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ISSN 0353-295X (Tisak) 1849-0344 (Online)
Radovi - Zavod za hrvatsku povijest
Vol. 57, br. 1, Zagreb 2025.

UDK: 242-523.4(495)“652/18“(091)
Pregledni rad
Primljeno: 22. 09. 2025.
Prihvaćeno: 30. 10. 2025.
DOI: 10.17234/RadoviZHP.57.04

Parthenon - A Temple Stripped Bare

This article provides an overview of the most famous and important disasters that have befallen the Parthenon, from antiquity to the present day, examining the archaeological, literary and media traces of the fate of the Athenian temple, dedicated to the patroness of the city, the goddess Athena. Particular emphasis is placed on the work of Lord Elgin in transporting a significant amount of original material to London in the early 19th century. The greatest attention is paid to the chronology of events during which parts of the Parthenon were removed from their original location and transported to the British Museum, as well as the manner in which the Elgin Marbles were transported and the unfortunate fate of the shipwreck *Mentor*. The stripping of the Parthenon is interpreted in relation to earlier scientific reflections on the Parthenon, contextualizing its construction, physical characteristics, use and various modalities of its later purpose. In addition to the story of the journey of the Parthenon sculptures through Europe, the article also provides information about the distinctive characters and their distinctive life stories, who “cleansed” Greece of its classical monuments during the Ottoman rule. It also looks at the role that the Parthenon has played in the modern perception and reception of antiquity, becoming a model of the ideal and “typical” Greek temple, even though, in its essence, the Parthenon is anything but a common and typical example of Greek architecture.

The most beautiful things in the world are there [Athens] … The sumptuous temple of Athena stands out and is well worth a look. It is called the Parthenon and is on the hill above the theatre. It makes a tremendous impression on visitors.
Heraclides Criticus (3rd century BC; translated by Mary Beard, BEARD 2002: 8)[1]

Greece has two enemies -
the Turks and Lord Elgin.
Inspector Morse, Greeks Bearing Gifts, Season 5, Episode 4, aired 20 March 1991.

[1] Heracleides Criticus, *Bios Helados*, FGrH 369a F1.1: „μετ οὐ πολὺ δὲ πιστεύσειεν ἄν τις. Ὠδεῖον τῶν ἐν τῇ οἰκουμένῃ κάλλιστον· θέατρον ἀξιόλογον, μέγα καὶ θαυμαστόν· Ἀθηνᾶς ἱερὸν πολυτελές, ἀπόψιον, ἔξιον θεᾶς, ὁ καλούμενος Παρθενών, ὑπερκείμενον τοῦ θεάτρου· μεγάλην κατάπληξιν ποιεῖ τοῖς θεωροῦσιν·“. More literal translation by Jeremy McInerney: “It is truly the loveliest place in the inhabited world. It possesses a noteworthy theater, large and astonishing, as well as an expensive temple of Athena, which is conspicuous and worth seeing, the so-called Parthenon, perched above the theater. It makes quite an impression on those who see it”. (MCINERNEY 2012: 248–249).

Introduction

The ancient Greek civilisation is by some scholars called the civilisation of temples, a characterization that reflects the fact that it was precisely the temple that represented the highest architectural achievement of ancient Greece.[2] It is difficult to give a precise number of temples that the Greeks built, not only on the territory of present-day Greece, but also in the regions where the Greeks founded their colonies, such as Asia Minor, southern Italy, Sicily, and other places. Nevertheless, the Parthenon, as its most famous example,[3] has been recognized for centuries as the most vivid surviving material symbol of the culture of ancient Greece, and a great illustration of the ideal, Classical architectural construction.[4] The Parthenon represents the symbol of Athenian democracy, and of the spiritual reserve bequeathed by the Athens of the 5th century BC to humanity. It has been termed the "golden rule" of ancient Greek architecture, as an unparalleled fusion of engineering, architecture, and art.[5]

The building of the first temples on the site of the Parthenon started in the Archaic period, more precisely at the beginning of the 6th century BC,[6] reaching its zenith in the Classical period, and then, during Roman times, some of the Greek temples were renovated. The present paper is not only a story of the development and function of the Parthenon. It provides a basic description of the monument and its decorative elements and then a concise overview of the temple's function in post-ancient periods. The focus of the paper, however, is the account of the infamous removal of the Parthenon's sculptured ornaments by Lord Elgin, an issue that remains unresolved despite decades of countless negotiations between British and Greek authorities, and continues to attract notable media attention.[7] The paper is also intertwined with the personal lives of Lord Elgin and his rich

2 RATTÉ 2003: 41.

3 The Parthenon was not a temple in the strict meaning of the term. Our earliest sources simply call the Parthenon *naos*. A lost book about the building called it the *hekatompedon* ('hundred-foot building'). The detailed financial accounts did not call it anything at all. The building is first called the Parthenon by Demosthenes (Dem. *Against Androtion*, 76–77), and this name became popular during the fourth century BC. It literally refers to the fact that the structure housed the statue of Athena Parthenos (HURWIT 1999: 161; HURWIT 2004: 77, 106–110; KING 2006: 33; SHEPHERD 2016: 48).

4 WYCHERLEY 1978: 110–111, 115; FERRARI 2006: 5; STEVENS 1940: 1; BARRINGER 2014: 228, 232; FULLERTON 2016: Chap. 7; TITI 2023: 40.

5 DELIVORRIAS 2004; TOURNIKIOTIS 1994; DIVARI-VALAKOU 2008: 116.

6 KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 13.

7 The "Elgin Marbles" as the British Museum is obliged by statute to refer to this group of artefacts since their acquisition in 1816 (HITCHENS 1997: viii, 17, 43; STEFANOU 2014: 5819) or the "Parthenon Marbles" as the Greek official national rhetoric addresses them (YALOURI 2001: 97–98; STEFANOU 2014: 5819).

wife Mary Nisbet because, as will be shown below, the removal of the Parthenon marbles was their joint project, and their scandalous divorce is a principal reason why these marbles are now located in London in the British Museum. As will be demonstrated, the acquisition of the Elgin marbles is a unified endeavour, partly based on the overall vision of Lord Elgin, the political instinct of both his chaplain, the Revd. Philip Hunt, and his personal secretary, William Richard Hamilton, the extraordinary tenacity of his chief artist, Giovanni Battista Lusieri, and the often neglected contribution of his wife's wealth and their marital disputes.[8]

The Pre-Parthenon Acropolis

The Parthenon temple is located on top of the Acropolis hill in central Athens. The hill was initially inhabited in prehistoric times, and the earliest finds there are from the Neolithic period (4th millennium BC). During the Mycenaean civilisation (c. 1600–1200 BC) the Acropolis served as a citadel of the mythical king Aegaeus who ruled in Athens. The first fortification wall that encircled the Acropolis was built in the Mycenaean age, more precisely around 1250 BC, and was later destroyed during the Persian invasion in 480 BC. Remains of the so-called Cyclopean walls[9] of the Mycenaean period are scattered all over the Acropolis.[10] The assumption is that this wall protected a bronze age palace, similar to those in Mycenae, Tiryns, etc., but later occupation and extensive use of the Acropolis have removed almost all traces of such a palace in Athens.[11] The current Acropolis fortification wall was built thereafter and includes many spolia from Acropolis buildings that were also devastated by the Persians at the same time.[12] During the 8th century BC, the rock (157 metres high) took on an exclusively sacred character and was dedicated to the worship of the goddess Athena.[13] In

8 NAGEL 2004; WILLIAMS 2002: 104.

9 For the description of Cyclopean masonry see TOMAS 2008.

10 They are succinctly described in PAVLOVIĆ AND TOMAS 2024: 162–165; in more detail they are discussed in CAMP 2001: 14–20.

11 CAMP 2001: 19. See PAVLOVIĆ AND TOMAS 2024: 166.

12 For example, the column drums of the pre-Persian Acropolis temples are embedded in the renovated northern or Themistoclean wall and are still visible today (KUXHAUSEN-DEROSE 2022: 34–35).

13 In ancient times, most Greek city-states had their own public cult and patron deity. In Athens, the official deity was Athena, the main site of her worship was the Acropolis, and the most important holiday in her honour was Panathenaia, an annual festival (NEILS 1996; HARD 2004: 18–181; WAGNER 2001: 99). Athena was a daughter of Zeus, the principal Greek god, and Metis. Zeus was warned by an oracle that Metis would bear him a child more powerful than himself. For that reason Zeus swallowed her. When the day of birth arrived, Zeus experienced a dreadful headache, so he ordered the blacksmith-god Hephaistos to strike his head with an

the 6th century BC, first temples[14] were founded on the rock, and the sanctuary of Athena witnessed its first lengthy period of prosperity. It is important to stress at the outset that the Acropolis was not only the principal sanctuary of Athens, but also a place of refuge. Hence its fortification wall, which at some parts rises as much as 8 metres in height.[15]

Chronology of the Construction of the Parthenon

The Parthenon as we know it today, in its reconstructed form, was built during the age of Perikles. The construction of the Periclean Parthenon (Parthenon III)[16] started in 447 BC. It was the successor to the unfinished marble Older Parthenon

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axe. Thereupon, a fully-armed Athena leapt out from Zeus' head (see HARD 2004: 181–182). A virgin goddess (Athena Parthenos), she inherited her mother's wisdom and became a personification of prudence, with an owl as her symbol-animal. She bestowed her name to the city of Athens and became its patron goddess. In a contest with her uncle Poseidon, she secured her dominance over Attica when she gave its residents an olive tree as a gift. Thus, as Athena Polias, she became the protectress of the city and its prosperity. In her other forms, she protected the world of arts and crafts (Athena Ergane), she also secured the city's victorious outcome in conflicts against its enemies (Athena Nike), as well as serving as a guardian of health (Athena Hygeia). Her final epithet is Athena Hippia, being considered a tamer and an inventor of the bridle. Because she was armed with a spear, a shield (*aegis*), and a helmet, she was also a warrior goddess who defended the city's integrity (Athena Pallas, Promachos) (HARD 2004: 180–186; BOARDMAN 2009: 107; PANDERMALIS, ELEFTHERATOU, VLAS 2015: 101).

14 One of the most important temples built on the Acropolis was a rather small temple dedicated to the patron goddess of the city, Athena Polias (also known as *Archaios Neos* or the Old Temple of Athena). This was the location of the most sacred cult of the goddess Athena and the location where the Athenians kept the cult statue of the goddess carved from wood (*xoanon*), believed to have fallen from the heavens and to have been sent by Zeus (CAMP 2001: 30; HURWIT 2005: 68; PANDERMALIS, ELEFTHERATOU, VLAS 2015: 91). It was a Doric peripteral structure with six columns on its front and rear and twelve columns on its sides, all made of limestone. It was built c. 510 BC, just to the south of the later Erechteion, that is, near the centre of the Acropolis hill. The remains are known as a "Dörpfeld-foundation" and Dörpfeld's original publication of the architecture of the Athena Polias temple remains valid today (DÖRPFELD 1885: 275–277; WIEGAND 1904: 115–147; SIOUMPARA 2020: 151). Despite its early date, this old temple was adorned with marble sculptures: in one pediment, there was a depiction of the battle of the gods against the Giants, with the goddess Athena prominently featured (CAMP 2001: 43).

15 HURWIT 2005: 21.

16 The development of the Acropolis after the Bronze Age, especially in the Archaic period, and the exact topography and periodization of its buildings remains controversial, issues that are widely debated in the scholarly literature. The identification of attested place names with specific remains is still contested, and this study adopts the most generally accepted scheme, following a timeline of development on the Acropolis which can mostly be found in recent relevant publications, for example, in CAMP 2001; HURWIT 1999; HURWIT 2005; see PAGA 2021: 273–275 for *Appendix I. Building Chronology in Athens and Attika, ca. 508/7– 480/79 B.C.E.*

(Parthenon II),[17] destroyed after the Persian attack in 480 BC. This was, in turn, a successor to the original Parthenon (Parthenon I), built c. 570 BC.[18] The Classical Parthenon is not simply the realisation of a new vision of the age of Perikles or of a new design by its main architects Iktinos and Kalikrates and the sculptor Pheidias. It is also the final achievement of much earlier aspirations: a temple to Athena Parthenos worthy of the Panathenaic festival, a monument to democracy, and a monument to all the mythical and earlier conquests and more recent victories of the Athenians over the Persians.[19]

The Archaic Parthenon (Hekatompedon)

In the 7th century BC the Greeks began to build the first large-scale stone temples and to decorate them with polychrome sculptures. The first temple of monumental proportions on the Acropolis was the Archaic Parthenon, also called *Hekatompedon*, which indicates that its length should have been 100 feet (about 30 metres).[20] Its construction is traditionally linked to the establishment of Great Panathenaia in 566/565 BC when the city's archon was the aristocrat Hippokleides.[21] Although its foundations have disappeared, its existence is attested by large sculptures and architectural elements discovered in the vicinity of the later Parthenon.[22] The decoration of its west pediment contained three sculpture groups carved from red, blue, black, and green poros limestone, colourfully painted.[23] The central group represents two huge lions attacking a bull, whose blood flows from its wounds. To the left is

[17] Also referred to as the Pre-Parthenon, this temple was still under construction when the Persians sacked the city in 480 BC razing the Acropolis. It was built after the battle of Marathon, c. 490–488 BC, upon a solid limestone foundation that extended and levelled the southern part of the Acropolis summit (HURWIT 1999: 129, 135; SIOUMPARA 2020: 156, fig. 5 for a visual of the sequence of the plans of the Archaic Parthenon, the Older Parthenon and the Periclean Parthenon).

