

Family Trail

# The Parthenon sculptures

6 short stories of separation



ACROPOLIS MUSEUM

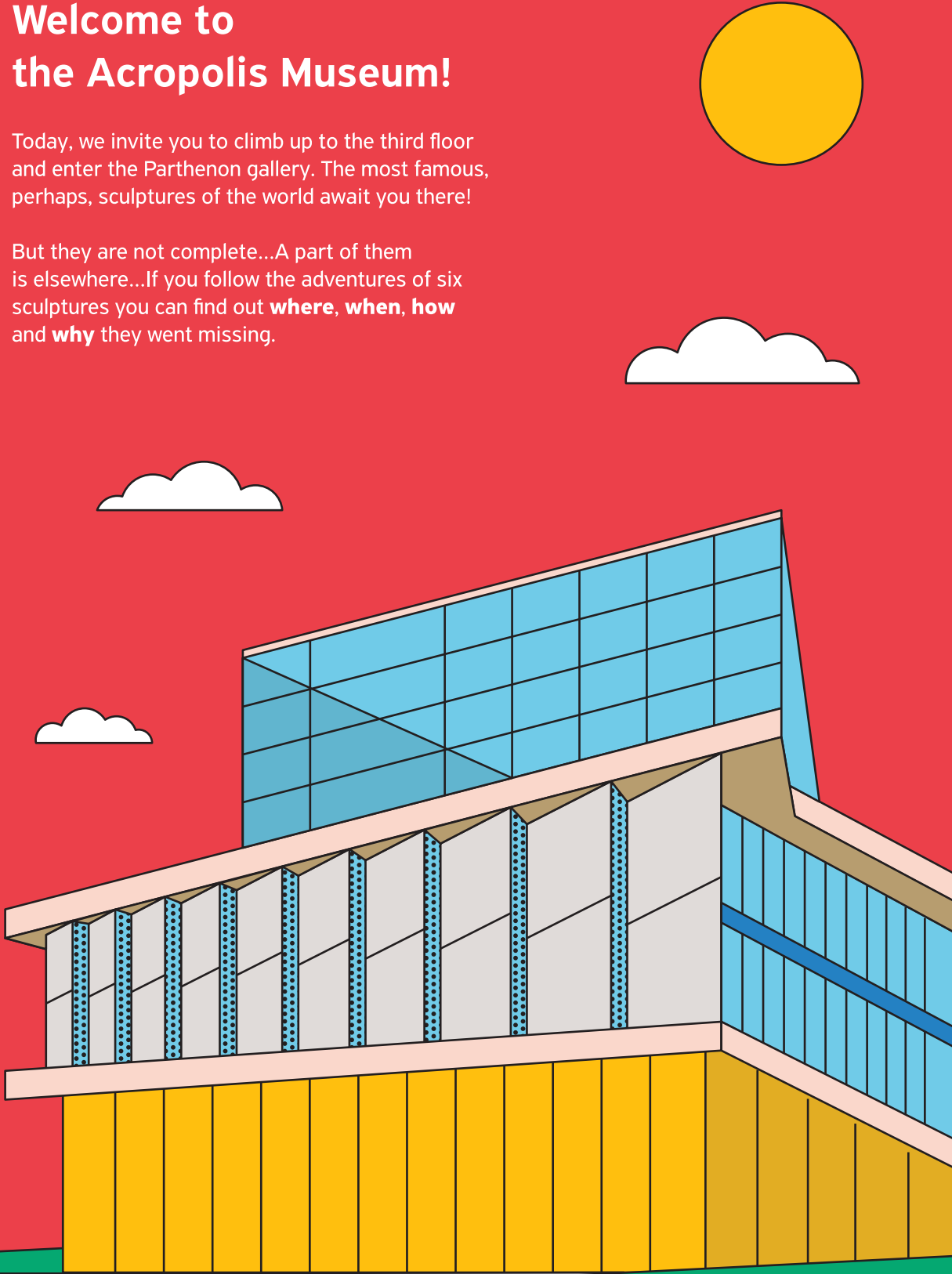
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the Acropolis Restoration Service

# Welcome to the Acropolis Museum!

Today, we invite you to climb up to the third floor and enter the Parthenon gallery. The most famous, perhaps, sculptures of the world await you there!

But they are not complete...A part of them is elsewhere...If you follow the adventures of six sculptures you can find out **where**, **when**, **how** and **why** they went missing.



# A few words about the Parthenon and its sculptures...

The Parthenon is the greatest and most famous temple on the Acropolis. It was built 2,500 years ago, in the middle of the 5th century BC, at a time when the city of Athens had acquired great power and glory.

It stands out for its perfect building structure and the magnificent sculptures that adorned it, all made by the renowned sculptor Pheidias and his pupils.

For the temple's interior, Pheidias had crafted, out of gold and ivory, the impressive statue of Athena Parthenos. No other ancient temple in Greece was so richly decorated!





