British Museum

Review

2007/8

1 London

2 United Kingdom

3 World
Chairman’s foreword

Open debate about cultural meaning in the past and its relevance to the formation of societies today
There is something about planning a cultural event that galvanises a museum. It is a huge investment of staff time and resources, and there are no guarantees of success. Over several years one proposes, one prepares, one presents (well, hardly ‘one’, since entire phalanxes of museum staff contribute their expertise). And then, on a single opening day, everyone watches nervously, to see if the gamble really will take off.

So it was with The First Emperor, where the British Museum’s own enthusiasm for displaying China’s terracotta warriors, musicians and other figures from the tomb of the emperor Qin Shihuangdi caught fire in the most astonishing way with the public. Ticket sales exceeded both expectations and capacity, and the BM was able (something that has not always been the case in the past) to show flexibility by extending the exhibition opening hours, enabling as many visitors as possible to see these rare world artefacts.

Critical acclaim was no less responsive and captured the importance of the story as much as the spectacle. For while the popularity of The First Emperor matters hugely in terms of the public affirmation of the BM’s work, the exhibition above all demonstrates the Museum’s role in addressing contemporary political issues through history. As recent events have shown, cultural ties are a complex area, and what is favourable at one instant may become problematic the next. That is, however, no reason to shy away from difficult topics. Indeed, it is all the more reason to engage with them.

The BM relishes its role as a forum for discussion. It is here that the great library of human history can be consulted, and the very presence of what has survived is a testament to civilisation in all senses, not least as a facilitator of open debate about cultural meaning in the past and its relevance to the formation of societies today. To speak of ‘the collection’ is very much to embrace what all nations have achieved over time.

The BM’s focus is strongly international. It aims to bring the world to London and the United Kingdom (for which, as The First Emperor and national interest in the forthcoming exhibition on the Roman emperor Hadrian have shown, there is a great desire) and to tour the BM’s own collection internationally. It is a unique role, and one which involves extensive work establishing ties with other institutions and other countries. It can only be achieved with the full support of the government and private individuals. The Trustees are grateful for the enormous support given by the BM’s funders, sponsors and donors in 2007/08, which enabled so much of the Museum’s work.

Knowledge not just of objects, but of improved techniques for studying and conserving them
It is a key feature of the BM that its work is underpinned by teams of scholars and researchers. The 6.049 million visitors who passed through the doors of the building in Bloomsbury in 2007/08 marvelled at Assyrian reliefs and Egyptian sarcophagi - as everybody must. Yet it may not always be immediately evident the extent to which everything they see on display has been meticulously preserved and studied.

New discoveries emerge from any number of directions: archival research, scientific analysis, treatment for conservation. The results are disseminated internationally, through scholarly publication and the discussion of new ideas among experts across the world, who share knowledge not just of objects and the societies that made them, but of improved techniques for studying and conserving such artefacts. Curators and conservators ensure that the very legacy of mankind is cared for in the best way possible for future generations.

The BM is at the forefront of such research, though it is presently hampered by outdated facilities. The historic development of the Museum infrastructure over 250 years is understandable — a Georgian terrace house can be converted into a laboratory, it is true — but the 21st century may at last be the time for a serious reconsideration of what the BM needs to do, and what facilities it needs in order to accomplish it. With the new Northwest Development, the BM hopes to modernise and extend its position as a leading institution of scholarship and scientific research and at last provide a proper space for temporary exhibitions. Both the public and the collection deserve no less.

Visitor numbers in 2007/08 were the highest they have been in recent years, putting the BM at the top of the UK’s cultural attractions. The nation’s cultural life is clearly thriving when people are willing to arrive early to queue for day tickets to an exhibition and literally run across the Great Court to gain admission, as they did for The First Emperor. Yet a concern with numbers is distracting: The real challenge is to establish the quality of the visitor experience. The BM is increasingly focused not just on what it can achieve with the collection, but on studying how people use the Museum.

Enhancing access in London, across the UK and throughout the world is both a big leap and a first step. An awareness that the Museum’s artefacts are a resource for understanding should encourage our attentiveness to finding new and relevant ways of making the world’s histories live for all who encounter the collection.
Adding to the collection

The British Museum (BM) constitutes a vast human record, preserving histories that would otherwise be lost. Reshaping those histories, furthering the world’s knowledge of them, is a key factor in acquiring particular objects that cast new light over the existing collection.

