‘Art, spirituality and power’

An evaluation of *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* at the British Museum

November 2011

This is an online version of a report prepared by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre for the British Museum. Commercially sensitive information has been removed.
The exhibition attracted a highly motivated audience of repeat exhibition attenders and specialists.

Visitors reached deep levels of emotional and spiritual engagement, being awe-inspired by the objects and encouraged to contemplate.

The exhibition facilitated this engagement by providing an immersive environment for visitors coupled with supporting contextual information.
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Executive Summary

*Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* was the second of three exhibitions covering spiritual journeys held in the Museum’s Reading Room. Whilst the findings from this evaluation suggest that the exhibition was more ‘niche’ in its appeal compared to previous Reading Room exhibitions, it achieved high levels of engagement and satisfied the appetite of an emerging ‘serial’ exhibition attender.

**Older age profile and a significant domestic audience**

The audience for this exhibition was particular in several ways. It attracted a relatively old age profile, with 22% aged over 65, higher than previous Reading Room exhibitions (where over 65s represented between 7% and 18% of the audience).

It also attracted a more local audience, with a higher proportion of Londoners (43%) compared to previous comparable exhibitions (where the London audience ranged from 20% to 38%), and a lower proportion of overseas visitors (17%, compared to between 22% and 41% at previous exhibitions). This is despite the fact that the exhibition covered the summer months when typically overseas visiting peaks at the Museum (63% overseas visits to the Museum overall during this period).

**Highly successful in engaging regulars and specialists**

The exhibition attracted the highest proportion of regular repeat visitors ever recorded at a Reading Room exhibition. Conversely, the exhibition did not attract the new audience of previous Reading Room shows; only 11% of visitors were on their first ever visit to the Museum compared to between 16% and 50% at comparable exhibitions.

In-keeping with the idea that the exhibition was more ‘niche’ than previous exhibitions, *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* attracted a significantly higher proportion of visitors with specialist knowledge than previously, at 27% this is more than double the highest proportion recorded in the past. The proportion of visitors with generalist knowledge has remained largely comparable to previous exhibitions, with a reduction in the proportion of visitors with little or no knowledge of the subject area.
Evidence of serial exhibition attenders, high crossover at other exhibitions

Visitors were asked if they had visited any previous special exhibitions from a list dating back to 2007. Around two-thirds (63%) of visitors had done so - on average having visited 4 exhibitions each - suggesting that a loyal following of British Museum exhibitions has emerged and providing evidence that the Museum’s reputation for staging high quality exhibitions is clearly established.

This loyal following looks set to continue; when asked if their visit experience had made any difference to their likelihood of visiting future special exhibitions at the Museum, 41% of visitors said it made them more likely, whilst a further 58% stated it had made no difference.

Immersive, relaxing and intuitive environment to navigate

The exhibition’s design had a profound impact on the visit experience. 81% of visitors to Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe thought that the ambience of the exhibition space enhanced their visit. The lighting, music and Reading Room’s impressive setting all combined to create an immersive environment that left visitors feeling far removed from everyday life, entering more of a spiritual domain. The exhibition ceiling was left open, meaning visitors were allowed to see the dome, particularly at the climatic central section of the exhibition. This large open space made many feel like they were in a church or cathedral, a sensation that heightened the experience for them. The low lighting further contributed to the church-like atmosphere of the exhibition, complimented by the chant-like music.

The volume of visitors in the room enhanced 59% of visits, and the layout / flow of the exhibition 82% of visits – and visitors were left more highly satisfied with these elements than the majority of previous Reading Room exhibitions, reflecting the lower footfall for this exhibition.

In addition, subtle techniques were used – such as the placing of panels and four sided cases – to take visitors on a seamless journey through the content, encouraging them to move around the space.

The reduced crowds delivered a more pleasurable experience, with visitors exploring the exhibition in their own time and being given space to reflect and contemplate. Overall, the exhibition design and flow of visitors around the space created a calming environment that facilitated visitors’ connection on a spiritual level.
Compared to the majority of previous Reading Room exhibitions spiritual (9%) and emotional (50%) outcomes were experienced to a greater extent, with comparatively low proportions of visitors experiencing a social or intellectual outcome as their highest outcome achieved.

New media to bring themes and objects alive

The flow and absence of crowds allowed visitors to experience high levels of engagement and many felt a sense of awe at seeing such precious objects up close.

For those who used the digital media displays, these added to their experience by allowing them to examine the detail of the objects, something they could not do from a static display. The Holy Thorn reliquary was particularly resonant, and this exhibit added another dimension through viewers witnessing the reliquary being opened.

The Sacred and Secular concluding film helped to put, what was for some, an abstract idea of relics into a modern context, thus making it more relatable. The World Pilgrimage introductory film was less successful in attracting visitors’ attention, and some visitors would have benefited from the content contained here, which would have firmly cemented the theme of pilgrimage from the start.

Specialist content in layman’s terms

Whilst specialists attended in record proportions, it is important to note that the exhibition’s interpretation was multi-layered, satisfying those with this specialist background knowledge whilst also catering for those less familiar with the content.

Written interpretation was well balanced; it was not overwhelming in quantity and therefore didn’t take away from the objects themselves. In addition, techniques such as timelines helped to set the objects into historical and geographical context succinctly. The chronological structure of the exhibition was highly successful in taking visitors on a journey and was appreciated by specialists and non-specialists alike.

Whilst the exhibition achieved high levels of satisfaction in relation to its content and interpretation, the experience could have been enhanced even further for some visitors through exploring certain themes more thoroughly, such as pilgrimage and the authenticity of the relics.
Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe

This Reading Room exhibition brought together some of the finest sacred treasures of the medieval age for the first time. It featured over 150 objects from more than 40 institutions including the Vatican, European church of treasuries, museums from the USA and Europe and the British Museum’s own collection. The exhibition was the first time such a collection had been seen in the UK since the Reformation of the 16th Century.

It was during the medieval period that the use of relics in devotional practice became a central part of Christian worship. For many, the relics of Christ and the saints – objects associated with them, such as body parts or possessions – continue to provide a bridge between heaven and earth today. Relics were usually set into ornate containers made of precious materials known as reliquaries, crafted by the finest goldsmiths of the age. They had spiritual and symbolic value that reflected the importance of their sacred contents.

The earliest items date from the late Roman period and trace the evolution of the cult of the saints from the 4th century to the peak of relic veneration in late medieval Europe. Relics featured in the exhibition included three thorns thought to be from the Crown of Thorns, fragments of the True Cross, the foot of St Blaise, the breast milk of the Virgin Mary, the hair of St John the Evangelist, and the Mandylion of Edessa (one of the earliest known likenesses of Jesus).

Running from 23 June 2011 – 9 October 2011 the exhibition was held in the Museum’s Reading Room and the main sponsor was John Studzinski.
Research methodology

3.1 Aims and objectives

The aims and objectives of this research were to provide an objective evaluation of the exhibition, comparative data across other British Museum Reading Room exhibitions – *Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings; Moctezuma: Aztec Ruler; Shah ‘Abbas: The remaking of Iran; Hadrian: Empire and Conflict; The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army* – and specific findings relating to the Museum’s high level research agenda of Attract -> Engage -> Outcome.

Specific areas to be covered in the evaluation were:

- Visitor profile against British Museum general visitor profile
- Visitor behaviour
- Interpretation awareness and usage
- Accompanying programme awareness and usage
- Motivations, expectations and outcomes (including comparative work on outcomes against other exhibitions)
- Segmentation
- Access provision usage
- Website usage
3.2 Our approach

In order to carry out the evaluation of *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* we used the following research techniques:

**Audience focus groups**

Exhibition attenders were invited to the British Museum to take part in a focus group. All of the attenders had previously visited *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* and they were divided into two groups:

- First-time paid for British Museum exhibition attenders
- Repeat paid for British Museum exhibition attenders

Participants took part in an accompanied visit to the *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* exhibition to refresh their memories, before taking part in an in-depth group discussion. The discussions explored their expectations of the exhibition, aspects of the exhibition design and overall visitor experience.

In total 14 visitors participated in the focus group discussions: 7 first time visitors and 7 repeat visitors.

**Exit survey**

Surveys were conducted with visitors who had just finished their visit to the exhibition to ascertain a basic visitor profile, awareness of marketing and publicity, motivation for visiting the exhibition, behaviour within the room and the impacts and outcomes of the exhibition.

*149 exit surveys* were completed during shifts from 25th June – 7th October 2011.

**Rolling research**

Questions were added to the on-going rolling research at the Museum to ascertain awareness and attendance of *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* amongst general Museum visitors.

**Observations**

Observations data collected, by an individual on a student placement at the British Museum, for the introductory media display and the concluding film is also included where applicable.

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1 Please note the research excluded schools and those visiting as part of an organised group.
‘Art, spirituality and power’: an evaluation of *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* at the British Museum

**Vox pop interviews**

Vox pop interviews were carried out at various points throughout the exhibition in order to test visitors’ responses to different elements including the multimedia guides and the overall exhibition design and interpretation.