# The amazing sculptures of the Parthenon decorated three different parts of the temple:

- the **pediments**, the triangular spaces formed under the temple's roof on its two narrow sides
- the **metopes**, the square panels located above the outer colonnade
- and the **frieze**, the continuous relief band that decorated the Parthenon's four sides, behind the outer colonnade

All the sculptures are carved out of white marble from the Penteli Mountain and were originally further embellished with bold colours and bronze additions.



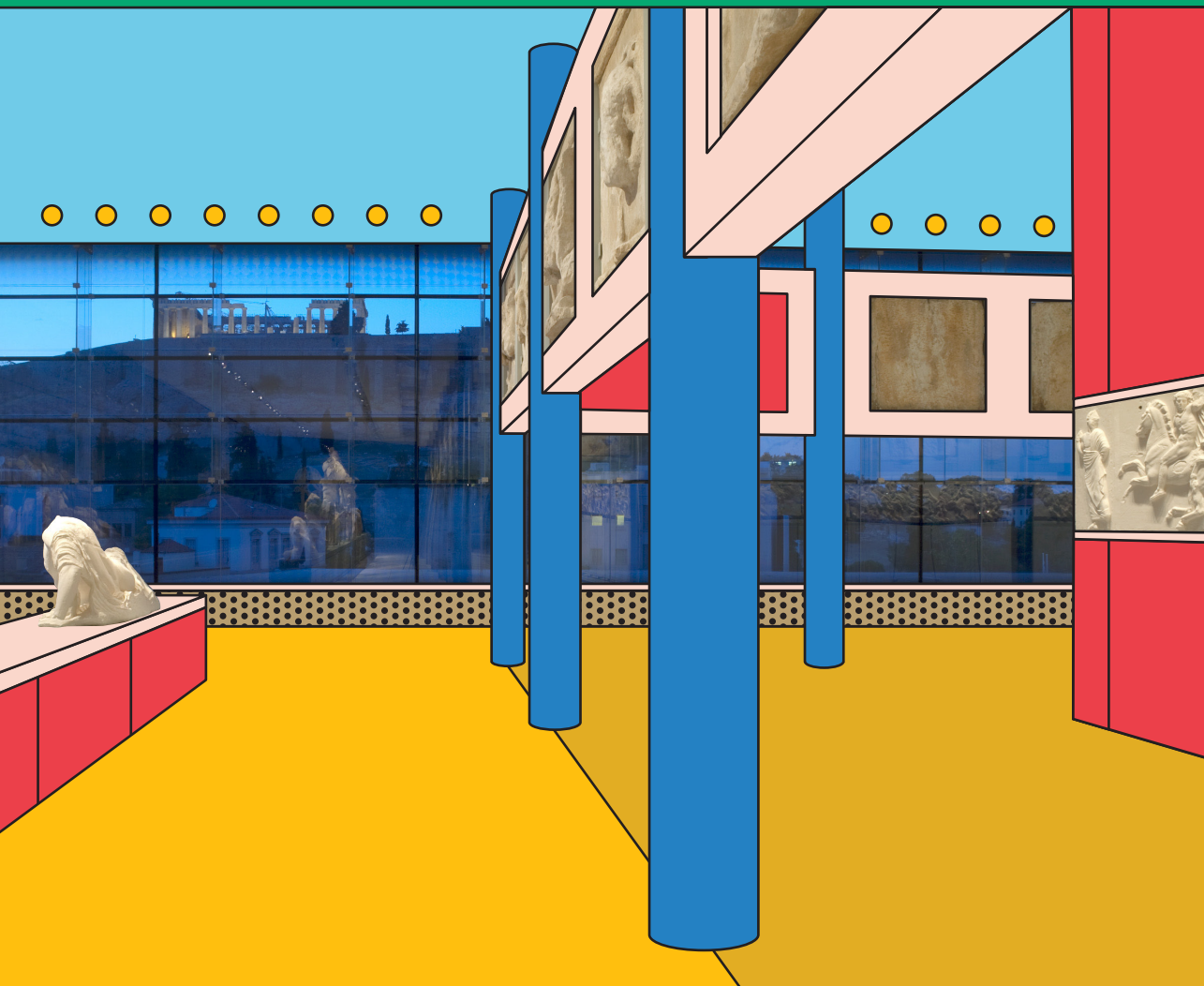
# Few words on the Parthenon's adventures

The Parthenon met many adventures through the years: earthquakes, fires, alterations, bombardments and vandalisms changed its appearance.

One of the greatest disasters occurred in 1687, when it got blown up by the Venetians and many of the sculptures were destroyed. Greece was then enslaved by the Ottomans and after the explosion many Europeans that visited the Acropolis took a small or larger sculpture that had fallen from the temple.

The gravest looting, however, happened by lord Elgin, the British Ambassador in Constantinople (Istanbul). In the years between 1801-1804 his people removed from the temple as many of the sculptures as they could.

They are those exhibited today in the British Museum in London.