[18] Known as Hekatompedon or Hekatompedos or Ur-Parthenon and H–Architektur (KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 18) it remains unclear in its location, architecture and sculptural adornment even today (see below) (SIOUMPARA 2020: 151–152).

[19] KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 13; HURWIT 2004: 11.

[20] *IG* I^3 4B; Editio princeps: LOLLING 1890. On the date, see STROUD 2004; on term *hekatompedon* see TRACY 2018; PAGA 2021: 277–292. DÖRPFELD 1919; DINSMOOR 1947: 111; HURWIT 1999: 106–112, 115–116, 161–163; CAMP 2001: 52; LANGDON AND VAN ROOKHUIJZEN 2024: 436.

[21] LAUGHY 2010: 113; PAGA 2017: 169; SIOUMPARA 2020: 163.

[22] The temple's precise location is still debated. For the various theories see KORRES 1997: 221 with fig. 1; SIOUMPARA 2015: 250–252; MEYER 2017: 113–118; most recently SIOUMPARA 2020). It is either located in the north as a precursor of the *Archaios Neos* of Athena Polias that stood on the "Dörpfeld-foundation", or in the south on the site of the later Older Parthenon, where the Classical Parthenon was built in 447 BC.

[23] On polychromy of ancient Greek temples see RICHTER AND HALL 1944: 236.



Figure 1. Sculpture from the east pediment of the Hekatompedon temple. A lioness devouring a calf. Athens Acropolis Museum. (© Ad Meskens / Wikimedia Commons; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Hekatompedon_temple#/media/File:Athens_Acropolis_Museum_Hekatompedos_Lioness_pediment.jpg).

the hero Heracles wrestling a sea-monster, half man and half fish, either Triton or Nereus. To the right is a three-bodied Daemon, frequently labelled as "Bluebeard", a winged creature composed of three bearded male figures whose lower bodies consist of intertwined snakes.[24] The figures hold objects in their hands: a wave, a flame or a sheaf of wheat, and a bird.[25] The eastern pediment had a central scene, the meaning of which is again unknown, of depicting a lioness attacking a young calf. In addition, there are enormous multicoloured snakes in the corner sections. The preserved metopes feature four small horses and two panthers carved in relief. Finally, there is a marble Gorgon with the monstrous face, which probably belonged to the central *akroterion* that once adorned the temple's roof.[26]

[24] DINSMOOR 1947: 109, 112 and notes 15 and 18 on 145, has summarized to date the arguments on this controversial structure and its sculpture. See also PHILLIES HOWE 1955: 287. Bluebeard is interpreted as Typhon, Geryon, Okeanos, Pontos and Aither (see RIDGWAY 1993: 287–288; STEWART 1990: 114; HÖCKMANN 1991; KIILERICH 1998; HURWIT 1999: 108) and as a benign allegory of Attic political union (BOARDMAN 1972; HURWIT 1999: 109).

[25] Sometimes interpreted as symbols of the three elements of nature: water, fire and air respectively, but the overall meaning of the whole pediment is unclear. The fourth element, earth, is evoked by snake-like bodies of the three creatures (PANDERMALIS, ELEFTHERATOU, VLAS 2015: 102–103).

[26] PANDERMALIS, ELEFTHERATOU, VLAS 2015: 108.

The Persian Devastation of the Acropolis

The second decade of the 5th century BC was marked by the defensive wars of the Greeks against the expansive policy of the Persians in which Athens played a leading role. The stimulus for the Persian invasion of Greece was earlier Athenian support to the mostly ethnically Greek city-states of Asia Minor, located in territories considered part of the Persian dominion, which rebelled against the Persians. The Persian armies campaigned against Greece twice, with the Athenians ultimately emerging victorious.[27] However, before that defeat, the Persians succeeded in overrunning Athens, destroying and burning the Acropolis, including the archaic Parthenon II, the Older Parthenon.[28] They also burnt the above-described old temple of Athena,[29] and the early temple of Athena Nike.[30] Thucydides informs us that, during the destruction process, the Persians also demolished most of the fortification wall that had previously encircled the Acropolis.[31] In brief, after the Persian sack, the Acropolis was left in ruins.[32] Before that attack Athenian citizens took refuge in several locations of the Saronic Gulf. Following their return to Athens, they buried whatever remained of the archaic Acropolis in hollows of the rock. Among those hidden remnants was a statue of presumably Athena Ergane attributed to the sculptor Endoios.[33]

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27 The first invasion, led by the Persian king Darius ended in the Persian defeat in the battle of Marathon in 490 BC. The Athenian forces were victorious under the leadership of the general Miltiades. The second Persian invasion took place ten years later, under the leadership of the Persian king, Xerxes, Darius' son. This invasion ended by the battle of Salamis when the Athenians defeated the Persian fleet (SHEAR 1993; BEARD 2002: 37; DE SOUZA 2004).

28 Herodotus (*Hdt.* 8.53): "[Xerxes] plundered the temple and burned the entire acropolis"; Thucydides (Thuc. 1.89): "For of the encircling wall only small portions were left standing and most of the houses were in ruins, only a few remaining in which the chief men of the Persians had themselves taken quarters"; Diodoros Siculus (Diod. Sic. 11.14): "Xerxes entered Attika and ravaged the countryside, and then he razed Athens to the ground and sent up in flames the temples of the gods". (KOUSSER 2009; CAMP 2021: 70).

29 See footnote no. 14.

30 CAMP 2001: 57.

31 Thucydides (Thuc. 1.89.3; see also Herodotus, Her. 9.13); WEIR 1995.

32 This devastation by the Persians extended to Attica as well affecting the small archaic temple at Rhamnous, the unfinished temple of Poseidon at Sounion and the Telesterion at Eleusis (SHEAR 1982; CAMP 2001: 57). Finally, Pausanias (Paus. 3. 16.8) tells us that the cult statue of Artemis from Brauron was carried off to Susa by the Persians (CAMP 2001: 58; KOUSSER 2009: 268; CAMP 2021: 74).

33 It is a marble statue found in 1821 at the foot of the Acropolis, just below the Erechtheion, described by Pausanias (Paus. 1, 26, 4). It is thought to have survived the Persian destruction of Athens in 480 BC intact, and to have been on the Acropolis at the time of Pausanias' visit. At one point, it was removed and reused as part of the retaining wall near the temple of Erechtheus, which later collapsed. The statue, along with the older debris that the wall had retained, was thus found at the bottom of the northern slopes of the Athenian Acropolis (CONSOLI 2004: 47; PANDERMALIS, ELEFTHERATOU, VLAS 2015: 174; BRISKI 2025: 20).

The Recovery and Renewal of the Acropolis

After the Persian wars, the Athenians immediately started an ambitious project of rebuilding their shattered city, beginning with the construction of a new defensive wall around the Acropolis. This wall, the so-called Themistoclean wall, included numerous spolia, such as column drums of ruined temples, and even some funerary stelae.[34] This initial reconstruction, however, excluded the rebuilding of the Acropolis temples because, according to the oath that the Greeks took before the battle of Plataia in 479 BC temples and sanctuaries were to be left in ruins as permanent memorials of Persian barbarism.[35] Apparently, the rebuilding of structures inside the Acropolis commenced a generation later, and flourished during the political prominence of Perikles (461–429 BC).[36] It was precisely Perikles who initiated the rebuilding of the temples that had previously been burned by the Persians. The resources that he used were those of the treasury of the Delian league that was in the meantime transferred from Delos to Athens.[37] The rebuilding of the ruined Acropolis started in the third quarter of the fifth century BC.[38]

The "Periclean building programme", as modern historians tend to call it,[39] was a radical makeover of the Acropolis as a whole. Besides the Parthenon, it included the Propylaia, a new monumental gateway to Acropolis, built over a period of five years, from 437 to 432 BC by the architect Mnesikles.[40] The Athenians also added in front of the future Parthenon a colossal bronze statue of a fully armed Athena Promachos, sculpted by Pheidias, which was, according to Pausanias (*Paus*. 1. 28. 2), made from the winning spoils of Marathon.[41] Representations of this statue are found on Panathenaic amphorai, Athenian lamps, and coins of the Hellenistic

34 CAMP 2001: 59; VIZYINOU 2018: 420.

35 A version of the oath, whose historicity has been questioned since the antiquity (KRENTZ 2007; KELLOGG 2008), can be found in a speech of orator Lykourgos (*Against Leokrates* 81) from 4th century BC (CAMP 2001: 60).

36 This quote excellently summarises Perikles' achievements in Athens: "Athens at the time of Perikles represents the high point setting a standard against which all subsequent expressions of Western civilization have been measured". (CAMP 2001: 72).

37 It should be emphasized that it was paid out of funds unwillingly contributed by allies in the Delian league (PRITCHETT 1969; TIAN 2024).

38 New temples were also at the time built in the lower city of Athens and throughout Attica (CAMP 2001: 72, 139).

39 BEARD 2002: 33; HURWIT 2004: 54–60, 94–105.

40 HURWIT 1999: 192–196; CAMP 2001: 82–88; HURWIT 2004: 54–55. When Athens fell to the Franks in 1204 Propylaia was converted into a palace for the dukes of Athens (CAMP 2001: 90).

41 HURWIT 1999: 23–24; Pausanias (*Paus*. 1. 28.2): "In addition to the works I have mentioned, there are two tithes dedicated by the Athenians after wars. There is first a bronze Athena, tithe from the Persians who landed at Marathon. It is the work of Pheidias…The point of the spear of this Athena and the crest of her helmet are visible to those sailing to Athens, as soon as Sunium is passed".

period.[42] The statue survived in Athens until the 5th century AD, when it was carried to Constantinople and destroyed in the early 13th century.[43] Another Athena statue erected on the Acropolis, was the bronze statue of Athena Hygieia, by the sculptor Pyrrhos, whose inscribed base was found by the far left column of the east facade of the Parthenon.[44]

After the Parthenon and the Propylaia the third edifice to go up on the Periclean Acropolis was the marble temple of Athena Nike outside the Propylaia on the south side,[45] completed after Perikles' death in 429 BC. On the north side of the hill was the last temple on the Acropolis to be built under Perikles, also completed after his death. This was the temple of Athena Polias, patron deity of the city of Athens. It is usually referred to as Erechtheion.[46] Pausanias (*Paus*. 1. 26–27)[47] informs us that this temple and not the Parthenon was the main sacred building of the Acropolis.[48] The Erechtheion had six columns shaped as young draped maidens, so called Caryatids.[49] One of the six Caryatids was taken by Lord Elgin and is now exhibited in the British Museum in London. The others were removed from the building in the 1970s and are now displayed in the Acropolis Museum in Athens, while originals are replaced onsite by replicas.[50]

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42 For amphorai see HERINGTON 1955: 40–65; for coins see HAVELOCK 1980: 41; for lamps see PICK 1931: 61–63; for other materials see LUNDGREEN 1997.

43 A Byzantine writer Niketas Choniates, saw it in the forum of Constantinople just before its destruction and described it for posterity. He wrote that the statue was 30 feet high and clothed in garments made of bronze (CAMP 2001: 53–55).

44 HURWIT 1999: 199; CAMP 2001: 88–89. The base was apparently placed by the spot where an unfortunate workman fell in course of building the Propylaia (Plut. *Vit. Per.* 13.7-8), and Athena herself helped to cure the craftsmen and so indirectly concurred that she approves of the Perikles' new work on Acropolis (HURWIT 2004: 277).

45 The bastion on which it stands dates to the Late Bronze Age. The temple was adorned with a sculpted Ionic frieze on all four sides. The north and the south sides of this frieze show the Greeks fighting the Persians, which makes them among the earliest specifically Greek historical reliefs that we have (HURWIT 1999: 209–213; CAMP 2001: 91; HURWIT 2004: 188–189).

46 HURWIT 1999: 200–208; CAMP 2001: 93–100; HURWIT 2004: 164–180.

47 The Erechtheion was built in the Ionic style. The distribution of the two main architectural orders, Doric and Ionic, is a geographical rather than chronological. The Ionic order developed in the eastern Greek world of Ionia and the islands of the Aegean, the Doric order developed in the Peloponnese and the western Greek world. The Athenians, who lived at the juncture of the two regions were comfortable with both orders and often used them together in a single building, as in the Propylaia. The Parthenon is an outstanding example of the Doric order, whereas the Erectheion is a lighter and more ornate Ionic temple (CAMP 2001: 94).

48 BERESFORD 2016: 1; VAN ROOKHUIJZEN 2021.

49 It has been suggested that they represent daughters of Kekrops. Soon after having been completed Erectheion burned to the ground, but it was repaired. In the 7th century AD it was turned into a Christian basilica (CAMP 2001: 99).