*66 visitor vox pops were carried out.*
Visitor profile

Where appropriate, and where comparative data is available, this report compares the findings from the Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe evaluation alongside those from the 6 previous major exhibitions to have taken place within the Reading Room.

It also compares the exhibition profile with the general Museum-visiting audience during the period of the exhibition (23 June 2011 – 9 October 2011).

Visitor origin

When the audience profile for Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe is compared to previous temporary exhibitions we can see that a significantly larger proportion have come from within London, the highest proportion ever when looking at comparable exhibitions (43%). There has been a compensating decrease in the proportion of visits made by overseas visitors; again Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe attracted the lowest proportion of overseas visits than all previous comparable exhibitions (17%). This is particularly surprising considering the exhibition covered the summer months when overseas visitors are typically at their peak.

Visitor first language

89% of visitors spoke English as their first language. German was spoken by a further 4%; all other languages tested were the mother tongue of 2% or fewer visitors.

Group age

The age profile of Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe was older than previous exhibitions, with 22% being over 65, higher than previous Reading Room exhibitions where over 65s represented between 7% and 18% of the audience). Compared to the Museum as a whole, the temporary exhibitions audience is consistently older. At the other end of the scale 9% of visits were made by those aged under 25, lower than 22% at Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead, however comparable to the 9% of under 25s at Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings.
Intentional visiting to the exhibition

The exhibition achieved a high level of pre-visit awareness, surpassed only slightly by Hadrian: Empire and Conflict and more significantly by The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army. 94% were aware of the exhibition before visiting and 6% were converted to visit on site, a similar proportion as those converted to attend Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead and Hadrian: Empire and Conflict.

Those who had not been to a Reading Room exhibition before were more likely to be converted on site (13%) compared to repeat exhibition attenders (2%), reflecting the higher pre-visit awareness among this latter group.

Visit history

89% of visitors were on a repeat visit to the Museum, with 67% having visited in the past 12 months. Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe attracted the highest proportion of regular attenders of all previous comparable exhibitions.

‘I am a Friend of the British Museum and I actually go to most of the exhibitions here’ Visitor vox pop

‘If there was a subject matter which I was interested in here or more interested in I would have no problem coming back because just the way things were displayed was so fantastic’ Repeat BM exhibition attender

Conversely the exhibition attracted a relatively small proportion of first-time attenders, with 11% being on their first visit to the Museum, compared to between 16% and 50% at previous Reading Room exhibitions. For 41% of this new audience – or 5% of all visitors to the exhibition – the exhibition was their main or one of their reasons for visiting that day. These visitors can be termed as ‘new intenders’.

Knowledge base

Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe was clearly an attractive proposition for specialists, with 27% claiming specialist knowledge of the subject and the British Museum more generally, significantly higher than at previous comparable exhibitions (where between 5% and 13% claimed specialist knowledge). The proportion of visitors with generalist knowledge has remained largely comparable; instead there has been a significant reduction in the proportion of visitors with little or no knowledge of the subject area (9%).
From the qualitative research it was clear that some visitors had seen religious relics elsewhere, demonstrating their specialist interest.

"Well it is a subject that I know quite a lot about and I was hoping to see on the one hand objects that I have seen before and perhaps see objects next to one another which I thought would be interesting" Repeat BM exhibition attender

"I’ve already seen a lot of relics in various places so I knew about the subject but... I was particularly interested in the movement from Constantinople. It’s an aspect of history that I didn’t know at all" Visitor vox pop

Others had a more academic connection to the subject, studying the historical period for a course or reading books about the themes the exhibition covered.

"I’m doing an MA in Medieval History" Visitor vox pop

"I’m interested in the Middle Ages and the history of Christianity" Visitor vox pop

"I became more familiar with early Christianity this part year. I have been taking classes at my university and one of the first things we studied was Saints and how much influence they had in Europe" Visitor vox pop

"Well I’ve already a lot of books by saints and stuff. So it was just to me I don’t know an exhibition that compliments my knowledge that I’ve already got" Visitor vox pop
Religion

The table below summarises the religion of respondents, 30% stated they had no religion with 63% stating they were Christian. Results are comparable with Taking Part data from 2010/11 relating to the whole sample (the population) and Museum and Gallery attenders specifically.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>No religion</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>29%%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian - Catholic</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian - Church of England</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian - Other</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jewish</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikh</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For some a religious connection was the driver behind their visit. This was the case for both first-time and repeat visitors.

*I came because I come from Slovenia which is a very Catholic country. I worked in Spain which is a very Catholic country. My daughter married an Italian and so I actually have a lot of this background of Saint reverence and I wanted to see how and my husband is an Anglican and so we have a lot of discussion about the Catholic Church and so I wanted to see how it would be presented from an English point of view if you like and so I was interested to see what they would actually say* First time BM exhibition attender

*I am a very devout Christian and I come from Cyprus and I basically come to London to look at medieval and religious artwork* Visitor vox pop

*I have been to lots of various sites like Rome and the Holy Land and France and places like that and that was my main reason for coming... I found it absolutely fantastic. I went away; I felt it was wonderful it really was and my first time in this museum* Repeat BM exhibition attender

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2 Taking Part 2010/11 data. Those who have been to a museum, gallery or archive in the past 12 months
Nevertheless those without strong religious beliefs also enjoyed the exhibition, specifically seeing objects they were unfamiliar with and being able to relate to the theme of devotion through the interpretation.

‘You see photos and things, but not being churchgoers ourselves we’re not accustomed to looking at this kind of stuff’ Visitor vox pop

‘I mean I am not religious but I suppose just the idea that people could be devoted to these things and the history of it. I thought it was good relating it to the modern day’ Visitor vox pop

Segmentation

The table below describes the Morris Hargreaves McIntyre-devised segmentation system into which the British Museum audience is currently divided for annual reporting purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Segment name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Broad needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sightseers</td>
<td>First time visitors making a general visit. Mainly tourists who want ‘do’ the museum</td>
<td>Ease of access, comfort, orientation, good facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self developers</td>
<td>Non-specialists wanting to informally improve their general knowledge about subjects covered in the museum</td>
<td>Journey of discovery, layered information, finding out new things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families*</td>
<td>Mixed age groups, wanting fun and educational trip for children</td>
<td>Ease of access and movement, child friendly facilities and activities, different levels of service to meet diverse age needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeat Social Visitors</td>
<td>Repeat visitors, meeting up with others at the museum. Use the museum as a sociable space and want to feel a sense of ownership in their surroundings</td>
<td>Ease of access, comfort, orientation, good facilities, warm welcome, accessible exhibitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts</td>
<td>Specialists wanting to deepen their knowledge further by engaging deeply with the collection</td>
<td>High quality access to collections, critical engagement, access to expert staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Lovers</td>
<td>Spiritually and emotionally motivated visitors who want to commune with objects in the collection, and use their existing knowledge as a base to go deeper</td>
<td>Ambience, deep sensory engagement, space for contemplation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Please note that families are defined as an independent adult visitor visiting with a child aged under 16
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The diagram below compares the proportion of visitors that fell into each segment across comparable Reading Room exhibitions.

**Visitor segments**

Consistent with the highly specialist audience *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* attracted the highest proportion of Experts than previous comparable exhibitions by almost two-fold in most cases.

39% of the audience were Art Lovers, being the most comparable to *Moctezuma: Aztec Ruler*. 37% were Self-developers a similar proportion as *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings*. 
# Motivations for visiting

## Hierarchy of motivation

We have identified four key drivers for visiting museums:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visitors who:</th>
<th>And they seek this from a visit..</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>See museum as a...</td>
<td>Have this driver...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHURCH</td>
<td>SPIRITUAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>EMOTIONAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCHIVE</td>
<td>INTELLECTUAL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTRACTION</td>
<td>SOCIAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At each level of the hierarchy visitors have different needs. The suggestion is not that visitors are forced or even led up this hierarchy, but that they get the opportunity to engage at the deepest level they wish to.

## Main motivation

Using a series of statements on the exit survey we asked visitors to *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* to identify the main motivation for their visit to the British Museum that day. The diagram below shows the main motivation of visitors to *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* alongside comparable exhibitions.
Main motivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book Title</th>
<th>Spiritual</th>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Intellectual</th>
<th>Social</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moctezuma: Aztec Ruler</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shah ‘Abbás: the Remaking of Iran</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadrian: Empire &amp; Conflict</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We can see from the graph above that with the exception of *The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army*, visitors to major temporary exhibitions are consistently most likely to be mainly intellectually motivated.

In terms of how main motivations break down there appears to be a relatively consistent pattern emerging amongst visitors’ main motivation for visiting exhibitions in the Reading Room, the only exhibition to fall outside of this pattern is *Hadrian: Empire & Conflict*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, visits to *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* were more likely to be spiritually motivated than visits to the majority of comparable exhibitions. The two exceptions to this are *Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* and *Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings*.

