

ELGIN MARBLES FACT SHEET

- The name refers to all the marble sculptures brought back to England by Lord Elgin, the majority, and most famous, being from the Parthenon.
- The works date from mid to late C5 BC.
- Many of the Parthenon marbles were damaged, destroyed or removed centuries before Lord Elgin was born - both when the building was converted into a church in around 450-500 AD and when it was converted into a mosque in the fifteenth century.
- The greatest damage occurred on 26 September 1687, when the Turks were using the Parthenon as a gunpowder store. A Venetian attack caused a great explosion, which ripped out the centre of the temple, bringing the frieze down with it. Looting followed this.
- Elgin became British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire in 1799.
- He obtained an agreement (a *firman* - a letter of instruction) from the ruling Turks that casts and drawings could be made of ancient monuments. A group of architects, draughtsmen, artists and moulders set to work in 1800.
- A second firman in 1801 instructed authorities in Athens not to hinder Elgin's work, and to allow him to 'take away any pieces of stone with inscriptions or figures.' He did not purchase the marbles; the firman was granted as a favour.
- The marbles were shipped to England between 1801 and 1810.
- Financial problems meant that Elgin could not afford to donate the marbles to the nation. In 1816 negotiations were completed with the British Government, who valued the collection at £35,000. Elgin had hoped for over twice that sum.
- The Marbles were given to the Trustees of the British Museum to care for in perpetuity and they now hold the Elgin Collection under the terms of the British Museum Act (1963).
- The marbles from the Parthenon are now housed in the purpose built Duveen Gallery.
- The British Museum holds about half the surviving Parthenon sculptures. The remainder, in order of size of collection, are distributed between Athens, Paris, Copenhagen, Wurzburg, The Vatican, Vienna and Munich. The sculptural pieces still in place on the temple are gradually being removed to the New Acropolis Museum in Athens.

Information from the British Museum website:

1.2. Strictly speaking the Elgin Marbles should refer to the whole collection of stone objects acquired by Lord Elgin between 1799 and 1810, purchased for the British Museum with a grant voted by Parliament in 1816. Beside the Parthenon sculptures, there are elements from other buildings on the Acropolis and from elsewhere in Athens – not to mention other sculpture and inscriptions, acquired from other sites on both sides of the Aegean Sea. The most curious is a colossal Egyptian scarab beetle in granite, acquired in Istanbul, and on display in Room 4: Egyptian sculpture. If the term of reference were the ‘Elgin collection’ then besides objects in stone we should include those made of other materials, such as Greek vases, bronzes, jewellery, plaster casts and drawings.

The collection includes the following marble, architecture and architectural sculpture from the Acropolis:

Parthenon	247ft of the original 524ft of frieze 15 of the 92 metopes 17 pedimental figures; various pieces of architecture
Erechtheion	a Caryatid, a column and other architectural members
Propylaia	Architectural members
Temple of Athena Nike	4 slabs of the frieze and architectural members

1.3. It should be noted that besides those acquired from Lord Elgin the British Museum's collection of sculptures from the Parthenon includes fragments from the Society of Dilettanti and from the Steinhäuser, Cockerell, Inwood, Smith-Barry, Colne Park and Chatsworth collections, all of which have no connection with Elgin.

1.4 All the sculptures from the Parthenon in the British Museum are on permanent public display.

For more information see:

http://www.britishmuseum.org/about_us/news_and_press/statements/parthenon_sculptures/facts_and_figures.aspx