# Scattering the sculptures

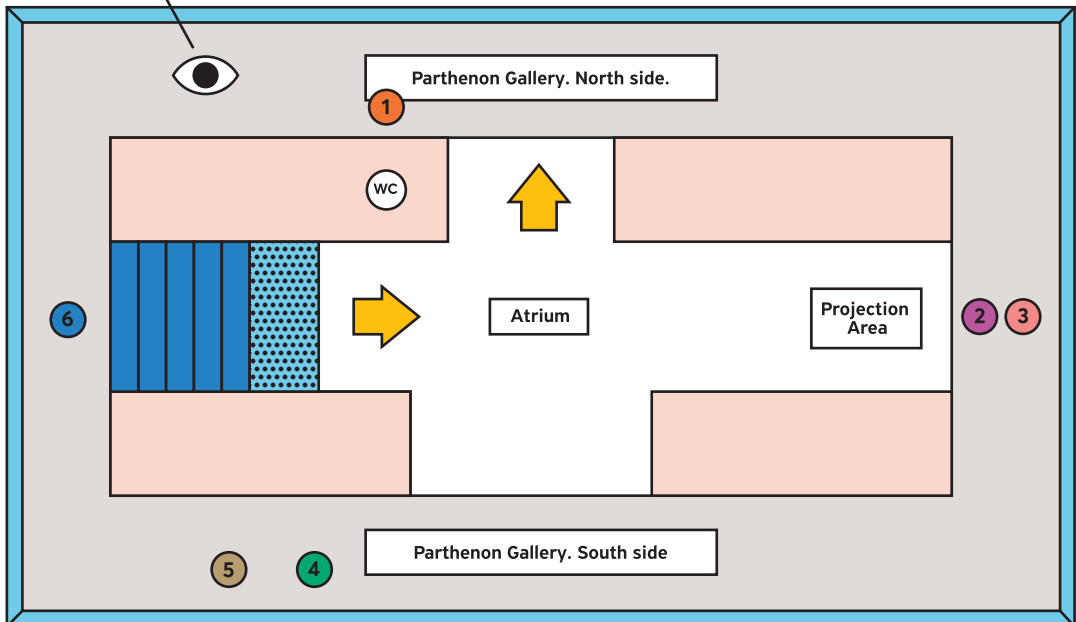
Today only 45% of the sculptures that have survived are housed in the Acropolis Museum. 5% of them has been scattered in various European museums whereas 50% of the sculptures are in the British Museum in London. Plaster copies of those have been placed in the Acropolis Museum.

## And a secret...

The Parthenon gallery in the Acropolis Museum was created especially for the temple sculptures. This room has the shape, orientation and approximately the same dimensions as the Parthenon! The sculptures are placed in the corresponding place they held on the ancient temple that today is mostly decorated with exact replicas.



You can start your journey from the north side of the gallery that faces the Acropolis Rock and the Parthenon itself. Follow the numbered route that you see on the map to locate the sculptures pictured in the brochure.



1



## Chariot race - North frieze, block XXVII (27)

You are now standing in front of the north frieze. Search for a block that is divided in two parts. Its upper section is in the British Museum and the lower one in the Acropolis Museum. Here we see a scene from the “apobates race”, an equestrian contest that took place only in Athens! It was sort of a chariot race, where young athletes in military gear called “apobates”, would jump up and down from chariots while those were speeding.

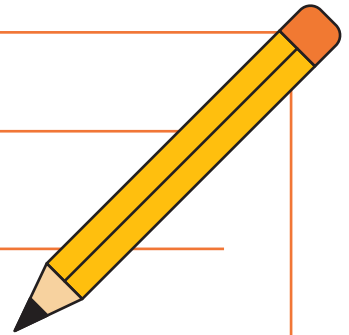
### What do we see on the frieze?

The frieze shows the Panathenaic procession. The Panathenaia was the most important celebration of ancient Athens and it was dedicated to goddess Athena. All of the Athenians -men, women and children- participate in the procession, some with horses, some with chariots and some on foot. Some carry offerings, some lead animals for a sacrifice, some play music. And, of course, the Olympian gods are also included! Overall 378 human and divine figures are pictured and more than 220 animals, mostly horses.





**Notice the apobates on the block's left side.  
Can you describe what he wears and holds?**



A rectangular writing area with a thin orange border, containing five horizontal orange lines for text entry.

