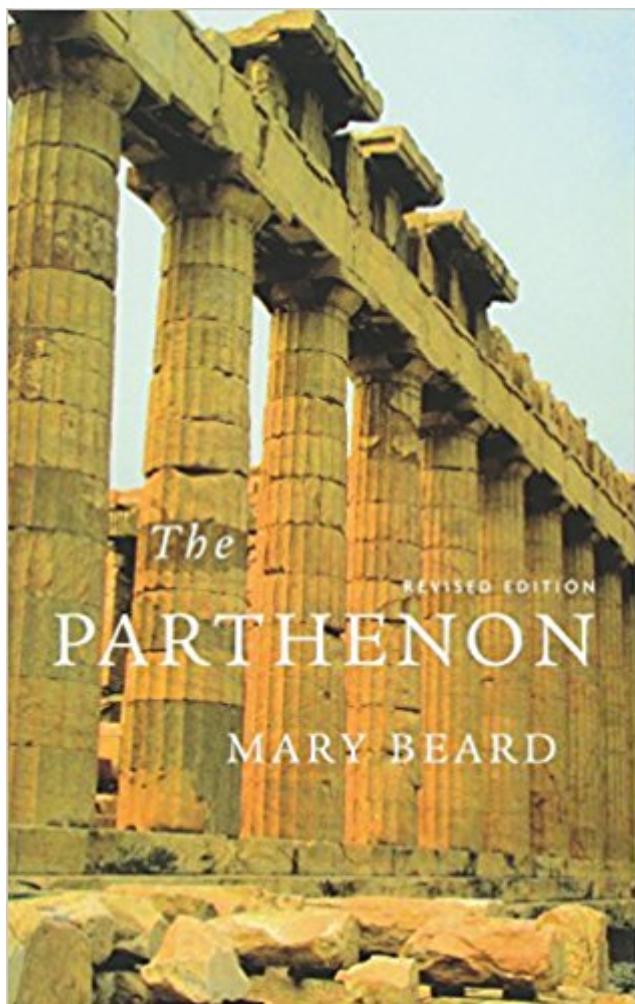


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# The Parthenon (Wonders Of The World)



## Synopsis

Praise for the previous edition: "Wry and imaginative, this gem of a book deconstructs the most famous building in Western history." — Benjamin Schwarz, *The Atlantic* "In her brief but compendious volume [Beard] says that the more we find out about this mysterious structure, the less we know. Her book is especially valuable because it is up to date on the restoration the Parthenon has been undergoing since 1986." — Gary Wills, *New York Review of Books* At once an entrancing cultural history and a congenial guide for tourists, armchair travelers, and amateur archaeologists alike, this book conducts readers through the storied past and towering presence of the most famous building in the world. In the revised version of her classic study, Mary Beard now includes the story of the long-awaited new museum opened in 2009 to display the sculptures from the building that still remain in Greece, as well as the controversies that have surrounded it, and asks whether it makes a difference to the "Elgin Marble debate."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Mary Beard has a Chair of Classics at Cambridge and is a Fellow of Newnham College. She is classics editor of *The Times Literary Supplement* and author of the blog "A Don's Life." She is also a winner of the 2008 Wolfson History Prize.

There is an old saying that one kills the thing one loves. Given the treatment meted out to some of the world's treasures, this certainly must have a grain of truth. Of course it is rare for humanity to

recognize a world treasure during its initial creation. The Mona Lisa was not the painting that it is now until the 19th century. This book on the Parthenon proves just how hard it is to win the acclaim of the world and just how many times we came close to losing it. Probably no monument has had a harder time of it than the Parthenon. It has since 5th century BC been burnt, sacked, looted, converted to a Christian Church, defaced (by Christians), turned into a mosque, defaced (by Moslems), additions added and then removed, in 1687 blown up by the Venetians. The unkindest cut of all was when Lord Elgin gathered up the 5th century sculptures and carvings and shipped them off to London where they eventually found a home at the British Museum. It is all a fascinating, if sad story of the iconic monument to the glorious 5th century of Athenian history. Mary Beard the historian of the classical age has provided an excellent synopsis of the past 2,500 years of this building's history and provides context to many of the developments which shaped its past and present. The section discussing the differences between the Athenian version of democracy (probably about 3% participating on a regular basis, much like in the early days of the US republic) and just how fleeting this concept was even as a thing exercised by elites and for elites. This is a well done addition to the "wonders of the world" series.