Among the new acquisitions in 2007/8 were two fascinating collections, both acquired with support from the BM Friends. The Elveden hoard of 627 coins is one of the largest known groups of Roman coins from the reigns of the British usurper emperors Carausius (AD 286/7–93) and Allectus (AD 293–6). They will tour England and Wales from 2009 as part of an exhibition of rare finds preserved through the Portable Antiquities Scheme. A very different, 19th-century group emerged from a William & Mary box that belonged to the Stafford Allen family. Its three trays hold 263 antiquities, many carefully labelled with their find spots. The objects include Roman gilt brooches and amber beads, a Frankish garnet-inlaid bird’s-head pin and an Iron Age enamelled bronze bridle cheek-piece. Most of the objects are Roman, but an Etruscan bronze inscription naming the Italian deity Culiuns is particularly important.

The spirit of intellectual enquiry that led from collectors such as Sir Hans Sloane to the founding of the BM itself could be seen in several Enlightenment rarities acquired with support from the BM Friends. An equation of time clock of 1710–15, made by the renowned London clockmaker Joseph Williamson for Anthony Herbert, was designed to measure ‘true’ solar time as indicated by the yearly motion of the sun. Three hand-coloured satirical etchings of 1792 by Richard Newton included A Forcible Appeal for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, disturbing evidence of the strength of the pro-slavery lobby.

A Charles II gold beaker was presented by the Levant Company in 1687 to the wife of Sir William Turnbull, the English ambassador to the Sublime Porte (Turkey). One of only two such presentation cups to survive, the rare object was accepted by HM Government in lieu of inheritance tax and allocated to the BM in 2007. Two maiolica plates of the 17th century show A Triumph of Julius Caesar and The Judgement of Paris. Both are rare pieces made in France in the Italian tradition, the former acquired with support from the BM Friends, the latter funded by the Friends and the Art Fund, as was a portrait in chalk of 1793 by Jean-Baptiste Isabey. It shows a fashionable young woman dressed in the simple Roman style favoured in revolutionary France. Isabey was an official artist for Napoleon, as well as a designer of theatre décor and Sévres porcelain. The portrait is a significant addition to the BM collection of French Neoclassical drawings. Further afield, important additions to the collection included...
Slave trade debates, 1790s
Abolition was not easily won, and argument raged against William Wilberforce's efforts. Three prints by satirist Richard Newton include views by those opposed to abolishing the slave trade.

Equation clock, 1710–15
Scientific interest in accurate timekeeping in the 18th century, when the BM was founded, led to the invention of clocks able to measure true solar time.

Japanese photobooks, 1945–2000
The breadth of life in post-war Japan is impressively caught in 212 newly acquired photobooks, many first editions with their original obi (sashes) attached.

Portrait of a woman, 1793
A fashionable chalk portrait by Jean-Baptiste Isabey has greatly enhanced the BM's collection of French Neoclassical drawings.

Historical money now includes an Iron Age silver minim with a double-headed dragon; a rare 20-franc cheque issued by the Anglo-Palestine Company; and a generous gift of medals by the German artist Hans Karl Burgeff. Other acquisitions include a Georgian tunic, Ethiopian baby carrier and a generous gift of 60 Paithan paintings from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The BM is especially grateful for these and all gifts to the collection.

Stafford Allen box
A 19th-century antiquarian assembled this wonderfully diverse collection of Iron Age, Roman, medieval and later jewellery, metalware and other objects.

Paithan painting, late 19th/early 20th century
Sixty dramatic south Indian paintings recently donated to the BM tell the story of King Harishchandra.
Exhibitions

In 2007/8 worldwide media coverage of *The First Emperor: China’s Terracotta Army* (13 September 2007 – 6 April 2008), sponsored by Morgan Stanley, confirmed the enormous importance of learning about China and Chinese history. The exhibition transformed the celebrated Round Reading Room of the BM — specially adapted by designers Metaphor to host the display — and broke all BM records for advance ticket sales.

