

# Perplexing Parthenon Sculptures

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(Image A.1) The Greek government is currently funding the restoration of the Parthenon.

## The History of the Parthenon

Sitting atop the Acropolis, the “upper city”, of Athens is the Parthenon dedicated to the patron goddess Athena. This former temple, seen above (Image A.1), was built during the Classical Period of Greece. This building was commissioned by Pericles, who was the democratically elected governor of the Delian League. The construction of the temple started in 447-432 BCE, taking approximately 15 years. The architects were Ictinos and Calicrates. The sculptor was Phedias. Both the architecture and sculptures were all created in pentelic marble then painted or gilded. The seeming perfection of the Parthenon's construction is created from mathematical illusion; there is not a single straight line used, horizontal lines were slightly curved, and each column protrudes out a little in the center (called entasis).

## Lord Elgin's Scandal

It wasn't until Greece fell under Ottoman occupation (1400-1821) the Parthenon truly suffered any extreme permanent trauma. This trauma was enacted by Lord Thomas Bruce the 7th Earl of Elgin and also the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Lord Elgin carelessly began hacking apart the Parthenon and shipping the fragments back to Greece. Additionally, he removed sculptures from the building as well as the Erechtheion and Propylaia. These pillaged marbles later became known as the Elgin Marbles. Sometime after the disruption of the Parthenon, Lord Elgin found himself broke and had no choice but to sell these treasures to the British government. A temporary gallery was built by Sir Joseph Duveen for the British Museum, in which the marbles have remained to this day.

## Arguments in Favor of Reinstatement

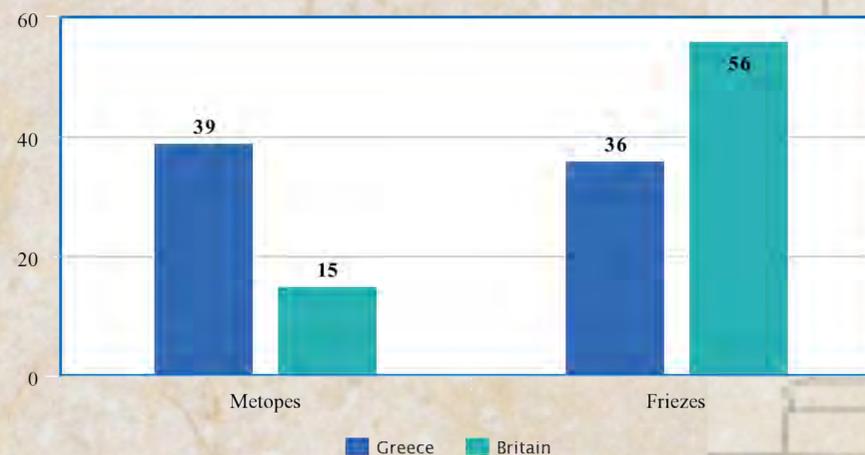
The Greek Government has repeatedly pushed for a return of the marbles to their birthplace in Athens much to the dismay of the British Museum who time and time again refuse this plea. The museum has argued on multiple standpoints including: the firman (permission/deed) the Ottoman Empire had given Lord Elgin, a slippery slope of returning stolen artifacts to their respectful countries of origin after the Parthenon Marbles are returned and the safety of the marbles being in Britain rather than in Greece. Unfortunately some of these arguments hold very little substance.

--First, The documentation of the firman granted to Lord Elgin was never found, and yet Britain upholds a practically illegal amputation of the marbles. Roughly half of the marbles now reside in Britain, as demonstrated on the graph below.

--In regards to the argument of a slippery slope of Parthenon reunification, the push to return the marbles is due to the fact that artifacts had been cut in half and removed in pieces unlike other stolen historical pieces. For example, an entire frieze (chunk of wall ex. Image A.2) of 192 men who died in the Battle of Marathon has been halved and difficult to study in the British Museum outside of the context of its true home.

--Lastly, the safety of the marbles return can be assuaged as Greece recently opened a museum, the state of the art Acropolis Museum, dedicated to the preservation of the marbles that were left. With their steadily improving economy predicted to grow 2.4% in 2020, they should continue to have the means to properly care for these invaluable art pieces.

Remaining Parthenon Fragments and their Locations  
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## The British Museums Future

Negotiations have been under consideration by the Greek and British governments, however a condition is always placed that the Greeks relinquish any legal title to the Parthenon before any mention of the marbles being returned. The British government claims they would be happy to send some of the marbles back on a short-term loan but British Museum director, Hartwig Fischer, insists the Parthenon Marbles would not be ‘permanently loaned to Greece’. This is a quite unfortunate circumstance since Greece offered to send other antiquities to Britain if the marbles were reinstated in Athens. If the British were to accept Greece's offer, the public at large would benefit because the British Museum would have access to additional Greek treasures of antiquity for new exhibitions.



(Image A.2) The frieze of the Battle of Marathon in the British Museum.

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