50 BERESFORD 2016. The pedestal for the Caryatid removed to London remains empty, awaiting its return, as a silent, but loud message.

Classical or Periclean Parthenon

The central point of this new building program and one of the earliest buildings to go up on the Acropolis was the new Periclean Parthenon, this time constructed in marble from the quarries on Mount Pentele which divides the area of Athens and the area of Marathon.[51] Its construction began in 447 BC, and in 438 BC, the colossal chryselephantine statue of Athena prominently placed inside the temple's *cella*, was officially dedicated. Further work on the ornamental sculpture and decoration of the temple continued until 433/432 BC.[52] Ancient writers attribute the building of the Parthenon to the following architects: Iktinos (named by Pausanias, Plutarch, Strabo and Vitruvius), Kallikrates (named by Plutarch) and Karpion (Vitruvius).[53]

Despite its monumental size, its central position on the Acropolis hill, and general significance for the city of Athens, the importance of the Parthenon is not based solely on its structural construction features, which are important, but not unique, and can be found elsewhere in Classical Greece,[54] such as its size and the fact that it was built entirely of marble.[55] The Parthenon consists of two architectural components. From the outside, we see a monumental Doric structure with eight columns at the front and rear, and seventeen columns along the sides. Inside the Doric colonnade, we find the inner part of the temple divided into four segments: a front porch (*pronaos*) with six Doric columns; the "hundred foot *cella*" (*hekatompedos naos*), and a back porch (*opisthodomos*). Inside the *cella*, there are two interior colonnades of superimposed Doric columns. They are connected to a third colonnade at the rear of the *cella*. With these additional elements, the Parthenon represents a unique plan among Greek temples.[56]

The Parthenon was one of the most richly decorated Greek temples due to the extraordinary quantity and quality of its marble sculptures. The rich sculptured

[51] On the ancient Pentelic marble quarries, their function and the stages of their development see KORRES 1995.

[52] COOK 1984: 18; HURWIT 1999: 161; CAMP 2001: 74; HURWIT 2004: 106.

[53] COOK 1984: 16–17; CAMP 2001: 74; HURWIT 2004: 117; Plut. *Vit. Per.* 13.6–7 (Iktinos and Kallikrates); Vitruvius 7. *Praef.* 12 (Karpion); Paus. 8.41.9 (Iktinos); Strabo 9.395, 396 (Iktinos). Karpion is the least known. We have a testimony of Vitruvius (7. *Praef.* 12) that he and Iktinos co-authored a treatise on the proportions of the Parthenon.

[54] CAMP 2001: 74.

[55] KORRES 1995.

[56] HURWIT 1999: 166; BARLETTA 2005: 67–100; SHEPHERD 2016: 45–52; KONTIĆ 2020; See Camp for a summary on the exceptional features of the Parthenon, which set the building apart from others Greek temples: the plan, the architectural refinements and the sculptural decoration (CAMP 2001: 75). Of these we will focus on sculptural adornment. For architectural refinements see HASELBERGER 2005: 101–158.

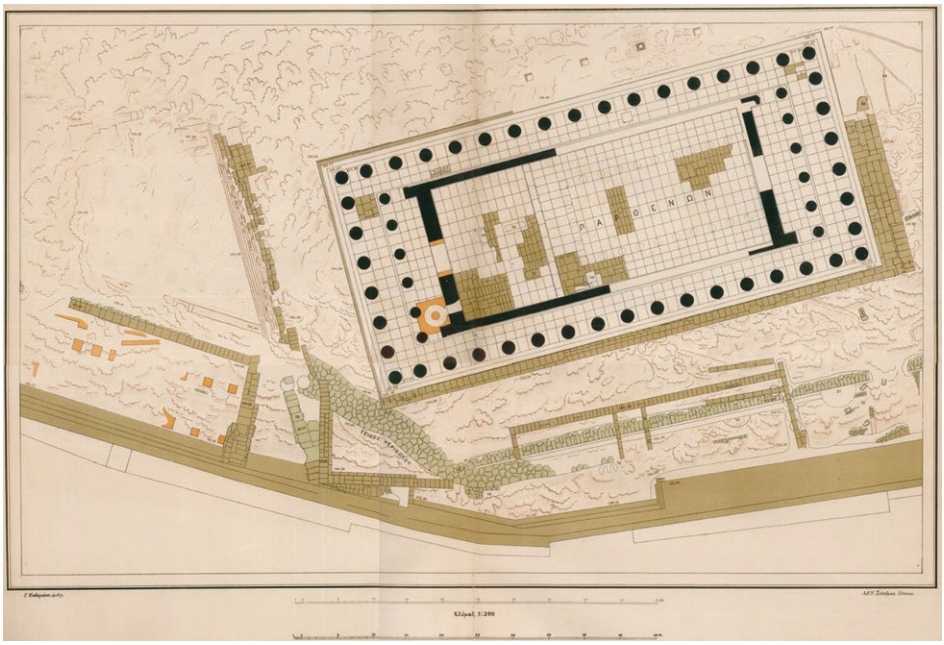


Figure 2. Plan of Parthenon and Adjacent areas, Acropolis of Athens. (KAVVADIAS AND KAWERAU 1906: Πιναξ Z' / Plate Z).

ornaments took at least a decade to be completed, and are directly related to the principal topic of this article: lord Elgin's removal of the Parthenon sculptures and their migration to London. The artist in charge of its sculptural adornment was Pheidias, who was, according to Plutarch, the leading sculptor of the era.[57] The sculptures of the Parthenon are distinguished not only by their matchless quality, but also by their great numbers: there are many more of them than in the case of other temples.[58]

There were four main groups of sculptures: the pediments, the exterior Doric frieze, the Ionic frieze, and the chryselephantine statue of Athena inside. The front (eastern) pediment contains sculptures related to the birth of the goddess Athena.[59] It shows Zeus seated on the throne in the centre, with fully-grown Athena standing in front of him and Hephaistos behind her. The space on either side of them was filled with sculptures of other Olympian gods gathered to watch this wondrous

[57] Plut. *Vit. Per.* 13.6–7; 31.2–5.

[58] KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 13. It is believed that Pheidias employed dozens of assistants for such an ambitious project of entirely dressing the Parthenon in sculptures of the highest quality. A very rich sculptural program of the Parthenon required a large number of participants. One estimation suggests 200 craftsmen and 50 sculptors (COOK 1984: 18; BURFORD 1963).

[59] See footnote no. 13.



Figure 3. Reconstruction of the west pediment of the Parthenon according to drawing by K. Schwerzek. Athens Acropolis Museum; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pediments_of_the_Parthenon#/media/File:Reconstruction_of_the_west_pediment_of_the_Parthenon_1.jpg

event.[60] The sculptures of the rear (western) pediment represent the strife between Athena and her uncle Poseidon for the patronage over the city of Athens. In the centre, we see Athena, who offered an olive tree, and Poseidon, ready to strike the rock with his trident thus creating a well of salt water. On either side of the two contestants were two-horse chariot groups, and in the corners of this pediment were sculptures of the legendary royal families of Athens.[61]

The outside of the temple is encircled by a Doric frieze, consisting of 92 metopes, which on the eastern side depicted gods fighting against Giants, the west side shows Greeks fighting the Amazons, the north side depicts scenes of the Greeks fighting the Trojans, and the south side shows Greeks fighting centaurs.[62] We can say that all four sides were thematically united by depictions of the triumph of Greek civilisation over barbarians. Perhaps this was also a symbolic depiction of the Greek victory over the barbarian Persians.[63]

Every year in July, Athena's birthday was celebrated with a festival called the Panathenaia, and every four years, there were the Great Panathenaia, with a thrilling procession of chariots and athletics.[64] The scene of the Ionic frieze has

[60] ROBERTSON 1963: 49–51; HARISSON 1967; PALAGIA 1993; CAMP 2001: 77; HURWIT 2004: 128–133; ST. CLAIR 2022: 177–178. Pausanias (*Paus*. 1. 24) has recorded the subjects of the two pediments. Had he not, the interpretation of the existing remains would be extremely difficult, since the pediments were severely damaged in the Venetian bombardment of 1687. An important source for the reconstruction of the pediments are the series of drawings made by French painter and draughtsman Jacques Carrey in Athens in 1674 (APOSTOLOU 2001).

[61] ROBERTSON 1963: 52–54; PALAGIA 1993; HURWIT 1999: 174–179; CAMP 2001: 77–78.

[62] HURWIT 1999: 169–174; CAMP 2001: 78; HURWIT 2004: 224–236; SCHWAB 2005: 159. Some of the Parthenon metopes were hacked away by the early Christians, some were destroyed in the explosion of 1687, and some were taken down by lord Elgin (on this later in text). Thus, we see that this temple was on several occasions mercilessly undressed or stripped down of its most precious ornaments.

[63] To quote John M. Camp (CAMP 2001: 79): "In some sense the Parthenon should be seen as a long-delayed victory monument for the epic struggles against the Persians, which in the eyes of Classical Athenians took on the superhuman dimensions of legend, one more chapter in the conflict between East and West which has so often been played in the eastern Mediterranean".

[64] NEILS 1996.

been interpreted as a depiction of the Panathenaic procession, the large formal procession from the lower city to the Acropolis to present the cult image of Athena Polias in the Erechteion with a newly woven robe (*peplos*). The frieze presents a celebration of the people of Athens with cavalry of handsome young men, bearers of sacrificial victims (sheep and bulls), musicians, and elders. The central scene depicts the bringing of the *peplos*, watched by the gods of Olympus seated on low stools.[65] The positions that these sculptures occupied on the building correspond to three symbolic levels of the universal order: the earthly (frieze), the mythical (metopes) and the heavenly (pediments). Within these levels there was also a lateral hierarchy, since the east side of the temple was more important than the west.[66] The sculptural compositions are made to serve not only the iconographic subjects, but also the need to rationally exploit the space available for each composition. Their main shared theme is the contest between worthy opponents, but there is also a symbolic meaning: the eternal struggle between opposing forces in nature, in human society, and in the human soul itself.[67]

The final ornament to describe in detail is a colossal chryselephantine[68] statue of Athena mentioned in the 2nd century AD by Pausanias (1. 24. 5–7), dedicated in 438 BC. Athena stands upright, dressed in a garment which reaches to her feet; on her breasts is the head of Medusa wrought in ivory. In her right hand, Athena holds a smaller statue of the goddess Nike which was 2 metres high. The middle of Athena's helmet is occupied by a figure of a sphinx with griffins on both sides. At Athena's feet lies a shield, and near her spear was a figure of a snake possibly representing Erichtonios. The base of the statue showed the birth of Pandora carved in relief.[69] Like most chryselephantine statues, this one is also lost. Luckily, numerous later copies on a much smaller scale were produced, both in marble and terracotta, which help us envision the original Pheidias' masterpiece.[70] The statue was more than 9 metres high, and it must have appeared miraculous, gleaming in the huge dark *cella* of the Parthenon. By representing her in her full glory, Pheidias paid due honour to the goddess Athena, the patroness of the city of Athens, while at the same time promoting the main star of Athenian political propaganda.[71]

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65 CONNELLY 1996; HURWIT 1999: 179–186; CAMP 2001: 79; STEVENSON 2003. For different interpretations of the meaning of the frieze, see OSADA 2019: 1, footnote 2.

66 KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 14. On orientation of a Greek temple see DINSMOOR 1939, but eastern orientation is not the universal key to Greek temples (see examples in HANNAH, MAGLI, ORLANDO 2017: 3).

67 KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 14; BARLETTA 2005: 69.

68 The flesh of the goddess would have been carved in ivory and her drapery in sheets of gold, attached to a wooden or metal underlayer. On chryselephantine statuary see LAPATIN 2001.

69 HURWIT 1999: 187; CAMP 2001: 80; HURWIT 2004: 187–188.

70 See overview of found copies in GAIFMAN 2006.

71 BEARD 2002: 30.



Figure 4. Scale model of Parthenon Athena, Royal Ontario Museum. (© Dennis G. Jarvis - DSC09130 – Athena; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Athena_Parthenos#/media/File:DSC09130_-_Athena_(37031332986).jpg).