**How did exhibition attenders compare to the Museum overall?**

![Graph showing visitor motivations]

As can be seen through the graph to the left, visitors to *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* were significantly more likely to be mainly intellectually or mainly emotionally driven than visitors the British Museum overall during the time period of the exhibition.

Visitors clearly arrived at the exhibition highly motivated, with a view of what they were hoping to get out of their experience.
Specific motivations

In addition to identifying visitors’ main motivation for visiting the exhibition, we were also able to look at the proportion of visitors driven by specific motivators. Visitors were asked to choose all the reasons that motivated their visit – therefore, for example, visitors can be motivated to gain a deeper insight, but also to visit the shop or restaurant on the same visit.

Specific motivators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivation</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>% of visitors overall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>To stimulate my own creativity</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To reflect and contemplate</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To escape or recharge my batteries</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>To gain a deeper insight into the subject</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To experience awe-inspiring, fascinating or beautiful things or places</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To be moved emotionally</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To feel a strong sense of personal connection</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To travel back in time</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>To improve my own knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have a personal / academic / professional interest in the subject</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To encourage children’s interest in history</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>To visit one of the major attractions in the region</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To spend time with other people in a nice place</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To use facilities such as shop / café / toilet / restaurant</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall the three most selected options were to ‘improve my own knowledge and understanding’ (37%), and ‘to gain a deeper insight into the subject’ (19%) and ‘I have a personal / academic / professional interest in the subject’ (13%).
Meaning making

Through our qualitative work into how visitors select and engage with objects in the museum environment, we have identified four modes of visitor behaviour. These modes classify how the visitor selects objects to explore and what kind of interpretation they need to make meaning from objects.

**Hierarchy of Meaning making**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Object selection</th>
<th>Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RESEARCHER</td>
<td>Specific objects/ collections</td>
<td>Focused, specialist museum visitors, select objects themselves based on their in-depth knowledge of the subject area, want access to expert information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEARCHER</td>
<td>Classification/ collection</td>
<td>Have good general understanding of the topic, consume all the information available in the museum on that subject, want museum to select and present objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOLLOWER</td>
<td>Narrative theme</td>
<td>Require a narrative explanation, want the museum to select and present objects which illustrate themes to follow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BROWSER</td>
<td>Random objects</td>
<td>Select objects by browsing the exhibition, will wander until they find a 'gateway' object that catches their attention, require explanation of their selected objects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four modes form a hierarchy, with each level of the hierarchy representing an increased level of engagement with objects. It is possible for visitors to move upwards through the modes of behaviour – the modes can be seen as stages in the development of a visitor's meaning making skills.

Visitors who are continually browsing an exhibition can only be making fleeting connections with a limited number of objects. If the Museum is committed to developing visitors' levels of engagement it should seek to encourage visitors to develop their meaning making skills by selecting objects and offering interpretation that propels visitors up the hierarchy and engages them pro-actively.

Visitors were asked a question on the exit survey to identify their ‘entry mode’; how they behaved on entry to the exhibition. The results are shown below alongside those for previous major temporary exhibitions.
Visitors to *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* were most likely to enter in ‘searching’ mode – with a good general understanding of the topic and appetite for higher levels of information – a consistent finding across the comparator major exhibitions and reinforcing the idea of a highly motivated and dedicated temporary exhibitions audience. The *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* also attracted a greater proportion of those in the ‘researching’ mode compared to previous exhibitions, in-keeping with the high proportion of specialists in attendance.
6 The visit experience

6.1 Pre-show

Booking process and ticket collection

The majority of visitors had no strong feelings about the booking process, with 76% saying it neither enhanced nor detracted from their visit. 22% thought the booking process ‘slightly’ or ‘strongly’ enhanced their visit with only 2% stating it detracted. Although satisfaction with the booking process seems to be lower than previously (34% of visits ‘strongly’ or ‘slightly’ enhanced at Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead) this is likely to be a result of an increasing proportion stating ‘neither’ in response to this question.

Visitors were also satisfied with the ticket purchase / pick up area; it enhanced 33% of visits and detracted from only 3%.

Queuing and staggered entry times

92% of visitors didn’t queue to enter the exhibition (compared to 81% at Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead) and overall queuing time was estimated to be 40 seconds on average. For 71% of visitors the queuing space before the exhibition neither enhanced nor detracted from their visit, for 29% the queuing space added to their visit and for only 1% it detracted.

Similarly 33% of visitors felt staggered entry times enhanced their visit, and this had no impact on 65% of visits.
6.2 Dwell time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibition</th>
<th>Average Dwell Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Treasures of Heaven</td>
<td>01:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book of the Dead</td>
<td>01:56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italian Renaissance Drawings</td>
<td>01:16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moctezuma: Aztec Ruler</td>
<td>01:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shah ‘Abbas</td>
<td>01:40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hadrian: Empire and Conflict</td>
<td>01:15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Emperor</td>
<td>01:15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The average dwell time for visitors was 90 minutes, exceeding all other comparable Reading Room exhibitions with the exception of Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead and Hadrian: Empire and Conflict.

Those who stated a Christian connection spent on average 9 minutes longer in the exhibition space (average dwell of 1 hour 35 minutes) compared to those with no religion (1 hour 26 minutes).

6.3 Size of the exhibition space

The majority of visitors had their expectations met in terms of the size of the exhibition space (57%). 38% thought the exhibition space was larger than expected and 6% thought it was smaller. Visitors to Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead and Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings were more likely to state the exhibition was larger than expected (52% and 44% respectively) compared to Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe (38%), however at all previous comparable Reading Rooms exhibitions this was less likely (7% to 15% stating the exhibition was larger than expected).

'It was bigger than I expected both in the space and the collection that is assembled here’ Visitor vox pop
Events and accompanying programme

46% of visitors were aware of related Treasures of Heaven events or activities at the Museum. Awareness among those who had visited a Reading Room exhibition was higher than awareness among first time exhibition attenders (53% compared to 37%). The table below shows the percentage of these visitors who were aware of the different aspects of the programme. It also shows which aspects visitors had used or intended to use in future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Attended</th>
<th>Intend attend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Base</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gallery Talks</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debates</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late night openings Fridays</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performances</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study Days</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Film Season</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC 4 film related to the exhibition</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themed menu at the Court Restaurant and cafes</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of these</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those that were aware, Gallery talks (69%) and lectures (68%) were the most high profile aspects of the accompanying programme followed by late opening on Fridays (58%).

25% of those aware of the events programme had been to a related event / engaged in a related activity, with the majority of these having watched the BBC 4 film about *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* (19%).

75% of visitors aware of the programme had not participated in any way whilst 82% did not intend to at any point. 29% of visitors stated that they generally attend events and activities at the British Museum. For those who stated that they did not do this the most frequently cited reason was because they do not live locally (50%).
8

Layout & display

This chapter details visitors’ reactions to the exhibition design in terms of ambience and atmosphere created, layout of the space and display of objects.

8.1 Exhibition design

81% thought the ambience of the exhibition space enhanced their visit, for 6% this aspect detracted from their visit.

To what extent did the ambience of the exhibition space (lights, colours etc) enhance or detract from your overall visit experience?

- 51% Strongly enhanced
- 30% Slightly enhanced
- 13% Neither
- 5% Slightly detracted
- 1% Strongly detracted

The ambience of the exhibition enhanced more visits compared to the two most recent Reading Room exhibitions (78% and 74%) however did not reach the peak achieved at Shah ‘Abbas: The Remaking of Iran (ambience enhanced 86% of visits). Three key factors combined created an immersive environment for visitors: the Reading Room ceiling, the lighting and the music.

The ceiling of the Reading Room

A key contributor to the ambience of the exhibition was the Reading Room itself. The exhibition ceiling was left open, meaning visitors were allowed to see the dome, particularly at the climax of the exhibition. This large open space made many feel like they were in a church or cathedral and this heightened the experience for them.

‘When you are looking up you see the roof so it looks like a church or sort of a spiritual environment’ Visitor vox pop

‘Even with the structure of the dome made it appear almost like it reminded me of being in a church’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think it works very well and it feels almost like you are actually in a cathedral and I am an Anglican and am used to being in St. Paul’s Cathedral so the environment works very well and I think actually that you
have got the height of the building for anyone even an atheist it kind of sets the scene’ Visitor vox pop

‘Well let’s say that the immense effort that it took to make that to house this exhibit, made the exhibit much more effective, made it huge because the items in it are so tiny, and so focused, and this huge ceiling above it created a pleasurable experience - it wasn’t just looking at tiny things, they were housed within something just as lovely, and that had a lot of the same the gold, and the music is beautiful, and so the setting of the exhibit was really quite wonderful. I think it made everything, put you in the right frame of mind to appreciate everything’ Visitor vox pop

Lighting

The low lighting further contributed to the church-like atmosphere of the exhibition.

‘I think the lighting is lovely. The music is lovely and it sets the scene for what the exhibition is about’ Visitor vox pop

‘It is not too bright but the lighting is good in that it is focused on the relics themselves so that you can see them better but it is also like most churches are quite dark and so it gives you the feel of what it would be like to see them in their original setting but also to see the detail, the minute detail and the design’ Visitor vox pop

Many visitors also complimented the way the lighting was low yet focused on the objects themselves. Using spotlights allowed visitors to focus their attention on the objects and pick up their subtle details and the jewels used.

