



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 13th 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 **16th and 17th 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 17th 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)

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