

# Greeks lose their marbles

**Athens, January 2001**

The Greek government is spearheading an international campaign to have 253 marble sculptures, that once decorated the Parthenon in Athens, returned by the 2004 Olympics.

In the early 1800s, British diplomat Lord Elgin removed these artefacts from the goddess Athena's temple and took them back to Britain. Elgin was Britain's ambassador to the Ottoman Empire which ruled Greece at the time. The British claim they should keep the sculptures at their London Museum because Elgin purchased them from the Ottomans. Britain even knows them as the Elgin Marbles. The Greeks - who refer to them as the Parthenon Marbles - claim they were stolen.

The Marbles (*one shown at right*) have been referred to as the national symbol of Greece, symbolising the Greek contribution to world cultural heritage. The Greek Foreign Minister has suggested the two countries share ownership, provided they are eventually returned to their original location. The British government replied by stating they are free for anyone in the world to see in their museum.

The grand ruins of the Parthenon is somewhat of a museum itself perched atop the steep, rocky hill in Athens known as the Acropolis. It was from this commanding highpoint that the ancient Greeks operated a natural fort and lookout for invaders at their seaport. The Parthenon took 15 years to complete - a short time considering its architectural mastery.

During its long history, the temple was made a Christian church in 450 AD and a Catholic church by the occupying Franks in 1204. When the Turks arrived in 1458 they converted the structure into a mosque and actually built Turkish houses around it. Years later in 1687, a Venetian general bombarded the Acropolis despite knowing that the Turks were storing gunpowder there. The result was a huge explosion which destroyed much of the Parthenon.



**Use the information above and any reference below to answer the following questions:**

1. For which goddess was the Parthenon temple built?

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2. Why do the Greeks want the Marbles returned to Athens?

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3. Why do the British say they should keep them at their London Museum?

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4. What do you think should be done with the Marbles? Give reasons for your answer.

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**References:** SOSE Alive 1, pp60-61 • Jacaranda SOSE 1 2E, pp62-63 • Jacaranda SOSE: Ancient History, p99  
 Retroactive 1 2E, pp62-63 • SOSE for Queensland 1, p101 • [www.museum-security.org/elginmarbles.html](http://www.museum-security.org/elginmarbles.html)