‘Well everything was well lit for a start. And so... because the way everything else was dark, and that was light, so that just drew you to... everything was very clear’ Visitor vox pop

‘The lighting was sublime. It is absolutely perfect. It was the first thing I noticed when I walked in with my husband and it was the first thing that I said to him the lighting is perfect... I liked the way you used soft targeted lighting to pick things out and I love the background colours that you have used. I think you have done it in a very sensitive way and you have got these greys and dark and light tones and it wasn’t distracting at all but it was notable the effort that had gone into the production values of this exhibition’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think it made you focus in detail and you were really having to look at things closely and carefully’ Visitor vox pop
Nice because it was subdued but then there were spotlights on the objects which brought up the jewels” Visitor vox pop

A few visitors also noticed the transitional use of lighting, which was lower in some areas but lighter in others.

“I thought it was interesting going from dark to light, the sort of transition... when we were at the affirmation I thought that was interesting. Sort of the dark ages, medieval times coming into the light. I thought that the lighting was perfect” Visitor vox pop

Despite this, some visitors found the lighting was too low; it cast shadows over objects and labels or was simply not bright enough to see certain details mentioned in the interpretation. However a few did acknowledge the lighting needed to be low in cases for preservation of the objects.

“The lighting was very bad as you got the head of the triptych in shadow and that was the only one although there was a couple where I had to get back to get the light right. You couldn’t look at the thing directly because the light was reflecting on it. Most of the time it worked very well but a couple of places it was a little bit off” Visitor vox pop

“The lighting... I found that sometimes difficult because I wanted to be able to see the objects so there were one or two examples where even the label was saying you could see something and I was staring at it for some time and I couldn’t see it because of the lighting” Repeat BM exhibition attender

“I understand a lot of the items are quite precious and might be damaged by light, but just more light [is needed] to make things easier to read” Visitor vox pop

Colour

A few visitors remarked on the way colour was used in the exhibition when different themes were covered, particularly when prompted in the discussion groups.

“I liked the use of colour. The red I think worked very well and emphasised the gold and also the idea of blood as well... I liked the use of the spotlight it made it dramatic” Visitor vox pop

“The colour of the rooms certainly [changed as you went round] and by the time of the final room the Reformation was quite lighter than the room before and so that was quite an obvious change and the main section seemed to be in this kind of Royal Blue from what I can remember” Repeat BM exhibition attender
‘When I first walked in it was grey and I thought why grey because it is a kind of modernist thing to do when you are presenting objects. And then it changed to maybe a bit blue to red’ Repeat BM exhibition attender

Music

Almost three quarters (73%) of visitors were satisfied with the music in the exhibition (47% ‘very’ satisfied). Many felt the music was consistent with the religious nature of the exhibition and in keeping with the objects themselves.

‘I suppose the objects themselves that have become revered and would appear in churches and so forth and so having music in the background seems very sensible. I think it kept the mood very quiet’ Visitor vox pop

‘It is consistent with the music that the visitors to those shrines would have heard when they went to see the shrine’ Visitor vox pop

‘Fantastic I loved the music. I think it all adds to it ... Because it is monastic and you are sort of in the presence of monastic things’ Visitor vox pop

Some also felt the music had an effect on then, putting them in the right frame of mind to engage with the objects in an unobtrusive way.

‘Actually blends with what you are looking at and you suddenly realise oh there is music’ First time BM exhibition attender

‘The music was beautiful, like I said it put me in a state of mind to reflect on the pieces’ Visitor vox pop

Nevertheless, 6% of visitors were not satisfied with the music. Qualitative comments focused on the music being repetitive, with a few feeling this could have been varied slightly.

‘Tedious after a while. Especially because it’s the same period of polyphony. If they’d altered it a bit and had some earlier and some later, possibly, but it does become tedious to be truthful’ Visitor vox pop

‘The music is slightly irritating ... it might have been nice to have it change now or then or isolate it to different sections’ Visitor vox pop

‘Perhaps they could have it just time to time. It irritates me when it goes on continuously’ First time BM exhibition attender

Effect of environment on visitors

The combination of these three elements of exhibition design – lighting, use of colour and music – made for a relaxing environment. Many visitors felt the ambience of the exhibition was calming and it allowed them to concentrate on
the objects, leaving any stresses that may interfere with their engagement behind.

“It was different to what you usually see in a museum I think. And everyone’s really quiet and sort of just looking and relaxed. No-one’s really saying anything really” Visitor vox pop

“It seemed quite appropriate for the subject ... Because it’s dark! It’s sombre, thoughtful, thought provoking. ... It’s nice and quiet and dark. It all fits” Visitor vox pop

“The atmosphere puts you at ease and I think it helps clear the mind so you can open up to what is being exhibited” Visitor vox pop

“Actually the music gave a great calm because we had arrived slightly flustered from our different homes and Underground and as soon as we came in it gave a lovely calm and it was also nice having the sense of height with the dome as that also makes it like a church which is where so many of these things would have been” Visitor vox pop

“The balance was just right. The lighting: it created the right atmosphere. I think the audio in the background created a very soothing, very calm, a very, very mellow experience so you know whatever problems or issues you had you left them back there and just really focused in on the exhibition... so I congratulate the British Museum on being able to create that” Repeat BM exhibition attender

Sacred environment

Some visitors felt the ambience was sacred or secret in some way, again in keeping with the objects themselves.

“I like the way everything’s presented and I like that music. I think on the whole it gives due reverence to what it’s presented. You know because it’s like religious objects and it seems to be reverencing the spirit in which they were created” Visitor vox pop

“I liked the fact that it felt like a sacred space in which to view sacred objects” Visitor vox pop

“It looks almost Cathedral like, as soon as you walk in you got the impression that you were going to see a real secret place” Visitor vox pop
8.2 Layout and flow of the exhibition space

82% of visitors thought the layout / flow of the exhibition enhanced their experience, with 4% saying it detracted.

To what extent did the layout / flow of the exhibition enhance or detract from your overall visit experience?

- 41% Strongly enhanced
- 41% Slightly enhanced
- 14% Neither
- 4% Slightly detracted
- 0% Strongly detracted

The layout / flow of the exhibition enhanced a higher proportion of visits to Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe than previous comparable exhibitions, with the exception of Shah ‘Abbas: The Remaking of Iran (85%).

Intuitive design

Some visitors felt the layout of the exhibition was intuitive; they were guided through the exhibition space implicitly and led to interpretation panels and objects.

‘I thought it a very good layout. It was obvious where to go, and everything was very clear, what it was. And everything naturally kind of drew you towards it’ Visitor vox pop

‘You seemed to be moved through it without realising you were being moved through it if you see what I mean. You didn’t have any worries about missing anything out, you were just gently moved through’ Visitor vox pop

‘The large print on the walls that is all quite intuitive like I remember at some point I walked through and I automatically turned one way and happened to be right in front of it and thought that is good positioning’ First time BM exhibition attender

Despite this a minority wanted more guidance in the exhibition, this could be a result of low uptake of the free exhibition guide.

‘A bit confusing in the sense of wandering round. I felt at times I was wandering around fairly aimlessly. I wouldn’t have minded actually figures...little footpaths or things to say yes, this is the way you should be
going, because the lighting’s so dim it was a little difficult to find the sequence that the museum had actually created itself’ Visitor vox pop

Progress markers

Progress markers were used in the exhibition for the first time to let visitors know where they were in the sequence of the exhibition. However, awareness was low or visitors only saw one of the two maps.

‘I didn’t notice it’ Visitor vox pop

‘In the exhibition no I didn’t notice it … in previous exhibitions I have been to here I have referred to the map. Like I remember the one about Alexander referring to the map but on this occasion I didn’t’ Visitor vox pop

‘I would have been grateful if I’d seen more than one, I only spotted one to give me a clue of the scope of this thing, pace it a bit. Just give an idea of the layout’ Visitor vox pop

Despite this the few who did notice the maps did find them useful as a means to face themselves.

‘I saw this on the wall about section seven which said where we were and we had two left but I didn’t see it before that though. It is always good to know how much we have left so that you can sort of pace yourself’ Visitor vox pop

The cases

As with previous exhibitions visitors praised open cases with four sides for viewing. Rather than a remedy for crowding visitors enjoyed being able to see the detail often on all sides of the reliquaries.

‘I particularly liked the double walled glass panels where you could see objects from both sides. I really don’t like it when I can’t see the reverse of the object’ Visitor vox pop

‘I thought it was beautifully done. I liked the fact that you could get around and see the back side of most of them and if you couldn’t they would usually have an image of what was on the back because they were three dimensional objects and meant to be seen that way’ Visitor vox pop
8.3 Issues of crowding

The volume of visitors in the room enhanced 59% of visits, the highest compared to previous comparable exhibitions. The volume of visitors in the room detracted from 12% of visits, significantly lower than Hadrian: Empire and Conflict (51%), First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army (42%) and Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead (31%) and only slightly higher than Shah ‘Abbas: The remaking or Iran (8%).