We can say that the sculptural repertoire of the Parthenon defined Perikles' and Pheidias' vision of Athens' victorious and triumphant battles against the superior Persian imperial force, which saved not only Athens, but Greece in general. Perikles and Pheidias endowed Athens with one of the most perfect and most ornate Greek temple. In other words, the Parthenon is a magnificent victory monument. The temple was more a political, rather than a religious statement.[72] As Gillian Shepherd succinctly observes: "The Parthenon was laden with allusions to Athenian identity and superiority, and throughout appears to reference the Per-

[72] There is no known priestess of Athena Parthenon, and no altar was built to accompany the temple. Throughout the antiquity the focal point of cult activity on the Acropolis was found on the north side, the area occupied in the fifth century by the Erechteion (HURWIT 1999: 163; CAMP 2001: 81; BERESFORD 2016: 1).

sians, whose defeat at the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC equipped the Athenians with some of the best PR capital they ever had".[73] It also served as a repository of state funds and other offerings belonging to the Athenians. It was, in fact a huge treasury.[74] Perikles' plans were not universally popular, and they were criticized even in antiquity by his contemporaries,[75] but as anticipated by both Thucydides and Plutarch,[76] the temples and buildings of the Acropolis remain the most visible legacy of Classical Athens even today.[77]

The (Ab)use of the Parthenon and the Acropolis after the Roman Occupation of Athens

The interior of the *cella* and the roof of the Parthenon were destroyed by fire during the Herulian invasion in 267 AD. The repair was partial: the internal columns were replaced by smaller ones taken from a two-storey Hellenistic stoa, which was dismantled to repair not only the Parthenon, but also the Asklepieion which had suffered a similar fate. The new roof covered only the *cella* and not the *pteroma* which from this date was exposed to the weather.[78] In the 4th century AD, the Visigoths sacked Athens and caused huge destruction to the Acropolis some twenty years before their pillage of Rome.[79] In the 6th century AD, the temple was, together with the Erechtheion, converted into a Christian church dedicated to Virgin Mary. The east door had to be removed, and in its place a semicircular apse was added, where the bell tower was constructed. Entrance to the nave was from the west chamber by way of three doors opened in the partition wall. The west chamber was converted into the narthex of the church, and in it was built a rectangular baptisterium.[80] The church was renovated in the 12th century AD. The earlier apse was replaced by a larger, semi-hexagonal one, windows were added, and the building was extensively decorated with wall-paintings, many of

73 SHEPHERD 2019: 49.

74 Special offices were in charge of rendering accounts through exact annual accountings of the funds as well as of the value and weight of the offerings stored there belonging to the Athenians. The range of objects included vessels of gold and silver, coins, carved gems, jewellery, furniture, musical instruments, weapons (including Persian daggers) and armour, as well as smaller statues and objects of ivory (CAMP 2001: 81; LAPATIN 2005). It is indeed our misfortune that most of these objects have not been preserved. Metal objects were melted down and reused. And there were probably cases of robbery even in ancient times.

75 BEARD 2002: 35–36.

76 Thucydides (Thuc. 2. 35–46); Plutarch (Plut. *Vit. Per*. 12–13.)

77 CAMP 2001: 74.

78 KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 15; CHIOTI 2021.

79 BOARDMAN AND FINN 1985: 214; HURWIT 1999: 283–286.

80 See KALDELLIS 2009: 23–30 on detailed description of conversion.



Figure 5. View of the destruction of the Parthenon, with illustrations of trajectories of Venetian rounds. (FANELLI 1707: 308; https://artilleryhistory.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/veduta-del-casto-d-acropolis.jpg)

which survive to the present day.[81] In 1458 the Turks reconfigured the church into a mosque, transforming the bell tower into a minaret.[82]

Under Frankish occupation (13th–15th centuries AD) the Acropolis was transformed once again into a fortress. During the Turkish occupation (1458–1833) it became the headquarters of the Turkish commander (*dizdar*) and the residential area of Turkish families.[83] In 1687 during the siege by the Venetian forces, a bomb ignited the gunpowder stored by the Turks inside the Parthenon and the central section of the monument was blown up and collapsed. The Venetian general Morosini and his soldiers seized the moment and sacked the place.[84] In 1688, the Danes lopped the heads off the metopes, and these can still be seen in the museum in Copenhagen.[85] The Vatican holds chunks from the west pediment;

81 KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 15; HURWIT 1999: 174, 287, 293–295.

82 HURWIT 1999: 292, 295–296, 302; NAGEL 2004: 131.

83 CAMP 2001: 247–248.

84 MOMMSEN 1941: 544.

85 BUNDGAARD RASMUSSEN AND LUND: 170.



Figure 6. North part of the western pediment of the Parthenon. Drawing attributed to Jacques Carrey. (Jacques Carrey, Temple de Minerve, à Athènes. Dessiné par ordre de Mr. Nointel Ambassadeur à la Porte. Avant que ce Temple ne fut renversé par une Bombe des Vénitiens. 1674; Public Domain: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pediments_of_the_Parthenon#/media/File:Fronton_ouest_nord.jpg)

the French have an entire collection in the Louvre and some in Strasbourg. Pieces of the Parthenon are on display in museums in Würzburg, Heidelberg, Munich and Vienna.[86] And in 1802, large sculptural ensembles were removed from the monument by Lord Elgin's workmen, followed by an extensive demolition of its walls by the Turks.[87]

The process of removing the fragments of the Parthenon had in fact begun much earlier, before the arrival of its most infamous defiler, Lord Elgin. In the 17th century, collections of Greek antiquities began to appear in some of the great country villas of England. The French showed equal interest. They were led by Marquis de Nointelm who preceded Elgin by almost 130 years when he brought his artist Jacques Carrey to sketch the Acropolis. Carrey's illustrations, executed around 1674, predated the Venetian bombardment and thus provided the world with a fairly accurate record of what the Parthenon looked like before the devastating explosion.[88]

[86] DIVARI-VALAKOU 2008: 116–117.

[87] HAMILAKIS 1999: 307.

[88] HURWIT 1999: 173–174; NAGEL 2004: 132; see footnote no. 60 (APOSTOLOU 2001).

Numerous adventurers and travelling artists visited the Parthenon during the 18th and 19th centuries and described it in a very admiring way. As Edward Dodwell, who visited the temple in 1819, and remarked: "It is the most unrivalled triumph of sculpture and architecture that the world ever saw".[89] Equally impressed by the Parthenon was the British poet Lord Byron who visited it towards the end of the 18th century and still saw in place all the sculptured elements which soon thereafter Elgin took away.[90] And Elgin was not the only one who removed parts of the Parthenon from Athens. Roughly only half of the Parthenon sculptures are housed in Athens today. In 1802 Elgin took and later, in 1816, sold to the British government over 75 metres of the famous sculpted frieze that once ran round the whole building, as well as 15 of the 92 sculpted metopes, and 17 life-size figures that once stood in the temple pediments.[91] But there is also a notable collection of Parthenon sculptures in the Louvre in Paris, acquired during the French Revolution, plus some smaller pieces in Copenhagen, Würzburg, Palermo, Rome, Heidelberg, Vienna, Munich and Strasbourg, mostly taken by early visitors to the Acropolis.[92]

Who Were the Elgins?

Thomas Bruce, the 7th Earl of Elgin, 11th Earl of Kincardine, was British ambassador to Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) between 1799 and 1803.[93] During the first decade of the 19th century, he removed boatloads of Parthenon sculptures from the Acropolis. Some of those sculptures had already fallen to the ground from their original position during previous disturbances on the Acropolis, and Elgin just had simply to collect them.[94] He also dismantled and removed from the temple a considerable number of sculptures. Some of these latter sculptures were very heavy, so their removal and transport required demanding and complicated procedures.[95]

A very substantial account of Elgin's life and the story of the Parthenon Marbles is known to us thanks to the preserved and published collection of letters

[89] DODWELL 1819, vol. I: 321.

[90] BEARD 2002: 2; FERRARI 2006: 5.

[91] DIVARI-VALAKOU 2008: 117: "Of the 97 surviving blocks of the Parthenon frieze, 56 are in London, 40 in Athens and 1 in the Louvre. Of the 64 surviving metopes, 48 are in Athens and 15 in London. Finally, of the 28 surviving figures of the pediments, 19 are in London and 9 in Athens".

[92] BEARD 2002: 12; See also BOARDMAN AND FINN 1985; KORKA 2003; MANTIS 1997.

[93] Thomas Bruce was born on July 20 1766. He was descended from Norman knights who arrived in Britain with William the Conqueror (NAGEL 2004: 20). Young Thomas was never called "Thomas", but became known as "Elgin" (SMITH 1916: 163–164; HITCHENS 1997: 17; HITCHENS 2008: 32).

[94] KORRES 1994: 154–156; ST. CLAIR 1998: 1–8; HURWITT 1999: 296.

[95] BEARD 2002: 12.

that Elgin's wife Mary Nisbet, countess of Elgin, regularly wrote to her mother.[96] These letters also reveal the decisive role Mary Nisbet played in the story of Elgin's stripping of the Parthenon. Mary Hamilton Nisbet, the future Lady Elgin, was born on April 18 1788, as one of the richest heiresses in the United Kingdom of Great Britain. She was a daughter of William Nisbet of Dirleton, a powerful Scottish landowner, who belonged to the small group of people who controlled the majority of land in Scotland. These Scots were richer than most European princes of the 18th and 19th centuries, and they formed their own close-knit aristocracy.[97] Mary grew up in the small village of Dirleton, situated eighteen miles east of Edinburgh. In 1799, when she was 21, she was a star in the matrimonial whirl of London and Edinburgh, with her impeccable pedigree and enormous fortune.[98] The Elgins were married on 11 March 1799, and in the same year they departed for Costantinople where Elgin was nominated as British Ambassador, in response to the current political situation in which British Empire found itself at the time. After serving in diplomatic postings to Vienna, Brussels, and Berlin, Elgin was named *Ambassador Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Sublime Porte of the Turkish Sultan at Constantinople*.[99] For much of the 1790s, England lived in fear of invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte. Sultan Selim III was enraged by Napoleon's threats in the Mediterranean and he forged an alliance with the British government, while George III was on the British throne. A new British ambassador was needed in Turkey, and the king's personal choice for the job was Thomas Bruce Elgin, a thirty-two-year-old Scottish diplomat and politician.[100]

Parliament's instructions to Elgin were very specific: persuade the Turks to open the Black Sea for trade, establish a postal station at Suez, get the French out of Egypt, and keep the Ottoman Empire on friendly terms with Great Britain. In 1799, Constantinople had a population of nearly 600,000 people of a very multinational profile, where the Elgins on their arrival could hear Greek, Hebrew, Italian, French, German, and various Slavic languages.[101] Athens, on the other hand, was a small town of mixed population, inhabited by Greeks, Turks, and Albanians.[102]

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96 First published in FERGUSON AND NISBET HAMILTON GRANT 1926. In addition to Lady Elgin's letters, correspondence between Elgin and members of his group that participated in the work of removing artwork from the Acropolis has also been preserved (see an overview in MICHAELIS 1871: 348–357).

97 NAGEL 2004: 9.

98 NAGEL 2004: 17.

99 JANŽEKOVIĆ 2016: 57; ELIA 2014: 2358.

100 COOK 1984: 68.

101 NAGEL 2004: 60–61.

102 SMITH 1916: 177–178; WILLIAMS 2002: 105. At that time there was barely one thousand people living in Athens. The Acropolis was largely a slum with shacks (KORRES 1994: 155; JANŽEKOVIĆ 2016: 60).



Figure 7. Lord Elgin by Anton Graff around 1788. Broomhall House, Scotland; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Bruce,_7th_Earl_of_Elgin#/media/File:7th_Earl_of_Elgin_by_Anton_Graff_around_1788.jpg



Figure 8. Portrait of Mary, Countess of Elgin by François Gérard, 1803. National Galleries of Scotland (NG 1496); https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Bruce,_7th_Earl_of_Elgin#/media/File:Mary_Nisbet.jpg

England's navy had just crushed Napoleon's forces in Egypt. and to demonstrate their gratitude the Turks regaled Elgin and his bride with unprecedented luxury. Napoleon's persistent invasions of Ottoman territory infuriated the sultan. He accordingly confiscated the French Embassy overlooking the Bosporus Strait and gave the palace to Elgin. When Lord Elgin arrived in Constantinople as the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, he requested the same courtesy that had been extended to the French ambassador. As a lucky "archaeologist" who was in the right place at the right time, he followed the practices of many other European antiquaries and collectors, seized with a fever for the ancient world of Classical Greece.[103] When Elgin arrived in Asia Minor, he dispatched a contingent of artists to significant sites to copy and make moulds of the antiquities for museums back home. He wanted permission for his artists to examine the Acropolis and sketch

[103] He was a product of his time, and as others of his rank and obligations, was deeply rooted in ideas of the civic humanism of the Enlightenment culture (WILLIAMS 2002: 104).

what they observed, but the original impulse very quickly transformed itself into an endeavour to collect and bring back famous artefacts.[104]

Elgin himself visited Athens only twice, and briefly in 1802, after the process of removing the antiquities had already been started. Due to poor climate conditions in Constantinople, Elgin suffered various unfavourable health conditions,[105] and as part of his recovery the couple decided to visit Greece. On 3 April 1802 they arrived in Athens and stayed at the English consulate. From Athens they visited Corinth, Argos and Mycenae. While in Mycenae, they visited a vaulted tomb, the present-day Treasury of Atreus. During their visit to Epidaurus Elgin received permission from the pasha of Nauplia to remove antiquities from Mycenae, Corinth, and Olympia.[106] After these fruitful art collecting ventures, the couple returned to Athens for a second time. [107] There Elgin's artists who had recently arrived to draw and record the beauties of the ancient world were now in the process of dismantling it.

