



# Parthenon Sculptures

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## Why in News?

Greece and the UK had a diplomatic dispute regarding the Parthenon Sculptures at the British Museum **when Athens accused London of avoiding discussion on the contested sculptures, also known as the Elgin Marbles.**

- Despite **Greece's repeated requests** for their permanent return, Britain and the British Museum have consistently refused.

## What are the Parthenon Sculptures?

### ▪ About

- The Parthenon Sculptures housed at the British Museum are a **collection of over 30 ancient stone sculptures from Greece**, dating back more than 2,000 years.
- Originally adorning the walls and grounds of the Parthenon temple on the Acropolis hill in Athens, these artifacts are **significant remnants of Athens' Golden Age**, with the temple's construction completed in 432 BC.
- Dedicated to the **goddess Athena**, the Parthenon is a symbol of cultural and historical importance.

### ▪ Artistic Depictions and Cultural Significance:

- Among the sculptures, a notable piece **spanning 75 meters** portrays a procession celebrating the **birthday of Athena**. Additionally, other sculptures **within the collection depict various gods, heroes, and mythical creatures**.
- The intricate craftsmanship and historical context make these sculptures not only artistic treasures but **also integral pieces of Greece's cultural heritage**.

### ▪ Arrival to Britain:

- They were removed from the Parthenon in the early 19th century by **Thomas Bruce, the 7th Earl of Elgin** and then-British ambassador to the **Ottoman Empire**. The marbles were taken to Britain and purchased by the British Museum in 1816.

### ▪ Controversies Regarding the Sculptures:

- The British Museum, **servicing as the custodian of the sculptures**, asserts that Elgin legally acquired them through a contract with the Ottoman Empire.
- While **Athens accuses Elgin of theft**, he claimed to have had permission. Unfortunately, **the original permission letter is lost**, leaving the authenticity of his claim in dispute.

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## Ottoman Empire

### ▪ Historical Overview, Rise and Expansion:

- The Ottoman Empire, founded in the **late 13<sup>th</sup> century by Osman I**, began as a small Anatolian state and gradually expanded its territory through military conquests.
- Under the leadership of Mehmed II, the Ottomans captured Constantinople in 1453, marking the end of the Byzantine Empire. The empire reached its peak during the **16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries** under Suleiman the Magnificent, controlling a vast territory spanning three continents: Europe, Asia, and Africa.

### ▪ Administrative Structure and Cultural Legacy:

- The Ottoman Empire was known for its sophisticated administrative system, with a centralized government **headed by the Sultan**.
- The Ottoman legal system, **known as the "kanun,"** and the use of the Turkish language further contributed to the empire's cultural influence.

### ▪ Decline and Dissolution:

- The Ottoman Empire faced a gradual decline starting in the **late 17<sup>th</sup> century**, marked by military defeats, internal strife, and economic challenges.
- The 19th century saw a series of reforms **known as the Tanzimat** aimed at modernizing the empire, but it struggled to keep pace with the rapidly changing global landscape.
- The empire's **involvement in World War I** on the side of the Central Powers led to its defeat and subsequent partitioning by the victorious Allies. The Republic of Turkey, **led by Mustafa Kemal**, emerged from the ashes of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, marking the end of its six-century-long existence.

## UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question (PYQ)

**Q. In which of the following relief sculpture inscriptions is 'Ranyo Ashoka' (King Ashoka) mentioned along with the stone portrait of Ashoka? (2019)**

- (a) Kanganahalli
- (b) Sanchi
- (c) Shahbazgarhi
- (d) Sohgaoura

**Ans: (a)**

PDF Reference URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/parthenon-sculptures>