To what extent did the volume of visitors in the room enhance your overall experience?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Strongly enhanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Slightly enhanced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28%</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9%</td>
<td>Slightly detracted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Strongly detracted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Crowding was not an issue for most visitors to the exhibition, they felt the exhibition was spacious and peaceful, something which added to their enjoyment.

‘I think it was very well done actually. It was quite spacious actually. There was quite a lot of space. We came to... the Egyptian one a while ago and that was much less spacious’ Visitor vox pop

‘It might just be the day that I am here but other exhibitions that I have come to like Hadrian they were very crowded but for some reason this one seems very, very peaceful’ Visitor vox pop

‘I came to see the Egyptians which were very crowded, too busy. I thought this was much better’ Visitor vox pop

‘The exhibition made me feel peaceful. I came to the Book of the Dead and that was so busy and this was much calmer’ Visitor vox pop

The volume of visitors in the room also meant visitors could concentrate on the detail of the objects without feeling crowds were rushing them.

‘You stand and hover for a long time and you wonder if you’re actually holding up other people, but it’s not you know teeming with people. So you do have time to stand and stare which is what you want with those relics’ Visitor vox pop
The design helped ease any crowds that were present, the exhibition was split into sections and objects were placed in central cases that could be viewed by multiple visitors at once.

‘Quite good and quite well spaced in that it is sort of like there [are] little rooms and so if it is busy in one area you can move to another one’ Visitor vox pop

‘Some of the objects being so small and at the beginning it was quite crowded and difficult to see things and I thought that where you put things in the centre where people could walk around it and more people could see the detail that was quite good’ Visitor vox pop
Content

9.1 Amount of information

94% of visitors were satisfied with the amount and quality of information available, with 71% saying they were ‘very’ satisfied with this. Only 3% were dissatisfied with the amount of information in the exhibition.

To what extent were you satisfied with the amount of information available?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71%</td>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23%</td>
<td>Quite Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2%</td>
<td>Not very Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>Not at all Satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not too much information, yet comprehensive

For many visitors there was not too much information, allowing the objects to speak for themselves.

‘The descriptions are good and there is not too much’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think it was a good balance of you know enough information and not too much ... I thought that having little bits about the saints and things like that, particularly for people like us who aren’t Christians and aren’t religious and don’t actually know who all the people are, was quite good’ Visitor vox pop

Despite being succinct, visitors felt the interpretation was comprehensive, covering the salient and interesting points such as the historical and spiritual context, the background of the objects and the saints’ relics they housed.

‘You never stop wanting to learn about things, but each object I felt was very comprehensively described and that was sufficient. That’s brilliant’ Visitor vox pop

‘They were fulsomely explained ... both to explain actually what you were seeing in front of you and also its historical context, and of course I suppose its spiritual one too’ Visitor vox pop

‘You didn’t look at something and think it is made of gold, it is made of this and what is it and what do you use it for, you know they had a little bit about the Saint and where the Saint comes from and where the object was’ Visitor vox pop
‘Art, spirituality and power’: an evaluation of Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe at the British Museum

‘I think it was a good balance of you know enough information and not too much … I thought that having little bits about the saints and things like that, particularly for people like us who aren’t Christians and aren’t religious and don’t actually know who all the people are, was quite good’ Visitor vox pop

Well displayed

When prompted in the discussion groups about the display of interpretation some visitors praised the variety of large panels and smaller labels. This layering allowed the objects to be the focal point yet visitors who wanted more information could choose to read more.

‘I did like the variety of [information] on the wall, moving round you know it was not just that it became bog standard… you know that took your eye round as it was and you went to read something else you know that was displayed in a slightly different way’ Repeat BM exhibition attender

‘I thought the combination with the large panels and I thought it was very reticent and you could have been totally overwhelmed but the objects sort of stood up for themselves’ First time BM exhibition attender

Aspects not covered

Despite high satisfaction with the amount of information available, some visitors were left wanting to know more.

From the group discussions it was apparent some visitors wanted to know more about the relics themselves, something that would have been covered in the multimedia guide.

‘If you read the catalogue it is there but pointing to you to more detail and if you are interested in this you can find more detail here. If you do it all the time it just slows the flow entirely but with some of the objects it would have been worth it I think’ First time BM exhibition attender

‘There were some things and I noticed with the badges it didn’t really explain it at all. What did you get it for? Did you buy it? Did you have to touch whatever to get it like the icon… I think some of the things did need explaining more’ First time BM exhibition attender

Some visitors wanted to know more about the saints discussed in the exhibition.

‘Some of the Saints I would have liked a little more information on them and their life or the lives of the Saints and their Saint’s Day’ Visitor vox pop
‘Although a lot of the saints, one would like to know more about them but some of them maybe nobody always knows exactly’ Visitor vox pop

With a few wishing for more about the art of the period and how reliquaries fit into that.

‘There was only a limited amount of information about where it fitted into the art of the period’ Repeat BM exhibition attender

‘I would have quite liked to have seen even just in part of the exhibition perhaps a bit more of the sort of context ... might for example have had some stained glass windows’ Repeat BM exhibition attender

Timelines and maps

Visitors were asked specifically about the timelines in the exhibition with the majority having used these and finding them a valuable addition to their visit. Although the exhibition was chronological, the timelines cemented this structure.

‘It gave you that little bit of chronology and it fitted the context which at the time was looking at well the transfer to Constantinople for the headquarters of the Empire, and the discovery of the True Cross’ Visitor vox pop

‘It was chronological and of course the introductions at each room set the scene as it were and put it all into context’ Visitor vox pop

Timelines also allowed visitors to put the objects into historical context.

‘I think they just look at the objects and they are not looking at things and that has got the timeline so it sets it in context’ Visitor vox pop

‘The panels which explain everything at the start at the beginning, that explain the historical context which I thought added to it because you often see this kind of stuff when you visit churches but because you don’t really know what it was I think you got more out of it’ Visitor vox pop

‘I thought it was very useful to provide a historical framework for the exhibition, to place everything into perspective and to see how it fitted into the entire period which was a very long period after all. It helps tidy things up and it helps you to remember I think as well’ Visitor vox pop

Visitors also found the timelines useful in terms of clarifying the locations that were key to understanding the themes discussed, and the journey of relics over time.

‘Again it was very nice in putting it in context both the location of places and different things that were happening over the years’ Visitor vox pop
‘They were quite helpful and knowing where the artefacts are from it was kind of interesting’ Visitor vox pop

‘It’s the geography. My geography’s not great! I’m good with timelines but my geography’s appalling, so it was helpful to have the two together’ Visitor vox pop

Due to the relatively high proportion of specialists in attendance, those who already had extensive knowledge of the subject did not need the timelines. However they were still useful to some specialists as a means to confirm their memory or act as a reminder.

‘I do have fairly good background knowledge of a lot of this stuff so I didn’t really need the context’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think they’re quite useful. I think... we broadly knew them but just useful to remind you of the key dates and things like that’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think they are helpful to just for checking... whether you are placing things in the right order in your own mind. I think they are very helpful’ Visitor vox pop

Finally although many thought the timelines were clear and usable, a minority of visitors thought their presentation could be improved to make them clearer and making them proportionate in terms of the amount of time between key events.

‘I thought they were very well done. Very clear. And pointed out important things... what was going on where and when. Both of these I saw and read every bit’ Visitor vox pop

‘It was a little bit confusing the way the bits of text go up and down. I didn’t immediately notice these lines that connect it to the timeline’ Visitor vox pop

‘For me a timeline has to be proportionate with the times between things. In this it just gave you the sequence really. Not how close and how far away some of the things were and so I was not impressed with that’ Visitor vox pop
9.2 The tone of the information and language used

Visitors were also satisfied with the tone and language used (92%).

To what extent were you satisfied with the tone of the information and the language used?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>69%</th>
<th>23%</th>
<th>3%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>1%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
<td>Quite Satisfied</td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>Not very Satisfied</td>
<td>Not at all Satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Linking to this a few visitors commented that the language used was accessible for them, despite not having a religious connection or detailed background knowledge of the topics.

‘From the perspective of someone who wasn’t raised a catholic and they don’t understand the saints perspective it was quite clear in how they explained why these are so important and were important to the people at that time’ Visitor vox pop

9.3 Narrative and theme

64% of visitors were ‘very’ satisfied with the themes / storyline / narrative of the exhibition and 93% were satisfied overall.

To what extent were you satisfied with the themes / storyline / narrative of the exhibition?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>64%</th>
<th>29%</th>
<th>4%</th>
<th>3%</th>
<th>1%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Satisfied</td>
<td>Quite Satisfied</td>
<td>Neither</td>
<td>Not very Satisfied</td>
<td>Not at all Satisfied</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chronological structure with themes

As discussed above, visitors were pleased with the chronological structure of the exhibition.