The Removal of the Elgin Marbles

Although the Elgins arrived in Turkey in November 1799, his artistic team did not arrive in Athens until July 1800. It was in fact Mary's parents, who in the summer of 1800, after having spent a year in Turkey, first visited the Acropolis on their way back to England. They began to immerse themselves in their son-in-law's undertaking, and became his cultural collaborators.[108] Since Mary's parents were willing to finance Elgin's project on the Acropolis, it took on a wider scope. It was the Nisbets who funded Elgin's artists in their endeavours, as Mary's letters to her parents clearly show.[109] Who were the members of Elgin's artistic team?

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104 HURWIT 1999: 296.

105 The doctors treated him with the most popular remedy of the day – mercury. The practice of curing with mercury came from the east. It was used even for curing sexually transmitted diseases, such as syphilis. It was not known at the time that mercury could have toxic effects on the nervous, digestive, and immune systems, and on the lungs, kidneys, skin, and eyes (NAGEL 2004: 120). After about three years of having been treated with mercury, Elgin became permanently disfigured, and the doctors amputated the tip of his nose (D'ARCY WOOD 1998: 172; NAGEL 2004: 122).

106 NAGEL 2004: 128.

107 COOK 1984: 74–75.

108 NAGEL 2004: 134.

109 From Mary's letters to her family, we know that Elgin hired the Italian artist Lusieri to make drawings of antiquities he was expecting to see in the East (NAGEL 2004: 61). Mary also wrote to her parents about her husband's developed passion for ancient art (NAGEL 2004: 97). Elgin wanted the British government to fund his art collection, but his proposal was rejected, and the entire venture was financed from private sources (COOK 1984: 69; WILLIAMS 2009: 103–104; ELIA 2014: 2359).

The main actors in this play were the artist Giovanni Battista Lusieri, recommended to Elgin by Sir William Hamilton, the British minister at Naples and famous collector of ancient pottery; Elgin's private secretary, William Richard Hamilton, who hired in Italy a group of draftsmen, architects, and modellers; and the Revd. Philip Hunt, Elgin's staff chaplain and diplomatic agent,[110] who played a key role in the removal of the artefacts, by drafting a memorandum in summer of 1801, requesting permission not only to draw and model but also to erect scaffolding, dig foundations, and take away sculptures or inscriptions that were not part of the fortifications.[111] On July 9 1801 Mary wrote to her parents that they had received permission, a signed *firman* from the sultan authorising Elgin to remove marbles from the Acropolis, and the removal was undertaken with the approval of the *voivode* (civil governor of Athens) and that the *dizdar* (military commander of the Acropolis citadel). The *firman* was a well-known letter from the sultan to all local pashas with instructions to provide its bearer safe passage and any other necessities.[112] This particular *firman*, as Mary explained in a letter to her mother,[113] allowed Elgin's artists to go into the Acropolis, to copy and model everything in it, to erect scaffolds around the temple, to dig and discover all the ancient foundations, and to bring away any marbles that might be deemed valuable, and that they were not to be disturbed by the soldiers.[114] The moment of signing the *firman* coincided with crucial military and political events in the

[110] SMITH 1916: 164–177; ST. CLAIR 1998: 6–10, 20–27; ELIA 2014: 2359.

[111] ST. CLAIR 1998: 65–67, 86–88.

[112] The original Ottoman document is regularly referred to in both contemporary and modern literature as a *firman*. A large amount of interest has been taken in its precise nature and status, with various attempts to analyse the scope and purpose of this document. The word *firman* (in its many spellings when transliterated: *farman*, *ferman*, *fermaan*, *fermaun*, etc.) was used within the Ottoman court and by foreign diplomats and travellers for a wide variety of documents (WILLIAMS 2009: 8). In March 1810, another firman was obtained, authorising the second shipment of marbles from Athens to Britain (WILLIAMS 2009: 23). See WILLIAMS 2009 for legal and historical analysis of various documents issued in connection with Elgin's acquisition of antiquities.

[113] NAGEL 2004: 134. Letter from July 9 1801, see FERGUSON AND NISBET HAMILTON GRANT 1926: 97–98.

[114] The document states in part: "..that it be written and ordered that the said painters [Elgin's men] while they are occupied in entering and leaving by the gate of the Castle of the City, which is the place for their observations, in setting up scaffolding round the ancient temple of the Idols [the Parthenon], and taking moulds in lime paste (that is plaster) of the same ornaments, and visible figures, in measuring the remains of other ruined buildings, and in undertaking to excavate, according to need, the foundations to find any inscribed blocks, which may have been preserved in the rubble, be not disturbed, nor in any way impeded by the Commandant of the Castle, nor any other person, and that no one meddle with their scaffolding, and implements, which they may have made there; and should they wish to take away any pieces of stone with old inscriptions, and figures, that no opposition be made". (The Firman [translated from the Italian]; WILLIAMS 2009: 6–7).

Napoleonic Wars. Fortunately for Elgin, at this very time, in the summer of 1801, British forces in Egypt had thoroughly defeated the French. Cairo capitulated on 17 June 1801, and Elgin's *firman* was signed on 6 July.[115] And so from July 31 1801, until the middle of 1805, the Acropolis suffered the agents of Elgin. Elgin's men, led by the Italian landscape painter Giovanni Battista Lusieri and Reverend Philip Hunt, liberally interpreted a vague Turkish *firman* and with Elgin's enthusiastic if long-distance support, managed to strip the Acropolis of large quantities of its monuments. There is an open debate as to whether the document authorised Elgin's agents to remove sculptures attached to the Parthenon and other structures. The *firman* is preserved only in an Italian translation, and the original document has never been found in the Turkish archives.[116] Dyfri Williams argues that the document was "rather open ended",[117] and as Mary Beard concludes in a Solomonic manner: "No amount of poring over the text can provide the answer. As often with documents sent out from head office, the precise interpretation would rest with men carrying out the orders on the spot".[118]

Most of the Elgin Marbles are sculptures from the Parthenon, but there are also some from the Erechtheion, the Propylaea, the temple of Athena Nike and other places. From the Parthenon, Elgin took almost all the substantial pedimental figures that survived, much of the remaining north, south, and east frieze, and the best preserved metopes from the south side.[119] Marble was sawn away from

[115] WILLIAMS 2009: 67; ELIA 2014: 2359. Elgin was aware of the connection between the two events. In his testimony at public hearings on whether he had acquired the marbles legally and whether they should be purchased by the government, held by the House of Commons Select Committee in February 1816 in London, Elgin stated that "about the middle of the summer of 1801 all difficulties were removed" (MICHAELIS 1871: 348, 350; ELIA 2014: 2359). "Difficulties" include a whole range of circumstances encountered by members of Elgin's team on their arrival in Athens, that stymied their efforts to be "beneficial to the progress of the Fine Arts in Great Britain" (Elgin letter to W. R. Hamilton, 27 November 1804; ST. CLAIR 1998: 6; WILLIAMS 2009: 104): the Acropolis was a military fortress and occupied by the commander and his garrison; Ottoman political authority was divided between the local governor and the military commander, and a fee had to be paid to even gain access on the Acropolis, while approach to some monuments was strictly forbidden (ELIA 2014: 2359). All these difficulties were eventually resolved by a combination of political manoeuvring and military circumstances, but also by the method of bribery and gifts to local officials (on bribery see CLARKE 1818: 223).

[116] An Italian translation of the purported *firman* is held by the British Museum, and an English translation was submitted to the 1816 Select Committee, see footnote no. 114 (RUDENSTEIN 2000: 30; ELIA 2014: 2359).

[117] WILLIAMS 2009: 20.

[118] BEARD 2002: 91. It is not possible to list here all the legal literature dealing with the reading and legal interpretation of one's segments, words, and the nature of the *firman* itself. Such an undertaking would go beyond the scope of this article. See HITCHENS 1997; HITCHENS 2008; HERMAN 2023; TITI 2023 for an overview.

[119] BOARDMAN AND FINN 1985: 216; JANŽEKOVIĆ 2016: 57. See timeline of removals in COOK 1984: 73–78; ANGOURI, PARASKEVAIDI, WODAK 2017: 212, fig. 1; TITI 2023: 64–70.

sculpted blocks to lighten their weight for transport or to take away small pieces as exemplars.[120] The columns' capitals and many metopes and frieze slabs were either hacked off the main structure or sawn and sliced into smaller sections, causing irreparable damage to the Parthenon itself.[121] A Caryatid was removed from the Erechtheion and replaced by a column of bricks.[122] If Elgin's original impulse and interest were to provide exemplars of classical masterworks for imitation by contemporary artists, to draw, record, and model the sculptural and architectural monuments of classical Athens with the goal of improving the arts in Britain, that purpose was now thoroughly compromised and surpassed.[123] Behind the facade of the protection of cultural heritage, there lay, as always, the question of prestige, especially with such famous works of art as the Parthenon. This approach to the conservation and preservation of art today seems ruthless and casual in the extreme, but we must keep in mind that it was quite common in those days. Greece at that time was full of antiquarians and lovers of the Classics, as shown by the unusual situation in which the two most famous Greek travellers and despoilers, Lord Elgin and Charles Robert Cockerell, found themselves staying in Greece at the same time during their joint ventures to remove monuments from various classical sites. Cockerell on his way to Aegina[124] passed and boarded the ship on which Byron was sailing with Lord Elgin's marbles aboard.[125]

120 ST. CLAIR 1998: 92–110; ELIA 2014: 2359.

121 BEARD 2002: 14. As parts were taken, the building was damaged. Lusieri described these actions himself, in a letter written to Elgin: "I have, my Lord, the pleasure of announcing to you the possession of the eighth metope, that one where there is the centaur carrying off the woman. This piece has caused much trouble in all respects and I have been obliged to be a little barbarous". (SMITH 1916: 232; JENKINS 2016: 96). Similarly, since the central slab on the east side of the Panathenaic frieze, with a display of a *peplos* ceremony, was too heavy to be transported, they had planned to cut it into two, but they seem to have changed their minds before the sawing was completed and as the slab was being moved down from the building, it broke in the middle. You can still see the jagged line caused by the sawing and the breakage on the piece put on display in the British Museum (ST. CLAIR 2022: 206, 211).

122 ST. CLAIR 1998: 135; ELIA 2014: 2359.

123 COOK 1984: 68; ELIA 2014: 2358; JANŽEKOVIĆ 2016: 58.

124 Charles Robert Cockerell was an English architect, archaeologist and writer, who during his travels in Greece took part in the 1811 removal of the temple of Aphaia's pedimental sculptures on Aegina and the 1812 removal of the Bassae frieze (AYRTON 1961: XI–XIII); described in his travel journals, published in 1903 (COCKERELL 1903). Elgin's boat *Hydra* crossed paths with Cockerell's boat as two "islands in the stream" in Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton hit song from 1983.

125 AYRTON 1961: XII; VRANOPOULOS 1985: chapter 4. On Byron a being passenger on *Hydra* see below.

The Transfer of the Marbles from Greece to London

Between 1800 and 1825, more than two dozen ships transferred the material to England, including privately contracted carriers and British naval vessels. The removal and transport of the pediment sculptures, metopes, and friezes from the Parthenon resulted in loads of material that most sea captains were unwilling to deal with. They were so heavy that naval officers refused to haul them on board. Lord Nelson for that reason told Elgin to use his own ship, the *Mentor*, which Elgin had constructed from Mary's money and placed at the British navy's disposal for the Napoleonic wars. [126] Besides his own brig *Mentor*, Elgin also used Royal Navy vessels, and it was Mary who often negotiated with naval captains and supervised the packing of as many cases as could possibly fit on board.[127]

Mentor *Shipwreck*

The ship *Mentor*, whose building was financed by Elgin was destined to transport 17 cases of material taken from the Acropolis from the Athenian port of Piraeus to London via Malta, which was under British control at the time.[128] The *Mentor* departed from Piraeus on 15 September 1802. The ship was supposed to travel through the straits between Crete and the Peloponnese towards Malta, then through the straits of Gibraltar and along the western coast of Europe towards its final destination – London. Unfortunately, she encountered bad weather and strong northwest winds. As soon as the ship passed Cape Tainaron she started leaking, so the captain William Eglen, decided to turn back to the island of Kythera, located roughly half way between the Peloponnese and the island of Crete, trying to find shelter. The captain was aiming to reach the natural, well protected harbour of Avlemonas on the southern side of Kythera. However, the winds pushed the vessel forcefully towards the coast and crushed it against the rocks at St Nicolo Ba, causing disastrous damage.[129] It was probably the heavy load on board the ship

126 SMITH 1916: 197–98, 231–252; ELIA 2014: 2359.

127 For example, as the artists began dismantling the caryatids, a column arrived from Corinth which Mary managed to get on captain's Hoste's ship too. She wrote to Elgin: "I am now satisfied of what I always thought; which is how much more women can do if they set about it, than men. Had you been here you would not have got half so much on board as I have". (NAGEL 2004: 139).

128 The *Mentor* contained 14 sections of the Parthenon frieze, four pieces of the frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike, and many other marbles, including an ancient throne, which had been given to the parents of Mary Nisbet by the Archbishop of Athens (ST. CLAIRE 1998: 116, with the ship manifesto which preserved for us a list of transferred antiquities; LEONTSINIS 2010: 255, footnote 1).