2



## Goddess Iris - East frieze, block V (5)

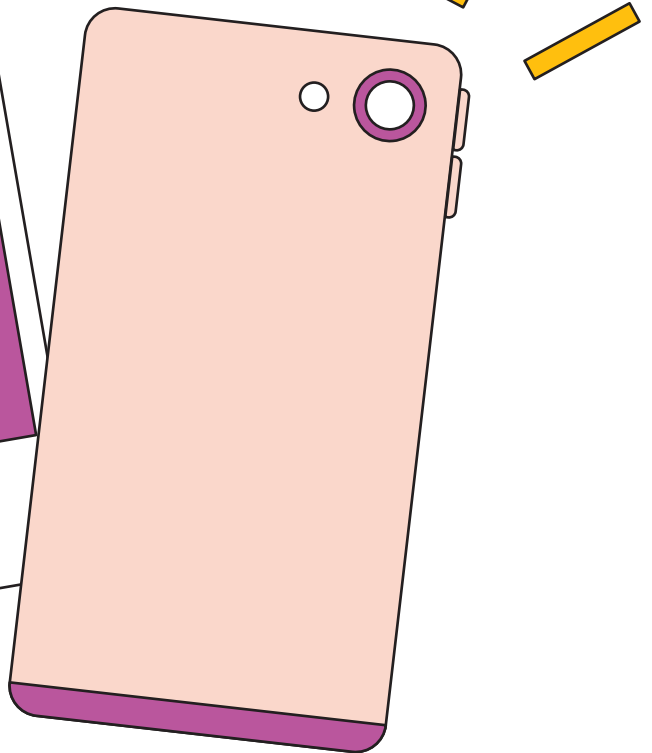
Now keep walking until you get to the east frieze. Did you find block V (5)? From this block, which is the biggest of the frieze, only the head of Iris, the winged messenger of the gods, is in the Acropolis Museum. The rest of the block is a plaster copy of the original that is located in the British Museum.

### What do we see on the east frieze?

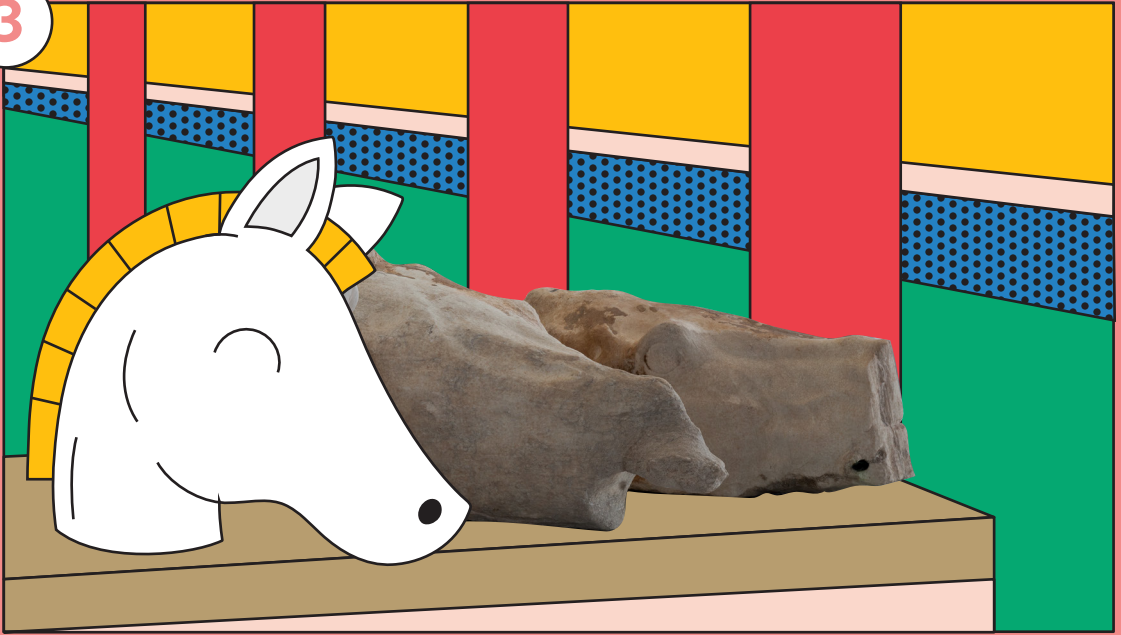
The east frieze presents the arrival of the Panathenaic procession on the Acropolis and the presentation of a gift from the Athenian people to the goddess that protected them. It is the peplos, a folded cloth that will dress Athena's wooden statue in the Erechtheion. A mature man and a young child are holding it. Behind the man, two young women carry seats with folded fabrics on their heads and are about to hand them over to Athena's priestess. The scene is framed by gods. On the right, next to the child, are Athena and Hephaistos, while on the left Zeus and Hera. Next to Hera stands Iris.



Try to imitate  
Iris posture and  
have someone  
take your photo!



3



## The chariots of Helios (Sun) and Selene (Moon)

Now, take a few steps back and stand in front of the pedestal with the statues from the east pediment. Look at the sculptures decorating the corners. On the left corner you see the horses from Helios' (Sun) chariot, as they emerge from the sea and on the right corner the horses from Selene's (Moon) chariot as they dive into the waves. Do you know what that means? That goddess Athena was born at dawn! Each chariot has four horses which makes it a quadriga.

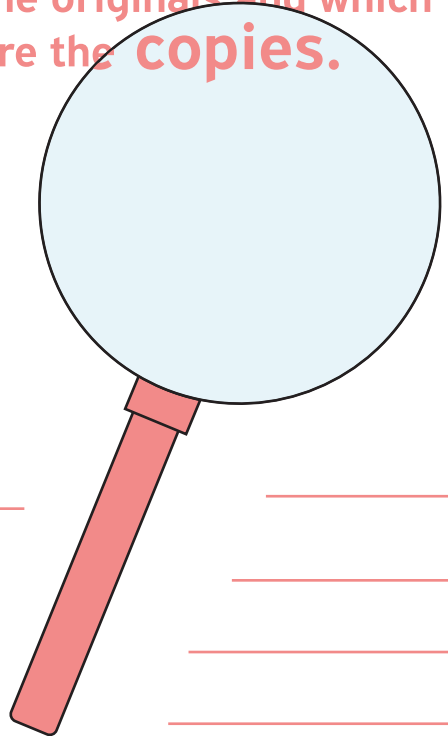
## What do we see in the east pediment?