‘I actually liked how everything is sorted by date. You know the information and it goes on to the 1600s with the execution of King Charles I so that was kind of nice the layout was nice and so it is very organised’ Visitor vox pop

‘I thought it was very well done to put it in the right sequence and order through the time sequence. The sequence through the years’ Visitor vox pop
Many commented that staging the exhibition in this chronological way allowed them to make a journey through the different time periods resulting in a holistic view of how themes developed over time.

'I didn’t expect that it would be so fully displayed in the cases with such style and such high [description] and not to confuse the lay person but descriptive in the sense that you would connect from one display to the other and see the movement historically. I thought it was very, very effective. It took us... from the beginning of Christianity right up to the English Saints' Repeat BM exhibition attender

'The fact that it’s in chronological order so you feel like you are going through a journey for the duration of that and so it is informative' Visitor vox pop

'I thought it was logical. I think it took you through chronologically. I think it explained things pretty clearly, showed you how they developed, how they changed' Visitor vox pop

Furthermore although the exhibition was largely chronological in structure, a few acknowledged how the curators also picked up on key themes throughout the period.

'Well I think you could see how it had gone chronological but it wasn’t strictly this happened then, and then this happened then. It was pulling out... key themes from those time periods and other little things like the relics in England of Becket and stuff. Just to kind of gather things together round a theme made it kind of interesting' Visitor vox pop

Relics and pilgrimage

Many visitors enjoyed exploring the theme of relics and reliquaries and the pilgrimages people made to visit them. Visitors left the exhibition with heightened understanding of the importance of these objects.

'Just how very, very important pilgrimages were. How important reliquaries were for churches and cathedrals. It gave them a sense of prominence and a place for people to worship and encourage faith and so yeah that is what I got' Visitor vox pop

'I thought about the people that would have commissioned these and how much they would have meant to them because they would have believed that it was the blood of Christ or a thorn or St Peter’s finger and there is even Christ’s umbilical chord there isn’t there and there is a painting of the two midwives' First time BM exhibition attender
However others, particularly in the discussion groups when talking about the interpretation in-depth, felt that the theme of pilgrimage could have been more explicit throughout the exhibition. Supporting this, observations of the introductory digital media (covering this theme) revealed that only 10% of visitors watched the projections depicting pilgrimage.

‘I am not sure if I understood the introduction because I didn’t spend a lot of time looking at it but for me... they hadn’t got the theme of pilgrimage’ First time BM exhibition attender

‘Up front... there were one or two captions of a background nature in relation to a pilgrimage but then pilgrimage disappeared? I was expecting to see something in parallel with the objects and something about it might have been the Beckett cult or people going to Jerusalem and that disappears as a theme entirely’ First time BM exhibition attender

‘People came all over from Western Europe to Canterbury across the Channel and so on in large numbers and the caskets went all over Western Europe but mercifully the exhibition didn’t pursue that, that sort of pilgrimage’ First time BM exhibition attender

Modern equivalent

Many visitors complimented the exhibition for making such a specialist topic relatable. The concluding film also introduced a modern equivalent – celebrity – an angle which was praised by some.

‘And it is in everyday life as well and things that you treasure like you know the pendants that you can put photos in they are your own special relics that you can have’ Visitor vox pop

‘Yeah interesting, it provoked a discussion amongst us about celebrity. We were just discussing how these items were supposed to get people closer to heaven, and now people try and get closer to celebrity. So they’ll get photographed with Jordan because that’s they’re ultimate ideal – the celebrity’ Visitor vox pop

However a minority felt this link was inappropriate, that these objects are holy and so cannot be compared to ‘celebrities’.

‘I thought some of the ideas were rather tenuous actually. The... pseudo worship of Diana didn’t seem to be quite the same as some of the reliquaries here, I mean it was more interesting in terms of Lenin, where you’ve got the preservation of a body which presumably people think has got sort of magical powers but I watched the film it was fine but I wouldn’t say it was a highlight’ Visitor vox pop
Finally some felt the exhibition should have explored how relics are venerated today, giving more modern-day religious context.

‘I think probably one interesting point that is not covered is obviously the timeline gets to a certain point and stops so whether it would be worthwhile explaining about the modern context and so is this relevant today’ Visitor vox pop

‘Within the Christian Church there [are] still discussions about relics and some people don’t like them at all and other people venerate them so it would be interesting if there was something actually saying today this is what this means’ Visitor vox pop

Greater debate

A few visitors felt there was opportunity for debate missed by the exhibition addressing, for example, the authenticity of the relics.

‘More into a sort of secular view of the relics. I mean it was touched on at the end about whether they were real or not, or whether they were genuine pieces of the true cross or not, but it was a very small bit right at the end. So I don’t know, I felt maybe there could have been more of that but that I think it might just be me’ Visitor vox pop

‘My only question that wasn’t really answered is I don’t know if anybody really believes that they really were bits of the bones of the saints’ Visitor vox pop

‘I wanted to know how fraudulent it was, because in the reformation it was regarded as totally fraudulent, but presumably some of them were real’ Visitor vox pop

Others picked up on the politically correct nature of the language used not stating hard facts.

‘I liked the judicious use of the word ‘apparently these are the bones of whatever’. It was quite tastefully done without being controversial I think’ Visitor vox pop

Some visitors acknowledged the importance of the Museum remaining impartial and not entering any form of debate, which could have been controversial and upsetting for visitors.

‘But the fact that it is in a museum means it is sanitised because these objects have or had very real meaning for very real people’ Repeat BM exhibition attender
**Treasured objects**

**Volume and variety of objects**

Many visitors were impressed with the volume and variety of high-quality objects brought together from across the world.

'It is very impressive with the amount of works gathered together' Visitor vox pop

'The quality and range of objects that you managed to borrow from all over the world in terms of different museums and so on and so it is exceptional' Visitor vox pop

'Bringing a lot of exhibits together that you wouldn’t otherwise see certainly not in this country anyway, obviously. Because of the English Reformation, very few English reliquaries, so you know, the opportunity to see so many reliquaries brought together here is excellent' Visitor vox pop

Some also acknowledged the exhibition was a rare opportunity to see these objects together, telling one story.

'I shall never in my lifetime see anything ever like this again' First time BM exhibition attender

'I thought there would be some quite spectacular pieces. I hadn’t realised how many of the earlier pieces that you’d managed to assemble. The number of them was amazing. Things from the 1200s and earlier. To see so many things of such superior quality was outstanding' Visitor vox pop

**Awe inspiring objects**

Some visitors were amazed at seeing the objects in person, this made for a much richer experience than seeing photographs or watching films as they had done in the past.

'There is still a very much richer impression from seeing the actual objects rather than looking at photographs of it, or even films of it because one relates to the scale and the effect and everything else in a very much more personal way' Visitor vox pop

'It is very good to actually see relics and reliquaries and to see all the attending bits and pieces rather than you know seeing it in a book or seeing it in a film and to actually see a collection of these things together in the one place' Visitor vox pop
 Others were fascinated by the detail of the reliquaries and the craftsmanship that went into making them. This realisation caused visitors to have a strong emotional reaction to the exhibit.

'It was just such a beautifully done piece, the workmanship was exquisite and the thorn itself was just presented very plainly after all that was surrounding it. It was a nice contrast' Visitor vox pop

'Seeing the old objects. Because they’re just fascinating you could spend like 10-20 minutes looking at one object because they were just so intricate' Visitor vox pop

'For me I think it was the ivory work, the detail on the things like the... resurrection. I think the ivory work for me was brilliant because it was so detailed' Visitor vox pop

'This glorious object made to glorify God' First time BM exhibition attender

9.5 Volume of content

From the qualitative research it was clear that visitors were impressed with the volume of content. The richness and detail of the reliquaries took time to study and many stated the need for a second visit.

'It’s enormous, and from that point it’s good. It needs two visits in my opinion' Visitor vox pop

'I would like to come back and really study the exhibition. I think there is a lot of good information here and I didn’t get it all in one short visit and so I would like to come back and make a commitment of time of 2 or 3 hours to linger longer’ Visitor vox pop

It was also apparent that some had actually already made a second visit to the exhibition to explore the content further. Visitors didn’t seem to mind having to make two visits and were not frustrated at the amount of content, as some visitors were at Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead. Instead this small group of individuals felt they needed to re-visit, rather than ‘giving up’, this was even the case for those who weren’t Friends of the Museum.

’It’s quite hard work seeing everything and looking at everything hard. It’s quite demanding. The second time having done the hard work of the first time’ Visitor vox pop

’It’s the second time for me’ Visitor vox pop
‘I am not actually a Friend but I have come twice this time’ First time BM exhibition attender

‘I did come back a second time. I came on the first visit fairly quick just to see what is happening and on my first visit I wasn’t really that impressed and thought what is this all about. But the second time I came I spent much longer and it was a little bit quieter and I was quite fascinated with it and I was in here about two and a half hours’ First time BM exhibition attender

9.6 Films

67% of visitors were satisfied with the films and audio-visual content of the exhibition.