129 BOHSTROM 2016; LEONTSINIS 2023: 35; BONELOU, TOURTAS, MICHAIL, KOURKOUMELIS 2024: 1.

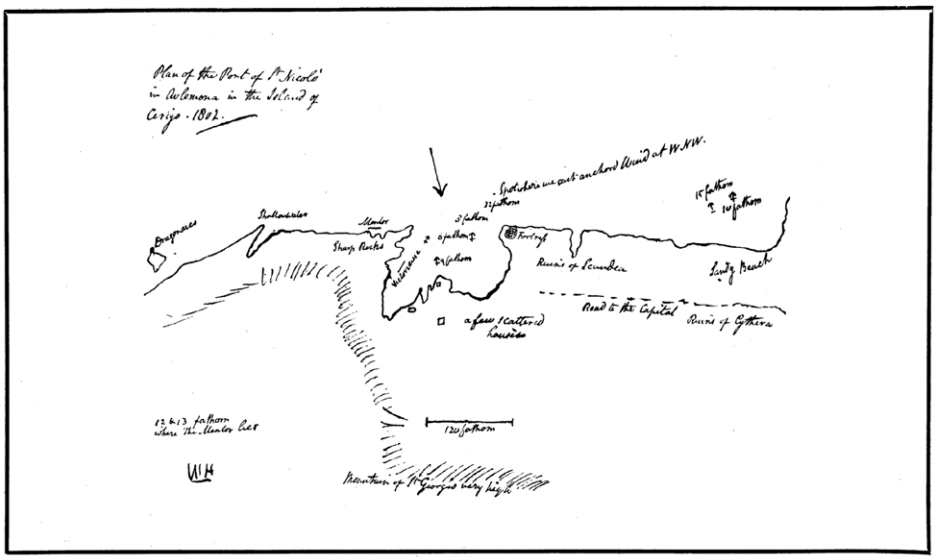


Fig. 6.—Sketch-plan of S. Nikolo Bay. (By W. R. Hamilton, 1802.)

Figure 9. Diagram of the sinking sketched by William Richard Hamilton. (SMITH 1916: 242; fig. 6).

that prevented the captain from manoeuvring around these rocks. The *Mentor* sank on 17 September 1802, only two days after departing from Piraeus.[130] The latest underwater investigation revealed that a part of the ship's bow had broken off, likely due to the impact against the rocks as she went down. Six members of the crew and six passengers were rescued by a nearby boat, but the *Mentor* and her cargo sank to a depth of 22 metres.[131]

In October 1802, Elgin wrote a letter to Emmanuel Kaloutsis, a British vice consul on the Greek island of Kythera referring to the sunken ship *Mentor*. Elgin wrote: "She [*Mentor*] had onboard a quantity of boxes with stones of no value themselves, but of great consequence for me to rescue…".[132] Captain Eglen started

[130] LEONTSINIS 2010: 256; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2014: 5; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a: 191. On 25 October 1802 Mary Nisbet, wrote a letter to her mother: "Dearest Mother, Our minds are so occupied with a sad piece of news we have received, we can think and talk of nothing else. Our ship the '*Mentor*' going from Athens to Malta laden with a quantity of our Athens antiquities… is gone to the bottom, attempting to get into the harbour of Cerigo".

[131] KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a: 191. Elgin's private secretary, William Hamilton, who had overseen the loading of the *Mentor*, was on board when the brig sank and he prepared a sketch of the site of the shipwreck to assist with salvage efforts (VARDAS 2022; see Εικ. 1 in KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a: 192).

[132] BONELOU, TOURTAS, MICHAIL, KOURKOUMELIS 2024: 1. Lord Elgin's "stones of no value" letter can be seen in VARDAS 2022.

to organize, under the orders of Lord Elgin, the salvage of the ship's load. After two years of salvage operations, the divers retrieved the entire load of the ship, including the Parthenon marbles. The initial salvage operation was performed by sponge divers from the Greek island of Kalymnos of the coast of Asia Minor who happened to reside on Kythera at the time. They managed to bring to the surface several cases with marbles.[133] On 24 October 1804 Giovanni Battista Lusieri sent Elgin a letter saying: "I have the satisfaction to inform you that at last all the marbles from the *Mentor* have been recovered, and we have good reason to rejoice, for they all deserve to be jealously guarded".[134] The cases with marbles rescued from the *Mentor* shipwreck were first transported to Malta. On 16 February 1805 aboard the ship *The Lady Shaw Stewart* the cargo was shipped to London, as approved by Lord Nelson himself.[135]

The Recovery Attempts of the Mentor *Shipwreck*

Almost three quarters of a century after this event, in 1875, the *Mentor* shipwreck became the first underwater site to be investigated by the Greek Archaeological Service. This investigation was undertaken due to rumours circulating at the time that there were still precious antiquities at the site that had not been salvaged. It is worth mentioning that these rumours remained current until recently, when more systematic research endeavours began at the site. Every now and then, people would report that they had seen antiquities in the water attracting illegitimate underwater explorers to investigate the site.[136] Famous French underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau and the crew of his underwater vessel *Calypso* visited the site in 1976 during their expedition to ancient shipwrecks by the island of Antikythera.[137] In the 19th and 21st centuries, there were several underwater investigations on the wreck, which aimed at discovering further marbles. In 2009, directed by the Greek Ministry of Culture, a new systematic recovery of the remaining cargo began.[138] More recent underwater investigations were undertaken with the support of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation and the John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation. During the three seasons of excavation in 2011–2013, the team discovered a large section of the surviving hull, which was largely damaged during previous salvage attempts. In total, the section of the hull that has been excavated so far measures 10.5 × 5.75 m and includes part of the prow and part of the keel that constitute

133 LEONTSINIS 2010: 256; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2014: 5.

134 LEONTSINIS 2010: 255; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a: 192–193.

135 SMITH 1916: 218; ST. CLAIR 1998: 116; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a: 194.

136 FARDOULIS 2012: 32; VARDAS 2014: 39; VARDAS 2022.

137 KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a: 195.

138 KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2014; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a.

almost a quarter of the whole vessel. Some of these parts are well preserved, providing evidence for the construction of the frames. At the stern of the ship, the team also excavated an area, about 3 × 3.5 m, of stones that most probably constituted the ballast of the ship. Among these stones they recovered many personal belongings of the passengers. On that basis, this part of the hull has been interpreted as the ship's accommodation spaces for both the officers and passengers.[139]

Overall, the assemblage of artefacts discovered so far can be classified into five categories: 1. objects that are related to the navigation and equipment of the ship; 2. objects that are related to the life on board and the ornamentation of the ship; 3. the armament of the ship; 4. personal belongings of the passengers and crew; and 5. objects that possibly relate to the cargo.[140] The fact that the cargo ship *Mentor* did not only carry bulky loads but also heavy armament indicates the political instability in the eastern Mediterranean during the period in question. All these finds provide us with new insights into not only the organisation and life on board ships of the period, but also the personalities of both the passengers and crew of *Mentor* and their involvement in the stripping and transportation of the Parthenon marbles.[141] As far as the cargo-related objects are concerned, very little seems to survive. In 2009, the team found nine slates with embedded fossils that seem to have been part of the cargo, while two fragments of Egyptian marble reliefs were found in 2013. These may indicate that, in addition to the Elgin Marbles, other types of antiquities were also being carried, but it cannot be confirmed whether these were part of Elgin's collection.[142]

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[139] FARDOULIS 2011: 26–29; ZERVOS 2015: 14–15; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2014; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018b.

[140] The first category includes the ship's compass, part of an hourglass, and calipers that were all used in navigation. The second category includes a large amount of glassware (vessels, drinking cups, and bottles), porcelain vessels that were used by both the passengers and crew, along with glass decorations for chandeliers. The ship's cannons were not found, and they are likely to have been retrieved during the 1802 salvage. The team did find, however, iron cannon shot, three pistols, and a large number of lead bullets and flints for weapons, constituting the third category of finds. The finds in the particularly interesting fourth category include a portable inkpot that could have belonged to distinguished passengers; a seal depicting a cannon on wheels, the most probable owner of which seems to have been the officer of artillery. There was also a number of coins of both Ottoman and western European origin, such as a gold coin that dates to 1788 from Utrecht in the Netherlands and a Spanish gold coin dating to 1755 (Ferdinand VI); and some ancient coins, of which the most interesting are two silver coins (one Boeotian and one Athenian). The hole in the Athenian coin may indicate that the object was used as a charm. (KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018b; BONELOU, TOURTAS, MICHAIL, KOURKOUMELIS 2024).

[141] SAKELLARAKIS 2013: 195; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018a: 195–203; KOURKOUMELIS AND TOURTAS 2018b; VARVARRIGOU 2020; LEONTSINIS 2023; BONELOU, TOURTAS, MICHAIL, KOURKOUMELIS 2024.

[142] The Egyptian fragments could quite possibly have been picked up in Alexandria by the ship's crew before its ill-fated voyage or from the Athens antiquities market. Or they could have been part of another Elgin collecting venture or have belonged to some of the other passengers on the ship (VARDAS 2014: 39).

The Elgins Return to England

On 23 September 1802, Elgin received a note from the government that he could return to England. On 17 January 1803, the Elgin family boarded the *Diane* and left Constantinople for good. All together they had spent three years and two months there.[143] Their next stop while sailing back home was Malta. There Elgin decided to change their plans, and instead of rushing back home they chose to travel through Italy and France. This tour had been inaccessible to English travellers for a decade, but now it became possible thanks to the 1802 Treaty of Amiens with Napoleon.[144] Elgin and Mary travelled to Naples and Rome, then to Livorno from where they crossed the Alps into France. Tension, however, was growing between England and France. As the Elgins were touring France, Napoleon began seizing British ships in French waters and confiscating their contents. On 17 May 1803, the British government ordered the detention of French ships in British waters, and on the following day it declared war. Approximately 1,400 Englishmen who had been traveling or stationed in France at the time were then prohibited from leaving France. Mary wrote to her parents that on 27 May 1803, Elgin surrendered himself as a *Prisonnier de Guerre*.[145] He did not return to England until June 1806. Elgin was now also faced with financial distress. He had asked the British Parliament for his salary to continue, but the government denied his request, claiming that he had travelled to France on his own, independent of his official service. Before Elgin left for Turkey, the British Parliament made it clear to Elgin that his archaeological program was to be privately funded.[146] Elgin used to spend lavishly, hosting an average of 60 people for dinner (consisting of British staff, servants, and military visitors) and keeping an orchestra for their entertainment. He also had borrowed heavily for building the ship *Mentor*, his excuse being that it was indispensable to the Royal Navy. The salvage operation of the *Mentor* alone cost over 5,000 pounds.[147] The period of their imprisonment in France Elgin also perceived as an antique buying opportunity, as the revolution caused tremendous hardship for the nobility.

143 NAGEL 2004: 147.

144 NAGEL 2004: 149.

145 Napoleon singled out about twenty VIP captives, mostly those with noble titles or political positions, whom he held for various kinds of ransom. Elgin was amongst them, for he was both an aristocrat and had a very high political profile as an ex-ambassador to Constantinople. These VIP prisoners were allowed to live luxuriously in Paris until Napoleon decided their fate (NAGEL 2004: 150–151).

146 See footnote no. 109.

147 SMITH 1916: 310; ELIA 2014: 2360; JANŽEKOVIĆ 2016: 66. Estimated costs of the excavation and removal of marbles for Elgin run up as high to a personal cost of 74,240 pounds (£6,790,090.02 in 2025, see £74,240 in 1812 → 2025 | UK Inflation Calculator).

From the French Elgin bought vases, furniture, some 54 old master paintings, and cases of French wine.[148]

On 5 June 1806, after the end of the Napoleonic Wars and the resolution of his political imprisonment, Lord Elgin arrived in London. During his imprisonment in Paris, the private conflicts of the Elgin couple, along with the financial burden of Elgin's enormous costs in financing the delivery of Greek antiquities, contributed to the dissolution of the marriage. On the 11th of March 1808 the divorce was finalised.[149] The trial resulted in a Pyrrhic victory: Elgin lost hold of Mary's money,[150] and Mary, then 30 years old, lost her children, because Elgin got full custody. Elgin also lost his political esteem.[151] Elgin and Mary achieved an unsurpassed archaeological coup, and if the Elgins had not proceeded with their divorce, there is no doubt that the Acropolis marbles would have remained in the private hands of the Bruce family. Without Mary's fortune, however, Elgin was unable to sustain paying the mounting costs of excavating, shipping, storing, and paying duties on the marbles, and in dire financial straits, he was forced in 1816 to sell the collection to the British government, which exhibited it in the British Museum in London. When he died in Paris on 14 November 1841, he left his family with 120,000 pounds in debt.[152]

The Arrival of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum

As the marbles began arriving in London, a home had to be found for them. In December 1804, Elgin had written to his friend Sir William Hamilton instruct-

148 NAGEL 2004: 197.

149 NAGEL 2004: 225. After returning to Britain, Elgin accused his wife of having an affair with Robert Ferguson, one of his oldest friends. In December 1807, Elgin successfully sued Ferguson for seduction in the English courts and was awarded 10,000 pounds in damages. The divorce action against Mary was brought in Edinburgh in 1808 on grounds of adultery, and the marriage was formally dissolved by a private act of Parliament. The court cases were widely reported and caused considerable public scandal (ST. CLAIR 1998: 145–146; D'ARCY WOOD 1998: 176).