The east pediment presents the birth of Athena from the head of her father Zeus. The birth takes place in front of all the other Olympian gods, but due to the unfortunate adventures of the temple, most statues are now lost. The Parthenon's two pediments carried 50 statues that composed scenes from the myths regarding goddess Athena. They were perfectly worked on all sides, even though the rear side was not visible.





Observe the sculptures and discover which are the originals and which are the **copies**.



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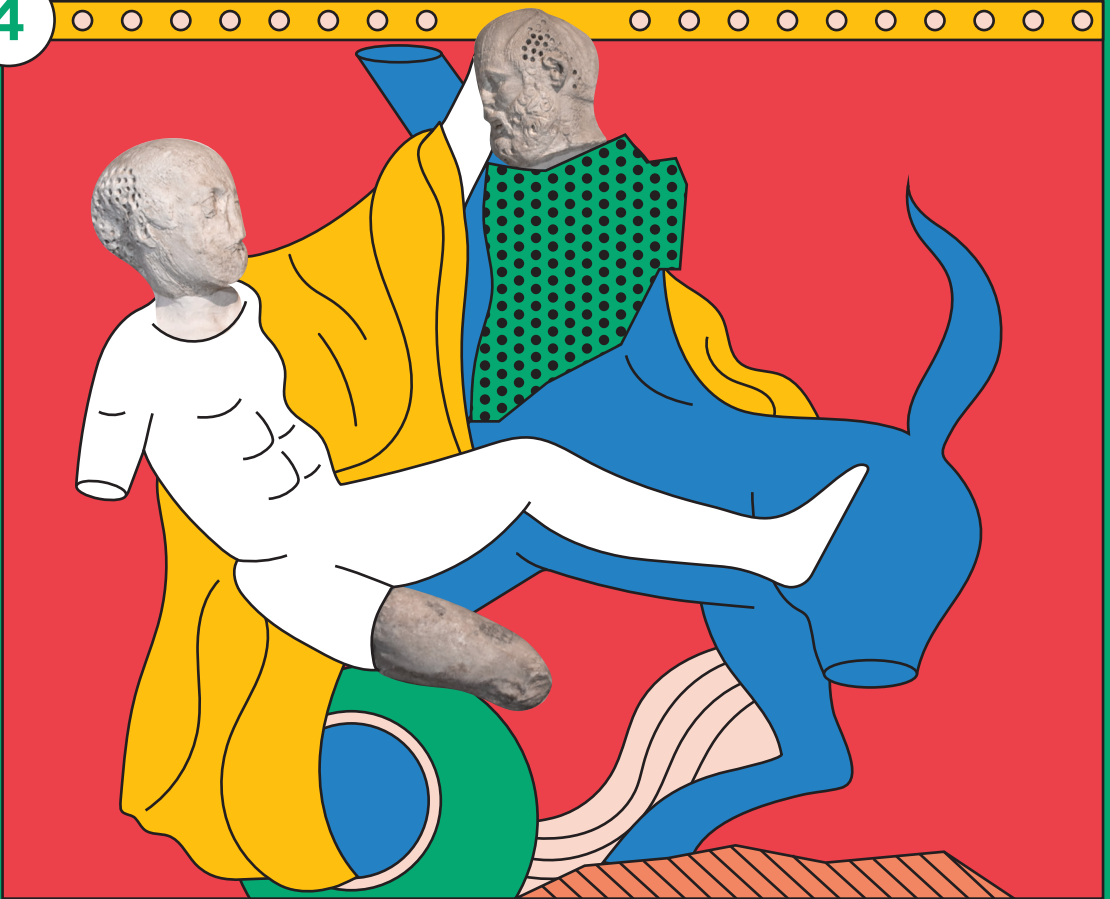
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## Centauroomachy - South metope 9

You can now continue exploring by walking to the south side of the gallery. Look upwards at the Centauroomachy metopes and keep going until you find metope 9. Here a Centaur -mythical creature with the body of a horse and the torso and head of a man- battles a Lapith. The Lapiths, legendary people that inhabited Thessaly, invited the Centaurs, to attend the wedding of their king. During the wedding feast the Centaurs became drunk and attempted to carry off the Lapith women. This resulted in battle.

### What do we see on the metopes?

The Parthenon is the only ancient temple that had relief scenes on all of its 92 metopes! The metopes, on each side of the temple, picture scenes from mythical battles: the east side has the Battle against the Giants, the west side the Battle against the Amazons, the north the Trojan War and the south side the Battle against the Centaurs.