To what extent were you satisfied with the films and audio-visual content?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Quite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28%</td>
<td>Neither</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Not very</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Not at all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

World Pilgrimage

As discussed above only 10% of visitors observed watched the first film about the theme of world pilgrimage. A few visitors seemed unclear as to why it was outside the exhibition space with others just glancing at it.

‘I noticed there was something at the beginning at the very start but there wasn’t a lot of text it was just changing images and I felt you know if there had been more text or text as part of the images I would have stopped and had a look at that but it seemed to be co-ordinated perhaps to an audio guide that I didn’t have’ Visitor vox pop

‘It sort of set the tone but I really just looked at it very quickly’ Visitor vox pop

‘Actually I wasn’t aware of any [films] except this final one’ Visitor vox pop

Sacred and Secular

The concluding film around the sacred and secular theme engaged more visitors with 70% stopping to watch this (based on observations). As already mentioned above, opinion was divided in relation to the film. For some bringing celebrity into the content was inappropriate.
‘I can see the point they were making about icons and idolising, but for me I would have preferred them not to do that, not to take it to Elvis and Diana. I thought the Pope and Mother Theresa I could understand that but Elvis no. I thought that just almost devalued the exhibition. I mean that was a cult’

Visitor vox pop

However, many appreciated the film and the contemporary link it made. Including this link enhanced understanding among some visitors as they were able to empathise with how relics were venerated in medieval times.

‘I found the film at the end very powerful. A lot of the imagery was showing how the relics of the past how a lot of those themes still resonate today’

Visitor vox pop

‘The final film showing people... everybody has relics ... I thought it was very good. Yes it made a point’ Visitor vox pop

‘In religious education if you are trying to get across this idea of veneration and the link between the veneration of the Saints and nowadays and teachers might find that quite useful’ Visitor vox pop

‘I thought the concluding film was good. It made it contemporary. I mean those reliquaries were religious but something has taken its place with regard to celebrities and I found that interesting and really relevant’ Visitor vox pop

Why did some visitors not watch the films?

Some visitors didn’t watch any of the films, instead preferring to focus on the objects themselves.

‘I just like looking at objects rather than watching films’ Visitor vox pop

‘I don’t like watching TV in an exhibition space. I want to look at the objects, as I’m not going to get a chance to see them ever again whereas a film about pilgrimage, you know I could catch it another time’ Visitor vox pop

9.7 Digital media displays

Added another dimension

Digital media displays were used in the exhibition to provide a close-up demonstration of particularly intricate objects. For those who used the digital media they added to their experience by allowing them to see the detail of the objects, something they could not do from a static display.
‘That one was really good because you can’t see…with so many of these things obviously you can’t…there’s more to it than they can show in one view, so it was good to have the video to show you what the rest of it looked like and how it opened as well, because you did kind of want to play with it which obviously you can’t do so I was fascinated to see somebody else opening it and looking at the different pieces because you can’t see all of that from it sitting there in the case... so I thought that video was really good’ Visitor vox pop

‘Well I thought that little pendant round the corner showing the different sides, I thought that was fantastic, and what I really admire is the curators have made it possible for us to see things in detail’ Visitor vox pop

Others highlighted the fact the digital media allowed them to see things they couldn’t with the naked eye, this was especially valuable for those with poor eyesight.

‘What I really, really loved is the high definition videos of a lot of the smaller objects... and it really captured the things that you can’t see with the naked eye especially that pendant with the relic of the holy thorn and you never would have known how it worked unless you had a little image of somebody’s fingers holding it and then showing you how it would have opened and how it would have worked and so I thought that was great’ Visitor vox pop

‘Well like for example my eyesight, I haven’t got my reading glasses on today, or my zoning in glasses, so there were some small artefacts and they actually magnified them, and that was good because I was able to see the detail more’ Visitor vox pop

‘They were really interesting because some of them really showed it close up, especially some of the more intricate work. I mean being able to see the amount of work that had gone into it, in to the picture is much better than sort of... straining your eyes!’ Visitor vox pop

Some discussed the Holy Thorn reliquary digital media specifically. The film revealed how the reliquary opened, adding another dimension to the experience.

‘It was very nice to see how it was done because when you are showing it you can only see it static and to see how the various pieces were put together was very good’ Visitor vox pop

‘Well it was important to show how you; the layers of it and the detail which you would probably walk past otherwise because you don’t get an idea of
the carving until it really zooms in and... how you take it apart and everything" Visitor vox pop

Missed or overlooked by some

A few visitors missed the digital media displays entirely; perhaps more could have been done to direct visitors to these as they provided such a valuable addition to the majority of those who used them.

"Walking around the exhibition they were not that apparent ... I must admit they didn’t immediately jump out" Visitor vox pop

"We saw the one on the way in at the entrance but within the exhibition the films are not that clearly signposted" Visitor vox pop

However, as with the films, others chose to ignore the digital media, instead preferring to focus their attention on the objects themselves, or use the multimedia guide to add another layer of interpretation.

"Images on their own are great but obviously when you are up against the physical pieces unless you are going to have some very, very strong image it is quite hard to compete" Visitor vox pop

"I’d rather see the actual exhibits themselves rather than digital displays’" Visitor vox pop

"I just wanted to come and see the objects, and in a sense let them and the audio guide speak to me” Visitor vox pop
10 Outcomes

10.1 Perceived value for money

Do you think the ticket price represents value for money?

The overwhelming majority of visitors thought the ticket price offered value for money. Interestingly this was the case both for repeat Reading Room exhibition attenders (88%) and first time exhibition attenders (84%).

10.2 Impact

The chart below compares visitors’ main motivation for visiting against the main outcome they got from the exhibition experience.

**Overall impact**

The results indicate that there has been a significant shift up the hierarchy, with a greater proportion citing emotional and spiritual outcomes than did motivations for a visit.
Main outcome

Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe
Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead
Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings
Moctezuma: Aztec Ruler
Shah ‘Abbas: the Remaking of Iran
Hadrian: Empire & Conflict
The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army
When emotional and spiritual outcomes are combined, taken together Treasures of Heaven: saints relics and devotion in medieval Europe achieved a higher proportion than all other previous Reading Room exhibitions, highlighting the relatively deep level of engagement experienced by visitors.

Half of visitors experienced a mainly emotional outcome, higher than previous Reading Room exhibitions, with the exception of The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army (51%). When looking at outcomes achieved more closely we can see that visitors to Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe were more likely to state they had ‘gained a deeper insight into the subject’ (71%) and ‘been moved emotionally’ (19%) compared to previous comparable exhibitions (the latter with the exception of Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings, 19%; and The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army, 29%).

9% of visitors experienced a mainly spiritual outcome, higher than previous exhibitions with the exception of Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead and Fra Angelico to Leonardo: Italian Renaissance Drawings (both 11%). When looking at all outcomes cited, visitors to Treasures of Heaven: saints relics and devotion in medieval Europe were more likely to state they had been able to ‘reflect and contemplate’ (37%) compared to previous comparable exhibitions (between 14% and 30%).

Ranked impact on specific motivations

The table below shows results for each motivator statement, revealing the difference between the proportion of visitors who selected each statement as a reason for visiting, and the proportion of visitors who felt they experienced each statement as an outcome. By doing this analysis we can see how the exhibition met, or exceeded expectations.

We can see that the majority of outcomes changed little compared to motivations stated. Although many differences are negative these are slight, and this could be a result of the tendency among respondents to tick on average less outcomes (3) than they did motivations for a visit (4). This is also typical of a regular exhibition attender audience who increasingly know what to expect from a British Museum exhibition.

The most drastic change can be seen for the outcome ‘I have a personal / academic / professional interest in the subject’ which decreased 14 percentage points from motivation to outcome and ‘to improve my own knowledge and understanding’ which decreased 7 percentage points. However the latter outcome was still experienced by over 7 in 10 (72%) visitors. In terms of unexpected outcomes, 18% of visitors felt they had spent
time with other people in a nice place (compared to 14% who were motivated by this).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All motivations</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Pre-visit</th>
<th>Post-visit</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>To stimulate my own creativity</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To reflect and contemplate</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>-4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To escape or recharge my batteries</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>+2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>To gain a deeper insight into the subject</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>+2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To experience awe-inspiring, fascinating or beautiful things or places</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To be moved emotionally</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To feel a strong sense of personal connection</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To travel back in time</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>-1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>To improve my own knowledge and understanding</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>-7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have a personal / academic / professional interest in the subject</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>-14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To encourage children’s interest in history</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>To visit one of the major attractions in the region</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>-6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To spend time with other people in a nice place</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>+4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To use facilities such as shop / café / toilet / restaurant</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Progression

The following model illustrates the journey for visitors in terms of their main motivation and highest outcome achieved.

Those mainly intellectually motivated also achieve their expected outcomes (15%), and the majority move up the hierarchy to emotional (47%) and spiritual outcomes (38%).

27% of visitors were emotionally motivated – 56% achieved emotional outcomes and 42% spiritual, however 2% experienced unexpected intellectual outcomes and did not experience any emotional or spiritual outcomes.

