

Fifth century BC objects returned to Greece

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Fragments of antiques, among which the oldest dates back to the 5th century BC, are displayed at the Athens archeological museum after being returned to Greece from Germany, Belgium and Great Britain. The objects, comprising a majority of ceramic or brass containers, are believed to come from a necropolis in Thessalie and date back to the third and fourth century, according to the archaeologists.

Greece on Tuesday reclaimed scores of ancient objects dating to the fifth century BC that Belgian, British and German authorities returned, the culture ministry said.

The list includes over 100 clay fragments and coins held by the Belgian Archaeological School, 70 ancient funerary offerings seized by German

customs officials in Nuremberg in 2007 and a marble decorative fragment from a Byzantine church donated by a British ceramist, the ministry said.

"Today societies increasingly realise that cultural goods are not just art objects...but vital links of peoples' historic identities and continuity," Greek Culture Minister Antonis Samaras said.

The ancient clay fragments and coins returned by the Belgian government came from digs at Thoriko, south of Athens, and the island of Salamis. They were taken out of Greece 40 years ago and were found at the museum of Ghent during an inventory check.

The Byzantine church fragment had been picked up in the 1950s by a British tourist from the Athenian Agora, the city's ancient marketplace, Greece's cultural attache Victoria Solomonidou told AFP.

"After his death his wife offered it to a British ceramist who delivered it to the Greek embassy in London," she said.

In recent years Greece has stepped up efforts to recover ancient objects that illegally left the country and ended up in the possession of foreign museums and collectors.

Its main aim is to reclaim the Parthenon Marbles, priceless friezes removed in 1806 by Lord Elgin when Greece was occupied by the Ottoman Empire, which the British Museum refuses to repatriate.

The capital's new Acropolis museum that will be inaugurated on June 20 has a special section reserved for the disputed friezes.

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