



British Museum Faces Call for Repatriation of Artefacts

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An Istanbul lawyer has said he will file a lawsuit in the European court of human rights this month against the British Museum.

Remzi Kazmaz is attempting to repatriate artefacts created for the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus that are now housed in the London museum.

“This is a civil society case supported by the general public as well as local and regional authorities,” said a spokeswoman for Kazmaz.

She stressed that the lawyer did not represent the Turkish government, although the ministry of culture supports the campaign.

Kazmaz said there were 118,000 signatures on a petition demanding the artefacts be returned.

“Article one of the first protocol of the European Convention of Human Rights states that ‘every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions’,” said the spokeswoman.

“At the moment, this is not possible for the Turkish people in the case of the mausoleum. So as far as ethics and morals are concerned, it is a human rights issue.”

Daniel McClean, a consultant specialising in art and cultural property at law firm Finers Stephens Innocent, said: “Even if a judgment was made in Turkey’s favour, it would not mean immediate repatriation of the works, as the British Museum is prevented by law from deaccessioning objects.

“This appears to be a question of moral pressure [on the British Museum],” he added, stressing that lending a limited range of culturally significant contested objects on a long-term basis by museums might help to avert future restitution disputes.

A spokeswoman for the British Museum said the museum was unaware of an impending legal case. “[The mausoleum] pieces were acquired... with firmans [legal permits issued by the Ottoman authorities] that granted permission for the excavation of the site, and removal of the material from the site [1857 and 1859] and Bodrum Castle [1846] to the British Museum,” said the spokeswoman.