This is an exhaustive, fabulous treatise on one of the most venerable monuments to classical history the world has ever known. Beard takes us through the entire history of the Parthenon. She details for us its probable early use as a temple to Athena (as well as some other theories) as well as its less known utility as a Christian church and Mosque in later ages. Along the way, Beard offers us statements concerning the Parthenon from various historical and modern personages. Some are profound, some are not. Some simply advertise their ignorance (such as the not-so-venerable Shaquille O'Neal). From the vantage points of different epochs we are able to discern how the Parthenon has been seen down through the ages. Of course, no work on the Parthenon would be complete without examining the highly(!) controversial exploits of one Lord Elgin. As hoped, Beard delivers in giving a thorough description of all the forces at play in both England & Greece. She does not take a position on the issue, so her discussion of this sensitive topic is not apt to offend anyone. Then again, since she refrains from taking a position, perhaps that in itself WILL offend some people? I don't know. There is also a background section on the disastrous explosion of 1687. It was caused by the Ottoman Empire using (mis-using!) the Parthenon as an arsenal. Not surprisingly, this made it a target for the Venetians and.....you can guess the rest. What is less known is that 300 people perished when the Parthenon exploded. That's an unfortunate detail that is many times overlooked in history classes. As usual, Beard does an excellent job of giving the

whole story of what took place. If you possess an interest in the Parthenon and / or ancient Greece in general, this book is a can't miss. For anyone who wishes to tour Greece (or the British museum in London), this book is highly recommended as well. Even if you only have a passing interest in history per-se, this book will give you an avenue to enjoy the Parthenon & all of its frieze and sculptural splendor.

Like her earlier book, *The Colosseum*, this book by Mary Beard provides a good summary of the history and significance of a great old building. Also, like that book it suffers from the lack of color illustrations, but in this case the black and white illustrations are mostly of much better quality. The Parthenon has a quite fascinating and rich history: a thousand years as a pagan temple, another thousand years as a Christian church, and almost four hundred years as an Islamic mosque. It suffered both depredations and preservation under the ownership of Christians and Muslims. Like many ancient buildings, its survival to this day probably is due to its conversion to church and then mosque. Otherwise, almost certainly its valuable carvings and stonework would have been carted off wholesale long before it would have had a chance to be appreciated as an architectural treasure. Of course, much of the sculpture was carted off by various collectors, most notably the notorious Lord Elgin. But at least these ÄfÄçÄ ¨ Ä“Elgin MarblesÄfÄçÄ ¨ Ä• ended up in a safe place, the British Museum, where they are well cared for and accessible to the public. But the Greeks want them back! And the Greeks have an even better place, the new Acropolis Museum, to show the world these ancient works of art. Mary Beard covers the controversy over ownership of the Parthenon sculptures in Chapter Six of this book. Although she ÄfÄçÄ ¨ Ä„çs a Brit, she tries to take a neutral stance in this political and cultural brawl, but I sense that she favors keeping them where they are.

Good Book!

Must have book especially if you are going to Greece.

It's interesting learning about the Parthenon, even if its required for my art history class. Love how its easy to carry!

compact volume, right to the point

Simply commenting on the writing style: very well done. Follows Strunk & White's Elements of Style. Factual too. Every point is rebutted by a counter point, giving a nuanced view. I don't usually give a book five stars (see my other reviews) but this one merits it.

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