

The Connection Between Scotland and Greece



Tourists posing at the National Monument of Scotland. [User:Colin / Wikimedia Commons / CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

Two countries that seem very dissimilar on first glance are Scotland and Greece. Greece is all sun, olives and an ancient history of civilisation while Scotland in comparison is drizzle, Irn Bru and a history which seems more beast than beauty. First glances can be deceptive so today we're diving in to find out what the Scottish and Greek connection is.

We will be looking at the far off past, migration waves and military history, and Edinburgh's nickname "[the Athens of the North](#)" to understand the connection between Scotland and Greece.

Incidentally, I will be doing a tour titled 'The Athens of the North' for Greek Artisan Pastries on Bread Street so I'd encourage you to check that out as well [at this link](#).

The Ancient Connection between Scotland and Greece

An ancient story myth of the Scots held that the Scots were potentially Greeks thousands of years ago. Once upon a time, before I started the Street Historians, I ran my own blog [which touched on this subject](#). It's an incredible story which ties us to the glamour of ancient Athens, the earliest

stages of the development of Christianity and Abrahamic religion in general, and sets us up as one of the great travelling people. It is also potentially stolen from the Irish. Then again, that's because the Scots were also said to be an Irish tribe who moved here.

There's a few compelling links between Scotland and Greece in terms of language. The Greek word 'skotos' means "darkness, gloom". Maybe they visited in Winter, when they should have come [at the best time in the Spring](#).





taken from my ipon

One argument holds that there is a connection between Scotland and Greece because they once wore a kilt like item (without the tartan pattern) and also played a bagpipe type instrument. This is easy to reject however because bagpipes [were used by almost everyone](#) and seem to be universally loved. Also, everyone loves a man in a kilt.



So as to whether the kilt is an example of a connection between Scotland and Greece I would not have much to say, but if any Greeks read this please send pictures of you in kilts to our Instagram!

I used to think that the Caledonian Boar from the story of Hercules was a Scottish link because Caledonia was the Roman name for Scotland, but then I discovered there was an ancient Greek city called Calydon. That particular connection is likely just because it sounds similar. Let's move on to things we know are legitimate.

Migration Waves

Scotland has been home to many people from other lands throughout our history. As mentioned in the last section, part of our foundation myth is that the Scots originated in Ireland. The myth says they originate even further away. But let's look at more modern history.

Greeks after Constantinople

This [academic article](#) from Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Volume 46, talks about numerous individuals who travelled from Greece to Scotland after the fall of Constantinople. They were greeted by royals and academics who assisted them after their journey. There were not many named in documents of the time but James II of Scotland hired a presumably Greek doctor named Serapion.

Interestingly, going in the opposite direction, was a [Scottish military engineer named Johannes Grant](#). He was a Scottish mercenary at the Fall of Constantinople who worked against the Ottoman tunnel diggers. The connection between Scotland and Greece gets deeper all the time.

Greek migration in the 20th-century

It's an understudied topic because the community is not very large but Greek people did come to Scotland in numbers significant enough to found multiple churches. [Cypriot Greeks moved to Glasgow and war brides came over after the Second World War](#).

Modern movement

Greeks came to Scotland in large numbers after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Many had difficulty finding work in Greece due to austerity measures imposed by the European Central Bank and this hit young people.



Photo by Masood Aslami on [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com/photo/ancient-temple-column-in-athens-1000000000/)

Many moved to Scotland. Some stayed only for a short time. Others put down roots, started families, got good at their jobs. In this second category can be included [the people behind the pastries](#) at Greek Artisan Pastries who I am doing the tour for soon. They were students at one of Edinburgh's universities who realised they missed home and could bring a piece of it to the Scots. Connections such as these make the relationship between Scotland and Greece very important to us. It has had a major impact on how we see ourselves and, further to that, the next section of this article.

The Athens of the North



Edinburgh on a good day. Photo by Pixabay on [Pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com/photo/ancient-temple-column-in-athens-1000000000/)

The nickname “Athens of the North” is said to originate from a [painter named Hugh William Williams in 1822](#). His paintings of Athens bore many similarities to Edinburgh. Our architects, particularly William Henry Playfair, advocated for the neo-classical style and borrowed heavily from Greek design.

1822 is a fascinating year because it marked the highpoint of Scotland's discoveries and innovations. Edinburgh had been home to Adam Smith, inventor of economics, as well as David Hume, philosopher of empiricism, as well as James Hutton, the first geologist. Scots were uncovering the world and leaving behind a vast legacy of innovation. This is incredibly similar to what the Greeks had accomplished in antiquity. The connection between Scotland and Greece was built into Edinburgh's architectural environment as a mark of respect.

Of course, this is not without controversy.

The darker side behind the connection between Scotland and Greece

One figure who hails from Scotland but is definitely not appreciated by the Greeks is [Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin](#). His purchase of the Elgin Marbles and their dispatch to London definitely ranks him as a villain in the eyes of many Greeks. Many Scots might not even be aware of Elgin as Scottish but he was born in Fife, which is undoubtedly Scottish. His last name is Bruce and there is not escaping that that is a Scottish name.

In this context, it makes Edinburgh look like the work of counterfeits, but I'd prefer to end on a more positive note.

The Grecian designs were used for Edinburgh's architecture because Greece is one of the best countries that has ever existed for architecture. Greece is home to many legends of progress and we too hope to aspire to that by working together. A trip to Edinburgh like a trip to Athens is an absolute must for any life well-lived and I am proud of the connection between Scotland and Greece.