150 Here is an illustration of her fortune. After her father's death in 1822, Mary inherited his vast estate. At that time, a man was considered a gentleman if he had an income of 150 pounds over year. Mary's estate around 1850 had an annual income of 40,000 pounds, which would today equal approximately 400 million US dollars. If there was one positive aspect of the devastation caused by Napoleon, it was the growing prosperity in Scotland that resulted from the need for clothing, food, coal, lime, and tobacco for the troops and for European countries that imported these goods (NAGEL 2004: 238).

151 NAGEL 2004: 223. Elgin lost his seat in the House of Lords in 1807, and the resumption of a military or diplomatic career was ruled out by the terms of his parole in France (ST. CLAIR 1998: 147–149, 180; WILLIAMS 2009: 151).

152 Elgin was deeply in debt due to the costs associated with his embassy, his procurement of the Elgin marbles, and his court actions. He virtually retired from public life (JANŽEKOVIĆ 2016: 66).

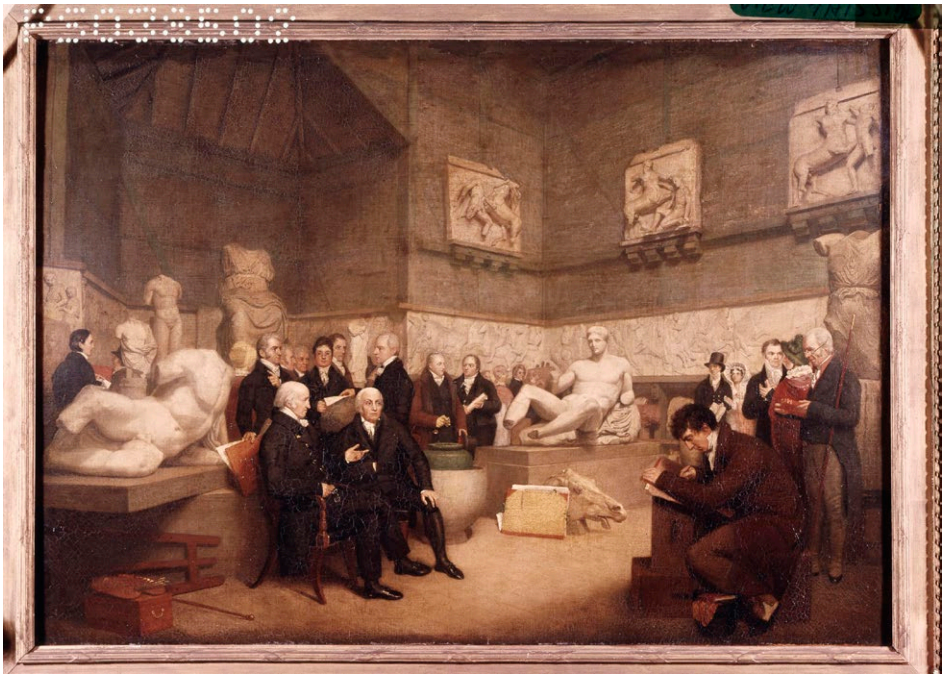


Figure 10. The Parthenon Sculptures in London: The temporary Elgin Room at the British Museum. Oil on canvas painting by Archibald Archer, 1819. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

ing him to find a spectacular town house in London where he would display the collection of the Parthenon marbles. Hamilton made discreet enquiries and suggested Buckingham House, later the core of Buckingham Palace, but the idea fell through.[153] Through the connections of his mother, Elgin was later able to display the marbles for the first time in 1807 in a specially constructed building (in reality a shed) in the grounds of the enormous and imposing Gloucester House on Green Park, a historic building at 137 Piccadilly, London, on the corner of Old Park Lane.[154] The sculptures remained in the dirty and damp shed on the grounds of the Park Lane House for years, decaying in London's humid climate. In 1811, Elgin offered the marbles to the British government for about 60,000

[153] NAGEL 2004: 200.

[154] NAGEL 2004: 200; WILLIAMS 2009: 161; TITI 2023: 91. The cases were opened, and his hard-won treasures were exhibited from June 1807 to almost universal acclaim (JENKINS 2016: 102). Visitors included the artists Flaxman, Wilkie, Haydon, Fuseli, West and Lawrence. Benjamin West spent hours sketching the marbles and wrote to Elgin, praising him warmly for bringing them to London (COOK 1984: 81).

pounds, but his offer was rejected as too expensive.[155] Meanwhile, in 1811 he had to move them from the Park Lane House, and the sculptures were then placed in a coal shed in the yard of the Duke of Devonshire's Burlington House.[156] Elgin procured testimonials from Ennio Quirino Visconti, director of the Louvre, and Antonio Canova of the Vatican Museums, who affirmed the high artistic value of the marbles.[157] He again offered in 1815 his collection to the nation, this time at the price of 73,600 pounds and after a parliamentary committee was set up in February 1816 to assess the value of the sculptures, the marbles were finally sold to the British government. After hearing testimony by Elgin and his associates, as well as by artists, sculptors, and connoisseurs, the committee upheld both Elgin's authority to acquire the marbles and their outstanding value as artistic masterpieces. The parliamentary committee's final report was debated in the House of Commons on June 7, 1816 and was passed by 83 votes to 30. It set a price of 35,000 pounds for the marbles, and although this was a disappointing figure for Elgin, he could do nothing but accept it.[158] And so by a vote of Parliament, the collection, to be known as "The Elgin Collection", was vested in perpetuity to the trustees of the British Museum.[159] The collection includes, from the Parthenon, 15 of the 92 metopes, 17 pedimental figures, and 247 ft of the original 524 ft of the Ionic frieze; from the Erechtheion, a Caryatid, a column, and other architectural pieces; four slabs of the frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike; and architectural pieces from the same temple and from the Propylaia.[160]

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155 This was not the first offer to sell the marbles to the government. An offer was previously even extended to Mary, while Elgin was still in France, to sell their marble collection to the British government, but at that point no arrangement could be settled, because it was impossible to estimate its cost (NAGEL 2004: 201).

156 VRANOPOULOS 1985; ELIA 2014: 2360; KING 2006: 279–280. Accounts of the state of the marbles at Burlington House at around this time show that they were in a sorry state (TITI 2023: 92). Artist Benjamin Robert Haydon wrote in his diary in May 1815: "I came home from the Elgin Marbles melancholy. I almost wish the French had them; we do not deserve such productions. There they lie, covered with dust, dripping with damp ... I sat amidst the ruins of Athens this evening, piled on each other as if shaken by an earthquake". (HAYDON 1960: 439, 441).

157 See letters in VISCONTI 1816; ST. CLAIR 1998: 220–228.

158 VRANOPOULOS 1985; ST. CLAIR 1998: 250–260; ELIA 2014: 2360.

159 SMITH 1916: 294–351; ST. CLAIR 1998: 245–260; ELIA 2014: 2360. The transfer of the sculptures from Burlington House to the British Museum began at once. At first, they were housed in a temporary gallery built in the Museum grounds and opened in January 1817 (see Figure 14). In 1831 a permanent gallery was built for the marbles, known as the Elgin Room. In 1928 Sir Joseph (later Lord) Duveen built a much larger gallery for the sculptures at his own expense, completed in 1938, known as the Duveen Gallery. The Duveen Gallery was badly damaged in Second World War, but was rebuilt and extended, and reopened in 1949 (VRANOPOULOS 1985).

160 List taken verbatim from ELIA 2014: 2360, who in 2014 could view the inventory on British Museum website. The same practice could not be repeated in 2025.

Controversies and Debates about the Elgin Marbles

The first public display of the Parthenon sculptures in 1807, in the above-mentioned shed behind Elgin's house at the corner of Park Lane, apparently instantly attracted public interest. For example, a famous actress of the time, Mrs Siddons, shed a histrionic tear when she first saw them,[161] and the British poet John Keats wrote a sonnet entitled *On Seeing the Elgin Marbles*, when he visited the sculptures in 1817, just after they had been moved to the British Museum.[162] The sculptor John Flaxman thought them superior to "the treasures of Italy".[163] The artist Benjamin Robert Haydon was so thrilled by the sight of them that he said: "I shall never forget the heads of the horses, their feet on the frieze. Divine art lit my mind. I understood that those sculptures would awake European art from its deep slumber. The sight of the sculptures, together with the thought that the eyes of Socrates and Plato had seen them, fascinated me. I felt I was conquered by a passion to understand the depth of the divine art of the Greeks".[164] Goethe is said to have celebrated the British government's decision to purchase the Parthenon collection from Elgin, foreseeing that they would herald "a new age of great art".[165] A celebrated anecdote holds that Elgin requested from the well-known Italian sculptor Antonio Canova that he restore some of the sculptures. Canova apparently turned him down, saying that it would be a sacrilege for any man to touch them with a chisel.[166] While *fama volat*, the fame of the collection also grew, and the Greek marbles exerted not only a considerable influence on the art and architecture of the time,[167] but they also entered the sphere of the popular domain, and suddenly there were advertisements in *The Times* of a hairdresser announcing a new ladies' hair style inspired by the Parthenon figures.[168] Of course there is

[161] BEARD 2002: 16. Said to have been moved to tears by the pedimental figures then known as the Three Fates (COOK 1984: 80).

[162] HERINGMAN 1998: 43; ESTERHAMMER 2009: 30.

[163] Quoted in ST. CLAIR 1998: 164. John Flaxman, the leading British sculptor, a pupil of Canova in the Neo-classical style of sculpture, immediately declared them to be 'very far superior' to all the Roman sculpture he had seen in Italy, that is to the Roman copies of Greek works in museums and private collections that had until then been the touchstone of correct taste (COOK 1984: 81; KING 2006: 279; JENKINS 2016: 102–104).

[164] Quoted in VRANOPOULOS 1985: chapter 4.

[165] BEARD 2002: 16. Quoted in GRAEPLER 2005: 302: "Für die Einsicht in höhere bildende Kunst begann dieses Jahr eine neue Epoche, Tag- und Jahresheften" zum Jahr 1818.

[166] BEARD 2002: 16; CASEY 2008.

[167] Churches, public buildings, and even private homes were built in the Greek classical style. A typical example is the St. Pancras parish church in London with its Caryatids and antiquarian copying of classical details (VRANOPOULOS 1985: chapter 4; see GALLO 2009). See also FEHLMANN 2007 for an overview of several ambitious attempts to reconstruct the Parthenon in London, Cambridge and elsewhere, upon the arrival of the Elgin Marbles in Britain.

[168] Advertisement published in *Times*, January 8, 1814; quoted in VRANOPOULOS 1985: chapter 4.



Figure 11. George Cruikshank The Elgin Marbles! or John Bull buying stones at the time his numerous family want bread!!, The British Museum 1868,0808.12833; © The Trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

another side. For a large section of the British public, the Marbles were simply a "parcel of old broken stones",[169] an opportunity to ridicule the lofty and incomprehensible pretensions of the upper classes of English society, as caricatures in the British media of the time clearly show.[170]

The movement of the marbles from Athens to London created numerous debates. In 1806, American statesman and financier Biddle declared that taking away the Parthenon marbles metaphorically looked like robbing Athens of heart and soul.[171] Biddle furthermore caustically declared that Elgin should have drowned with the

[169] MEMORANDUM on the Earl of Elgin's Pursuits in Greece, 3rd ed. (London: John Murray), 1815: 2.

[170] Cartoon by George Cruikshank *The Elgin Marbles! or John Bull buying stones at the time his numerous family want bread!!*, an etching created around 1816. Cruikshank's print reflects the contentious acquisition of the Elgin Marbles, seen on the left. The cartoon serves as sharp criticism of the British government, embodied as John Bull, prioritizing art acquisition – the stones – over the welfare of its people during economic hardship (HERINGMAN 1998: 45, 60–61).

[171] WOODHOUSE 1979: 21–22; MCNEAL 1993: 72.

marbles when the ship *Mentor*, transporting a portion of them, sank by the island of Kythera.[172] In Britain, the acquisition of the collection was supported by some, while others likened Elgin's actions to vandalism or looting.[173] Those in favour of Elgin's undertaking simplified it in this way: Elgin's reason for collecting the artefacts was that he had an intellectual and romantic passion for these timeless treasures. He felt that by bringing the great works of art to Britain, he was rescuing history, and instead of leaving them to wither and disintegrate, uncared for, he was serving mankind. His intent was to make these great works of art available to artists and educators, and in a sense to become a messenger of time. That was certainly an overtly idealistic and romantic notion.[174] But opposition was immediate. Contemporaries, such as Lord Byron, expressed horror that these beautiful treasures had been torn from their homeland.[175] Fuelled by a certain amount of personal animosity, Lord Byron deplored that Elgin had ruined Athens and that "the honour of England" was not "advanced by plunder, whether of India or Attica".[176]

The same controversy continues today. On one side, there is the ongoing never-ending debate about the legality of Elgin's acquisition, and on the other side, there are persistent and numerous demands from the Greek government for the return of the stolen artworks. It is a war waged in the political, social, and media space, the complexity of which cannot be expressed on these pages. Those arguing for the marbles' return cite legal, moral, cultural, conservation, and artistic grounds, while a range of arguments has been presented by scholars, British political leaders, and the British Museum for the retention of the Elgin Marbles in London. As Stefanou succinctly concludes: "The Parthenon marbles have gained twofold significance,

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172 NAGEL 2004: 140.