Notice the heads of the two opponents. Along with part of the Lapith's leg, these are the only original pieces of the metope that remain in Athens. Do you see the holes on the heads? What do you think was inserted there?

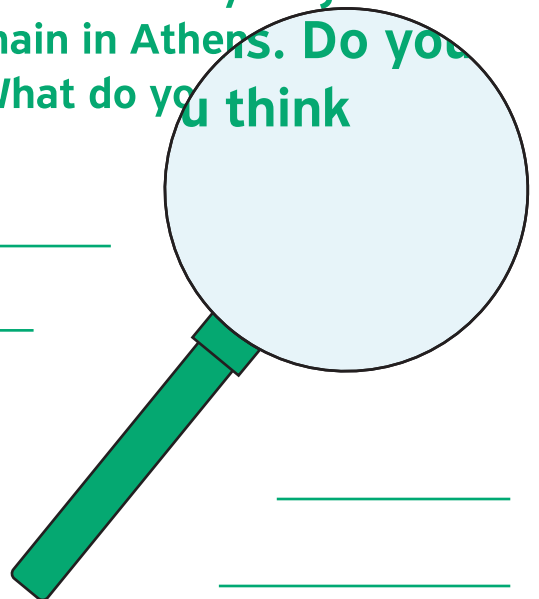
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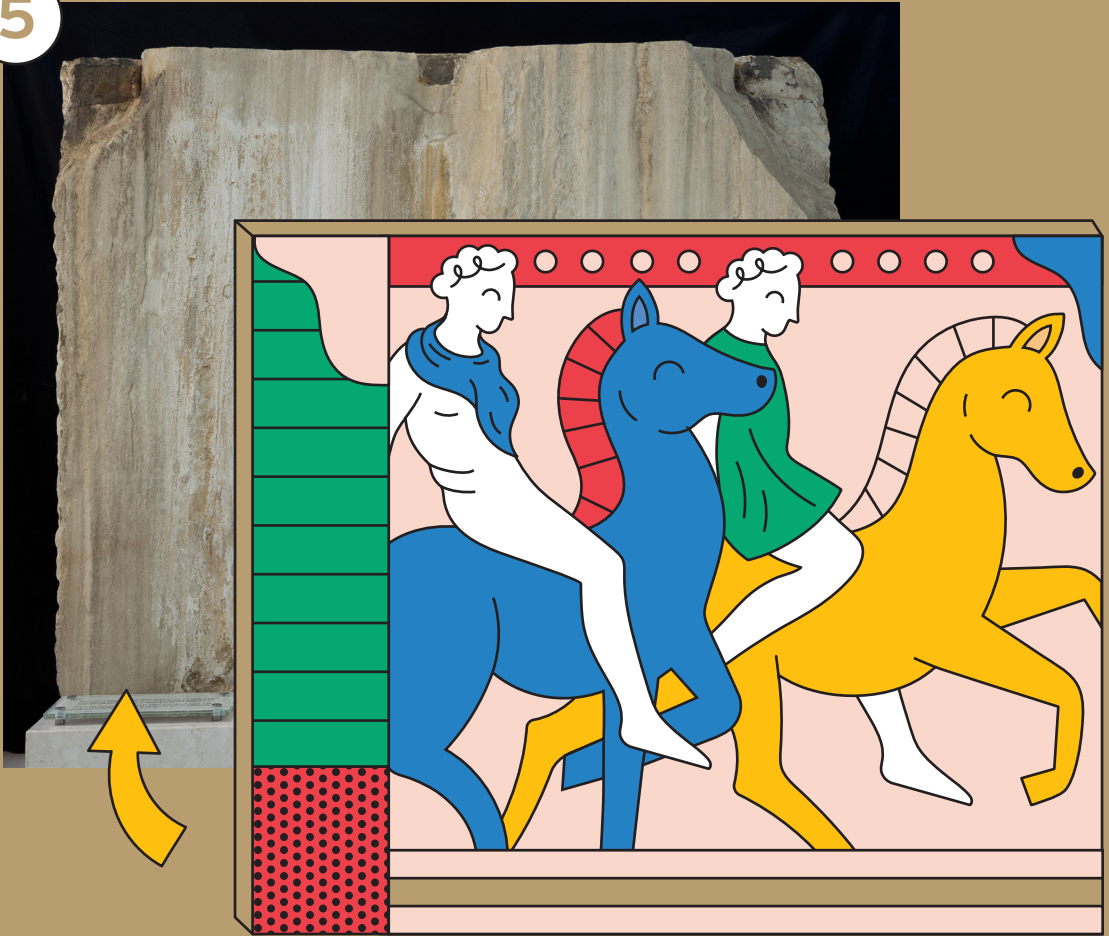
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5



### South frieze, block III (3)

Upon reaching the other end of this side you will come across a bizarre exhibit. It is the back portion of block III (3) from the south frieze that was left behind by Elgin. Using crowbars he detached the front side with the relief decoration of riders and carried it to Britain. If we could reunite the two pieces they would fit perfectly!

