purposes of cultural and political identity. There is much to agree with in this argument, and of course, much with which to disagree. That's what makes this book a must-read." --James Cuno, art historian, author, and President and CEO of the J. Paul Getty Trust "Ms. Jenkins has produced a courageous and well-argued book; the howls you hear in the background are those of the contrition crowd." --The Wall Street Journal "Jenkins does an excellent job of portraying the extreme reactions elicited by repatriation conversations." --Nature "A full-throated argument against the repatriation of arguably stolen art and artifacts. To say that it is controversial is a severe understatement. Yet [...] Jenkins makes no attempt to sugarcoat the past." --The Weekly Standard

Tiffany Jenkins is an author, academic, broadcaster and columnist who for four years wrote a weekly column on social and cultural issues in the Scotsman. Her writing credits include BBC Culture, Apollo, The Independent, The Art Newspaper, The Guardian and Spectator. She has consulted widely in academia and museums on cultural policy, most recently advising scholars and practitioners at University of Oslo, the Norwegian Theatres and Orchestras, and the National Touring Network for Performing Arts. As part of this, she contributed a comparative study of cultural education in England and Norway. She was previously the director of the Arts and Society Programme at the Institute of Ideas and has been a visiting fellow at the London School of Economics, Department of Law. Her first degree is in art history, her PhD in sociology. She divides her time between London and Edinburgh.

While Tiffany Jenkins believes repatriation of the so-called Elgin marbles from Great Britain to Greece is inadvisable, the book charges off in a plethora of tangents: from shrunken heads, to victim complexes, to military adventurism, and on. She makes a good case for the dispersion of important cultural artifacts to distant museums based on their universal humanity and their murky national ownerships, and deals less with the safety, availability, and preservation cultural objects often gain abroad as opposed to being forgotten, endangered, or abused as they sometimes are in modern countries where they happened to have been found. There is a lot here for the museum

specialist, cultural scientist, and student of contemporary governments.

I'm a sucker for a good historical read. Add ancient scoundrels, purloined artefacts, international plunder disagreements that stretch over millennia, and a dose of politics and you'll find yourself happily engaged in *Keeping their Marbles*. That the treasures of antiquity – Egyptian, Greek, and Roman and beyond – landed in the World's finest western museums is not in doubt. Yet how did artwork end up so far afield from original locations, and will they make it back to the homeland. Or should it. Discussed are these themes in this engaging book. Ms. Jenkins makes a compelling case for ancient treasures that found their way to the West, by means questionable or legal, to remain housed where they are. Artefacts in museums remain secure, accessible, and studied by museum pilgrims, historians, scholars, and the curious tourist who become acquainted with fine artefacts of antiquity in its wider historical and cultural context.

Great summary

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