Finally of the 5% of visitors mainly spiritually motivated all achieved a spiritual outcome as their highest.

These results reflect the profound yet unexpected emotional and spiritual connections visitors had to the Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe exhibition due to their dominance in the model.
Impact on future behaviour

Visitors were asked whether visiting *Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe* would affect the way they used the British Museum in the future. The table below shows the proportion (and real number) of exhibition visitors who said they would alter their behaviour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More likely to...</th>
<th>% of exhibition visits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visiting The Medieval Europe AD 1050-1500 or Europe AD 300-1100 Galleries</td>
<td>47% (33,439)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting British Museum special exhibitions</td>
<td>41% (29,378)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting British Museum in general</td>
<td>36% (26,217)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the British Museum website</td>
<td>35% (25,088)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding out more about the British Museum</td>
<td>28% (20,280)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing or finding out more about Treasures of Heaven events and activities</td>
<td>27% (19,723)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the British Museum’s online collection</td>
<td>27% (19,471)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that the exhibition encouraged visitors to attend the related galleries in the Museum (47% more likely to do this).

41% of visitors were also more likely to visit special exhibitions as a result of their visit, slightly lower than at *Journey through the afterlife: ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* (54%) however this could be a result of the high proportion of repeat attenders coming to this exhibition, who may be already likely to visit exhibitions.
Meaning making impact

The chart below compares how visitors expected to behave in the exhibition alongside what they actually did during their visit.

As can be seen from the chart, there was only a relatively small shift in visitors’ intended behaviour and what they actually ended up doing. As the Museum’s reputation for exhibitions grows and the loyal base of repeat exhibition attenders continues to come back, visitors are increasingly knowledgeable of what to expect in terms of information levels within the exhibition, and are accurately anticipating the way in which they will absorb this information.

The most common exit mode during Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe was ‘Searching’ in which visitors immerse themselves in the exhibition - 54% of respondents stated that they followed this behaviour during the exhibition only slightly more than the 52% expecting to behave in this way.

The most significant change in exit mode was a 6 percentage point decrease in the proportion of visitors who actually ‘Browsed’ compared to those expecting to behave in this way. Again, this highlights the deep engagement experienced by visitors.
10.3 Intellectual outcomes

Improved knowledge and understanding

38% of visitors experienced a mainly intellectual outcome, although this is comparatively low when looking at previous Reading Room exhibitions, the most common outcome experienced was improved knowledge and understanding.

Many visitors learnt about the period, with the chronological layout and timelines facilitating this.

‘The historical aspect was illuminating for me... I thought having read a little bit before about the period I felt it identified the historical part of it and the continuity and I thought that was for me very interesting and that is what I got out of it more than anything’ Repeat BM exhibition attender

‘Seeing the history of it and understanding a bit more about the timeline and ... it is interesting to see the history of what has happened to these pieces’ Visitor vox pop

‘I’ve come away I think with a greater knowledge of that period and of the artefacts that were created at that time, and of the meaning that they held for the people of the Middle Ages’ Visitor vox pop

Relic veneration was also a learning outcome for visitors, they left having understood how relics fit into the historical period. Visitors also discussed the meaning relics had for society and context relating to the early church.

‘A greater understanding of the whole you know idea of relics, and saints and religious development’ Visitor vox pop

‘I enjoyed the combination of looking at some really beautiful objects with some really interesting history attached to them, and the early church which I didn’t know much about’ Visitor vox pop

‘What I thought was very informative as well was a lot of the written works because it showed how in fact all these relics were used to reinforce the power structures’ Visitor vox pop

‘One of the things we learnt was the fact that different materials actually had specific meanings spiritually, and bones mean one thing’ Visitor vox pop

Some visitors were also encouraged to research the content after visiting, their experience having ignited a desire to explore the topic in further detail online, or by visiting other collections from the period.
10.4 Emotional outcomes

Insight

Half of visitors experienced an emotional outcome as their main outcome from the exhibition, comparatively high when looking at previous Reading Room exhibitions. The most frequently experienced main outcome was ‘I gained a deeper insight into the subject’ (28%). Visitors gained insight into the theme of relic veneration and the artistry that went into creating them.

‘It was like an insight into what happened and history and relics ... almost touching, connecting with it’ Visitor vox pop

‘I am interested in sculpture. I am an artist, I am not a three dimensional artist but the quality of the carving is impressive’ Visitor vox pop

‘Yes very satisfying indeed. No you really feel you’ve come away with something...and it’s easier to see the actual artefacts themselves than to plough through books. I mean we’ve got books for days on it, but you’re doing the visual, and of course that is the impact that you get back’ Visitor vox pop

Awe-inspiring and beautiful exhibits

14% if visitors experienced ‘awe-inspiring, fascinating or beautiful things’ as their main outcome from the exhibition. The beauty of the reliquaries themselves and the craftsmanship that went into creating them amazed visitors.

A few also discussed the investment put into creating the reliquaries and acknowledged the belief that went with this; with others being amazed they had survived in this condition for so many years. This emotional response did not seem dependent on a religious connection from the visitor, but was widely felt.
How beautiful the craftsmanship of many of these objects and artefacts are and how wonderful they are preserved and that is quite special’ Visitor vox pop

‘It is not something that is central to my belief system but I am glad it happened and produced the beautiful objects that it did’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think it would come down to the quality of the work, the workmanship, and what the quality of that workmanship must mean in terms of the money that was invested in it, and therefore the belief that was invested in it. And the real significance of these things to the people who owned them and had them commissioned’ Visitor vox pop

‘I think the thing that really struck me is the power of relics and how much they mean to so many people. Like one of the first things that struck me was I think it was one of the wall panels and had about the Holy Shroud with the image of Christ and it had a quote from an ancient historian from the middle ages that said hundreds of people died in the mob to rush to see that object and that is incredible that people would die just to see something from a dead person’ Visitor vox pop

Personal connections

Linking to this some visitors had more of a personal connection to the exhibition, empathising with those who venerated these objects and even feeling enlightened by their experience.

‘It is a way of being close to something that obviously has meant a lot of meaning in the past to different persons, so it is history’ Visitor vox pop

‘A sense of experiencing something that was really important to these people hundreds if not thousands of years ago and the continuity of things that are still important’ Visitor vox pop

‘I enjoyed the experience and it reaffirms the value of art and creativity and it does I think make one feel better looking at these things’ Visitor vox pop

Travel back in time

A few visitors also felt as if they had travelled back in time on their visit, an immersive response created through the exhibition design and atmosphere.

‘You get to feel that you are back in the Middle Ages in a monastery or something’ Visitor vox pop
10.5 Spiritual outcomes

Reflection and contemplation

The most commonly cited spiritual outcome was reflection and contemplation, with 8% of visitors experiencing this as their main outcome. Visitors were able to reflect on the stories behind the objects and their relevance today in a peaceful environment, linking the themes of art, spirituality and religion.

‘I think it goes back to that sense of peacefulness, and it’s all set up to be... contemplation and thinking about things. I wasn’t expecting that. I was just expecting to wander around very quickly, and it’s taken us quite a long time’
Visitor vox pop

‘I found a real connection between art and spirituality and power’ Visitor vox pop

‘I quite like the contemplation at the end of the exhibition at the end about other religions and the worship and devotion they do, because most of it’s...most of the exhibition is dedicated to the Christian religion and Christian saints, but like I say I think everyone in the world is called to be a saint, and just because you’re religious doesn’t mean to say... like Mahatma Ghandi and people like that. They might not get canonised because they’re not a Roman Catholic’ Visitor vox pop

Others felt inspired by the objects themselves.

‘I was astonished that so many of these relics had survived so well for so long. And of course many of the items were truly beautiful, and quite inspiring’ Visitor vox pop

Religious experience, facilitated by the space

A few visitors had a more religious experience, with the exhibition enhancing their beliefs or causing them to connect on a religious level.

‘I suppose in your day to day life your beliefs tend to sometimes get kicked to the back of life and just sometimes it is quite nice and recently I visited the Holy Land and so it was actually quite nice to come here and see exhibits and something of the story and it was like doing the trip there it enhances your beliefs a little bit more and brings it back to the front of your mind’ Visitor vox pop

‘I believe in the true stories behind...the experiences of the saints that made these artefacts holy. So to me it was kind of like a religious experience if you like’ Visitor vox pop
‘Art, spirituality and power’: an evaluation of Treasures of Heaven: saints, relics and devotion in medieval Europe at the British Museum

Again, this reaction was aided by the ambience of the space, putting visitors in this spiritual frame of mind.

‘It’s a sacred subject. It just gives a sense of the sacred, spiritual space. It feels spiritual’ Visitor vox pop

‘I really like [the] way it was put on, I like the music. I like that fact that it felt like quite a spiritual environment. Sort of peaceful, you know tranquil’ Visitor vox pop
Morris Hargreaves McIntyre is a creative and intelligent arts management consultancy working in the interests of audience and organisational development.

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