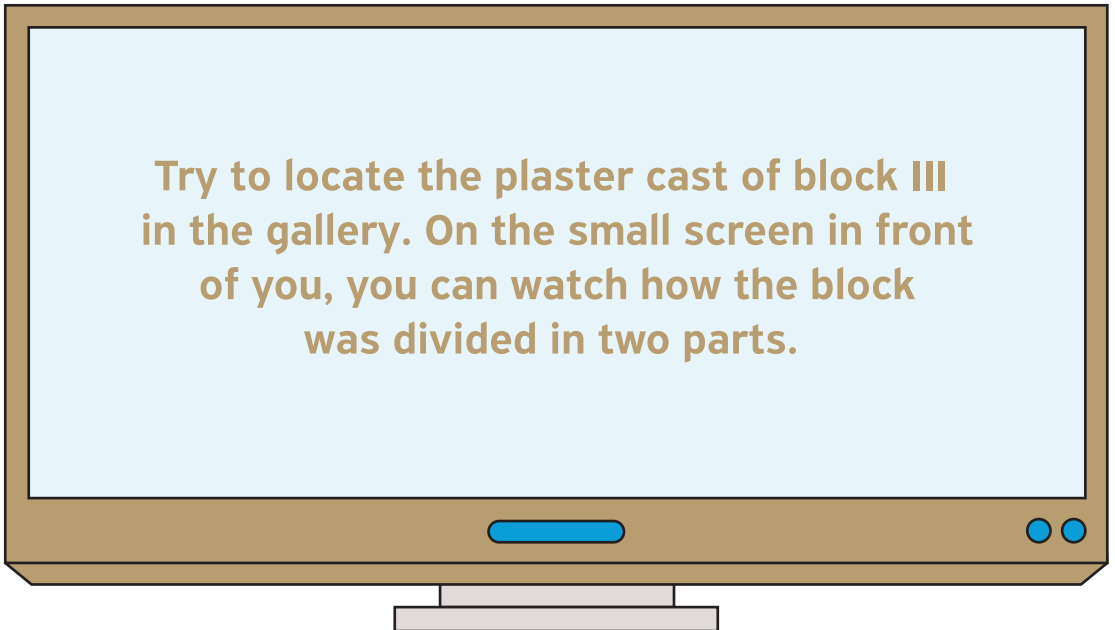
#### With a crowbar and a saw

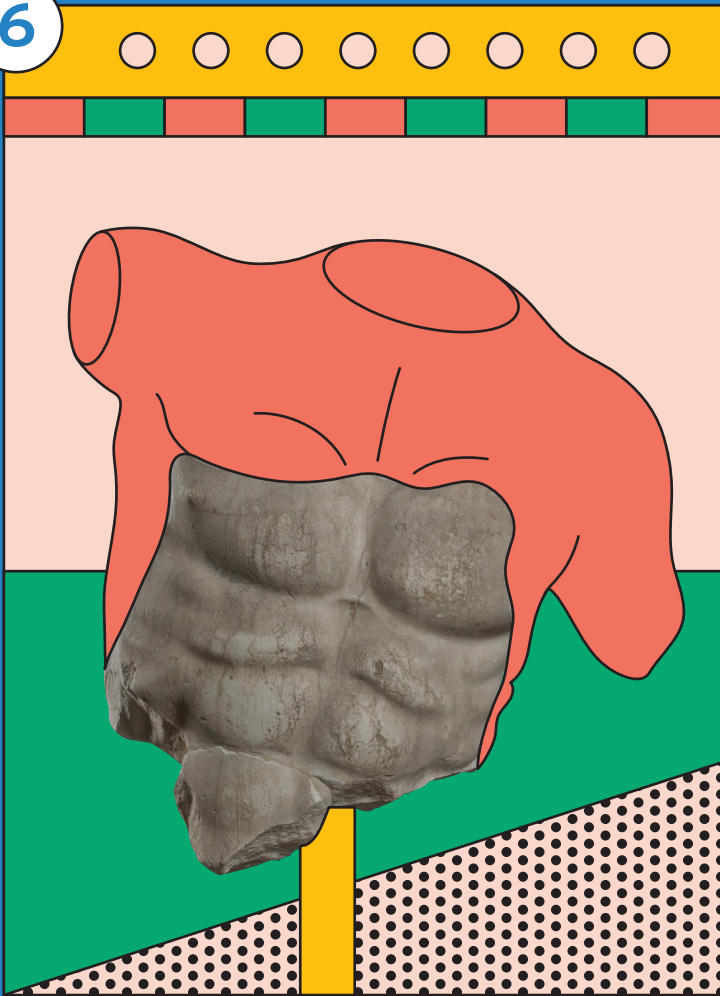
The frieze is carved on a row of big blocks. Each block has a height of almost one meter (3 feet), width around 60 centimeters (2 feet) and weight that reaches or exceeds 2 tons (4,480 pounds)! So moving the blocks was no easy task. This is why Elgin's crewmen came up with another solution. They saw off or detached with crowbars only the front side of the blocks that carried the relief decoration.