173 BEARD 2002: 11–15; CASEY 2008. ST. CLAIR 1984: 193 describes an anecdote that on a wall in a chapel on the Acropolis a traveller (DODWELL, Classical Tour, I, 353) saw the following carved inscription: "Quod non fecerunt Gothi, hoc fecerunt Scoti" (What the Goths did not do, the Scots did here) – an obvious reference to Elgin who was a Scotsman (VRANOPULOS 1985: Chapter 6).

174 NAGEL 2004: 142.

175 In 1811 Byron published the poem *The Curse of Minerva* in which he denounced Elgin's removal of the Parthenon sculptures. Lord Byron was actually on board the warship *Hydra* in 1811, as a passenger with Lusieri, which sailed for Malta carrying the last load of Lord Elgin's plunder. It was on this voyage that Lord Byron was apparently inspired to write his poem *The Curse of Minerva* (VRANOPOULOS 1985: chapter 3). Byron also denounced Elgin as a vandal in his narrative poem *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, published in 1812, where he wrote in relation to the Parthenon:
"Dull is the eye that will not weep to see
Thy walls defaced, thy mouldering shrines removed
By British hands, which it had best behoved
To guard those relics ne'er to be restored.
Curst be the hour when from their isle they roved,
And once again thy hapless bosom gored,
And snatch'd thy shrinking gods to northern climes abhorred!" (BYRON 1980).

176 JENKINS 2016: 103; BYRON: 1980: 100–101.

as pieces that encompass the glory of Classical Greece and as perhaps the most famous case related to the issue of repatriation of material culture up to now".[177] For some, and especially for modern Greece, the Elgin Marbles have become a universal symbol of injustice, and it is quite clear why they are used as an easy and convenient narrative stereotype to characterize conflict, intrigue, and animosity in various media productions, as for example in the popular British TV series *Inspector Morse*, where a sentence denouncing Lord Elgin as an archetypal enemy of the Greeks, clearly showcases the cultural differences between the two nations and illustrates the feeling of disillusionment in British characters lost not only in Greek culture but also in the Greek language.

Building of the Acropolis Museum

In 1834 the Acropolis formally ceased to be a medieval fortress and became an official archaeological site. That is when ambitious efforts began to preserve and protect the antiquities scattered on the rock after numerous ravages of time and historical events. After the foundation of the modern Greek state, efforts began to restore the Parthenon, based on a programme drawn up by the architect Leo von Klenze in 1834. Parts of the side walls were restored in 1842–1844, as were the two columns on the north side.[178] In 1898–1902 and again in 1922–1933, extensive restoration work was undertaken by Nikolaos Balanos giving the monument its present form.[179] These restorations were praised for their architectural virtues, but were poorly executed and harmful to the material because of the thoughtless use of iron. The rusting and consequent expansion of iron elements caused cracks in the marble and accelerated other phenomena of decay.[180] In 1981 the temple was struck by a major earthquake, after which the surviving sculptures were moved to the Museum. All modern iron clamps were removed.[181]

When it comes to preserving any ancient site, it becomes clear very quickly that the preservation of antiquities requires a museum to be built nearby, and the authorities began searching for a proper location for that museum. In 1863 it was decided to establish the museum in a hollow in the ground southeast of the Parthenon. This was the old Acropolis museum founded in 1865, completed in 1874.[182]

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177 STEFANOU 2014: 5819.

178 MANNONI 2021.

179 LAMBRINOU 2010: 63, 72.

180 KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 16. See BOURAS 1994 for detailed analysis of the restoration work on Parthenon and changing attitudes towards the conservation of monuments.

181 KORRES, PANETSOS, SEKI 1999: 17; LAMBRINOU 2010: 66.

182 PANDERMALIS, ELEFTHERATOU, VLAS 2015: 9. It was designed by architect Panagis Kalkos. In 1950s it was expanded to a modern design executed by Patroklos Karantinos, a Greek modernist architect (BROUSKARI 1974).

When in 1975 the *Committee for the Conservation of the Acropolis Monuments* (ESMA) was founded with a mission of systematic restoration and preservation of the Acropolis antiquities, one of the main tasks of the new organization was the construction of a new museum, and the construction of this new museum is closely inspired and related to the story of the Elgin Marbles.[183] Namely, it is well known that every year millions of people visit the British Museum in London to see the Parthenon marbles,[184] whose removal from Athens, as we have seen, has caused intense and emotional international debate.[185] A principal argument of the British government against returning the so-called Elgin Marbles to Greece was that the museum was too small and insufficient. In brief, the British position was that Athens in general did not have an adequate museum where Elgin's marbles could be properly exhibited, as they are now exhibited in the British Museum in London. The Greek response was resolute: we will then build a new and spacious museum to exhibit antiquities from the Acropolis, this time not on the Acropolis, for it was already too crowded with ancient structures. In 2000, after long debates it was decided to build a new Acropolis Museum on the south side of the Acropolis, at a distance of some 300 metres from its monuments, by the southeastern slope of the Acropolis hill, on the ancient road that led up to the "sacred rock" in classical times.[186] The museum foundations were laid in June 2004, and the museum opening took place on 20 June 2009. The exhibition area of this new Acropolis museum is 14,000 m^2 spread across 6 floors. When viewed from outside we notice that, compared to the lower floors, the top floor of the museum is deliberately rotated in order to assume a position parallel to the Parthenon visible on the rock above it. This top floor is a rectangular hall featuring the proportions of the Parthenon, with a space of 3,200 m^2.[187] Across it are the columns that hold the museum ceiling; their positions imitate the positions of the Parthenon's columns. Above them, in a weathered yellowish condition, are metopes that escaped Elgin's removal to England, and in white are the gypsum casts of those metopes that had been taken away. This striking colour contrast of the two groups of metopes conveys an unequivocal visual message of what is expected to be returned from London to Athens. Through the use of highly transparent glass panels, a visual connection is created between the museum exhibits

183 See manifest and programme on ESMA – YSMA.

184 RAZZALL 2023 gives four million people as number of visitors to the British Museum in 2022.

185 To simplify: the Greek government would like the sculptures back; the British government argues that they received them and fairly paid for them, as well as rescued them from disintegration (NAGEL 2004: 1–2).

186 After several failed architectural competitions to design a new museum, in 1976, 1979 and 1989, the fourth competition in 2000 went with Bernard Tschumi's winning proposal (LENDING 2009: 571).

187 TSCHUMI, PANDERMALIS, AESOPOS, RUTTEN 2009.

and the Parthenon itself.[188] In the new display of Caryatids, exhibited on a low base, with all five statues positioned in the Π-shaped arrangement that they had assumed when originally inserted into the south porch of the Erechtheion in the late fifth century BC,[189] the negative space left between two Caryatids denounces the marked absence of Caryatid C, guarding the space for the "missing" sister which is currently in the British Museum.

Conclusion

That visual connection transcends the meaning that the Parthenon still has in the consciousness of the average person today. In addition to the visual message that clearly calls for the return of displaced monuments, the contrast between the original monuments and the plaster casts points to another peculiarity that the Parthenon as an icon contains within itself. The Parthenon functions as "an eternal model of plastic perfection in which the quintessence of architecture as an art is innate".[190] For centuries, the Parthenon has been celebrated as one of the most impressive and important buildings in the world. Poets, architects, and scholars have visited it, studied it, and written about it.[191] It is a Greek temple that is in almost every aspect atypical and special, but which, due to its importance, became the prototype of the standard, ideal Greek temple. Numerous artists, architects, and sculptors have used the Parthenon as their focal inspiration. The Elgin Marbles have likewise become preferred models for academic training in the fine arts. Plaster casts of the marbles were in high demand and were distributed to museums, private collectors, and heads of state throughout the world.[192] We are often unaware that we walk in a world deeply imbued with the influences that the Parthenon, as the ideal of a Greek temple and a symbol of the golden age of Athens, has left in our everyday lives.[193] As an example, at the end of this article, we will mention the role and influence that the plaster casts of the Parthenon frieze and the metopes had on the architecture of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb. Acquired in 1892[194] through the

188 LENDING 2009: 572; STEFANOU 2014: 5822. See an interview by Frédéric Migayrou with Bernard Tschumi in PARAYRE AND MIREUX 2014: 13.

189 BERESFORD 2016: 3.

190 KONDARATOS 1994: 20.

191 FERRARI 2006: 5.

192 JENKINS 1990: 89; GETALDIĆ 2013: 3.

193 LENDING 2024.

194 Elgin Marbles were purchased by order of the Department of Worship and Education (hrv. Odjela za bogoštovlje i nastavu) no. 7816 dated 9th July 1892 from the firm of modellers and sculptors D. Brucciani et Comp. in London (VHAD 1896: 241; BAUER 1948: 4; BILIĆ 2008: 441; MATIJAŠKO 2009: 38).

reformist efforts of Isidor Kršnjavi, as the crown jewels of his *Collection of plaster casts*,[195] today they adorn the corridors of the first floor of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, in the new building erected in 1961,[196] fulfilling their dual decorative and didactic role.[197] The same role that Lord Elgin intended for them to fulfil when he went to Constantinople in 1799 and in the following years "accidentally" stripped the Acropolis.

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[195] See GETALDIĆ 2021: 7–23; GETALDIĆ 2024 for the history of Kršnjavi's collection.

[196] The building on today's Ivana Lučića Street was designed by architect Božidar Tušek and completed in 1961. (AGIČIĆ 1998: 19; MATIJAŠKO 2009: 54).

[197] MATIJAŠKO 2009: 56–59.

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Partenon – ogoljeni hram

U članku se donosi pregled najslavnijih i najvažnijih nedaća koje su zadesile slavni Partenon, od antike do danas, preispitujući arheološke, literarne i medijske tragove sudbine atenskog hrama, posvećenog zaštitnici grada, božici Ateni. Osobit je naglasak stavljen na djelovanje Lorda Elgina u sklopu dopremanja znatne količine izvornog materijala u London početkom 19. stoljeća. Najveća pozornost posvećena je kronologiji zbivanja tijekom kojih su dijelovi Partenona skinuti s izvornog mjesta i dopremljeni u Britanski muzej, kao i načinu na koji se odvijala doprema Elginovih mramora i nesretna sudbina broda *Mentor*. Ogoljavanje Partenona nastoji se protumačiti u odnosu na ranija promišljanja o Partenonu kontekstualizirajući njegovu gradnju, fizička obilježja, uporabu i različite modalitete njegove kasnije namjene. Članak, osim priče o putovanju partenonskih skulptura Europom, donosi i informacije o osebujnim likovima i njihovim osebujnim životnim pričama, koji su „počistili" Grčku tijekom turske vlasti. Također se osvrće i na ulogu koju je Partenon odigrao u modernoj percepciji i recepciji antike, postavši modelom idealnog i „tipičnog" grčkog hrama, iako je, u svojoj biti, sve samo ne-uobičajen i tipičan primjer grčke arhitekture.

Ključne riječi: Partenon, Akropola, Periklo, Lord Elgin, Elginovi mramori, brodolom Mentor

Key words: Parthenon, Acropolis, Perikles, Lord Elgin, Elgin marbles, *Mentor* shipwreck

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RADOVI ZAVODA ZA HRVATSKU POVIJEST FILOZOFSKOGA FAKULTETA SVEUČILIŠTA U ZAGREBU

Knjiga 57, broj 1

Izdavač / Publisher
Zavod za hrvatsku povijest
Sveučilište u Zagrebu
Filozofski fakultet, Odsjek za povijest
FF press

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Časopis izlazi jedanput godišnje / The Journal is published once a year
Časopis je u digitalnom obliku dostupan na / The Journal in digital form is accessible at: Portal znanstvenih časopisa Republike Hrvatske „Hrčak“ http://hrcak.srce.hr/radovi-zhp

Financijska potpora za tisak časopisa / The journal is published with the financial support by:
Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa Republike Hrvatske

Časopis je indeksiran u sljedećim bazama / The Journal is indexed in the following databases:
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Naslovna stranica / Title page by
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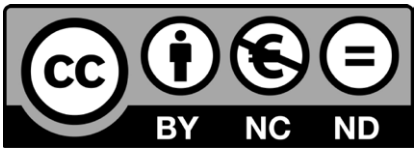
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Ilustracija na naslovnici
Muza Klio (Alexander S. Murray, *Manual of Mythology*, London 1898)

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