**Try to locate the plaster cast of block III in the gallery. On the small screen in front of you, you can watch how the block was divided in two parts.**



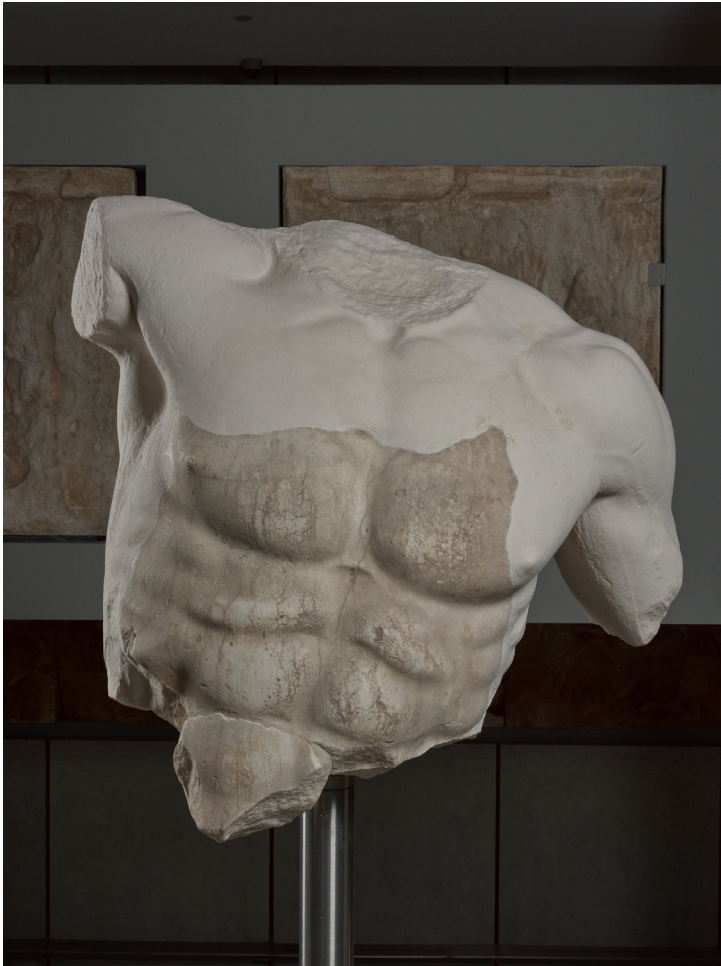


## God Poseidon - West pediment

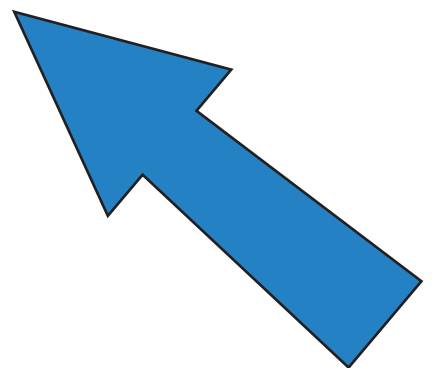
Our journey ends here, at the west side of the gallery. Stand in front of the pediment statues and locate Poseidon. If you want, however, you can take another stroll around the gallery and take your time discovering more dismembered sculptures.

### What do we see on the west pediment?

The Parthenon's west pediment pictures the dispute between Athena and Poseidon about who would take charge of protecting the city of Athens. The contest took place on the Acropolis in front of the mythical kings Kekrops and Erechtheus, as well as other local heroes. They chose Athena, preferring her gift the olive tree over Poseidon's gift of salty sea-water. And this is how Athena gave her name to the city!



**Notice the different colours on Poseidon's body. The front part is darker than the rest and we are sure you now know why!**



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## Think and write

3 words about how you feel when you look at the sculptures that have been separated between the two museums.

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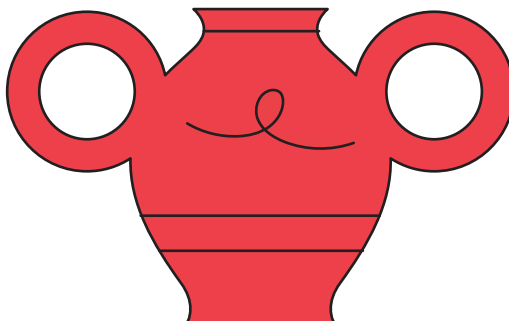
3 words about how you feel when you consider the possibility to see them all together in the Acropolis Museum.

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Disappointment  
Wrath  
Excitement  
Frustration  
Injustice  
Optimism  
Sadness  
Relief  
Freedom  
Enjoyment  
Pride  
Sorrow  
Anger  
Happiness  
Hope  
Embarrassment  
Gratitude  
Fear





Now choose the strongest emotion you feel and express it in a drawing! Iris, the messenger of the gods, will carry it around the world!



Cut off the card and drop it in the box at the Museum's ground floor



Reuniting the sculptures of the Parthenon at the place where they were created is a standing request ever since the Greek State was established. When this happens the mutilated temple will be made whole again and people from around the world will be able to admire the totality of the sculptures in their natural environment. The Acropolis Museum standing across the Parthenon is ready to welcome them!