Over 850,000 visitors saw *The First Emperor* — the largest attendance for a BM exhibition since the Tutankhamun display of 1972. Opening hours were extended during the run to cope with the demand. Critical praise was extensive. *The First Emperor* was ‘exhibition of the year’ (*Independent*), ‘endlessly fascinating’ (*Observer*), ‘spell-binding’ (*Sunday Times*), ‘awe-inspiring’ (*Sunday Telegraph*) and ‘wonderfully theatrical’ (*Evening Standard*). Rachel Campbell-Johnston of *The Times* summed it up for readers across the nation: ‘You must see this show.’

The exhibition featured the largest number of objects ever loaned from Xi’an, where the tomb of China’s first emperor, Qin Shihuangdi (259–210 BC), was discovered in 1974. Excavation turned up thousands of terracotta figures, and made the archaeological site the most famous in the world. At the BM, visitors could get close to the emperor’s celebrated soldiers and other finds: bureaucratic officials, musicians and acrobats, life-size bronze cranes. In 221 BC Qin Shihuangdi united several states into what became China, unifying codes of law, money, script and weights and measures. The displays established the first emperor’s important legacy and how the vast project of creating his burial place was achieved. The BM is grateful for the guidance of Professor Dame Jessica Rawson, who was senior academic adviser on the project.

Film and television links included the BM DVD, *The First Emperor*, which sold over 17,000 copies. Dan Snow’s hour-long documentary on BBC2, *China’s Terracotta Army*, reached 4.2 million viewers. The events programme included the most successful single day at the BM ever: Chinese New Year, supported by BP in association with CHINA NOW, attracted over 35,000 people. Supporting the exhibition was an extensive programme of research and collaboration, part of the BM’s ongoing academic partnerships with China. BM China publications during the year ranged from the popular exhibition catalogue — written by a team of international scholars, it sold more than 54,000 copies in both hardback and paperback — to *Textiles from Dunhuang in UK Collections*, published in English and Chinese in Shanghai.
Terracotta army
Warriors from the tomb of
the Emperor Qin Shi Huangdi
(259–210 BC)

‘a strange, thrilling and
moving experience . . .
beautifully shown in the
Round Reading Room’

Daily Telegraph, September 2007
Picnic box with poppies, late 1600s.
Sources that inspire contemporary design in Japan include lacquered boxes such as this one inlaid with shell, displayed in the major exhibition, Crafting Beauty.

Egyptian cat, 600 bc.
The Gayer-Anderson cat, a perennial favourite with visitors to the BM, was the centre of a display that used the latest scientific techniques to explore the feline’s history. (Height 42cm)

Crafting Beauty in Modern Japan (19 July – 21 October 2007), organised with the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, featured Japanese ‘traditional art craft’: metalwork, water jars, kimonos, flower baskets, red lacquer boxes, all designed and made by leading Japanese artists of the past 50 years. These ceramics, glass and other wares by Living National Treasures were, according to the Guardian, ‘extraordinary works of art’, emerging from a long aesthetic tradition, yet boldly reworked in modern terms. Over 43,000 people saw the exhibition, two thirds of whom said it inspired them to visit the new BM Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries. Special events included a sold-out sake tasting, lecture by Grayson Perry and tours with curator Tim Clark for visiting Japanese students.

The BM programme ‘Atlantic Trade and Identity’ continued through 2007/8. A New World: England’s First View of America, supported by The Annenberg Foundation, ran until June 2007, attracting nearly 50,000 visitors to see rare 1580s drawings of America by the Englishman, John White. Inhuman Traffic: The Business of the Slave Trade (24 May 2007 – 6 April 2008) used coins and medals to show what Ignatius Sancho called in 1778 the ‘abominable traffic for slaves’. Marking the 200th anniversary of the Parliamentary abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, the display featured important resistance figures such as Olaudah Equiano and Toussaint l’Ouverture.

The Caribbean before Columbus: The Taíno Universe (3 May – 17 June 2007) gave a tantalising glimpse into the world inhabited by indigenous cultures in the Americas before the arrival of Columbus in 1492. A large number of visitors felt that the display had given them a much better understanding of peoples and cultures in a region about which they previously knew very little.

The Asahi Shimbun Displays in Room 3 remained popular and the company has generously renewed its sponsorship for a further three years. Changing flower displays were shown in a modern stoneware vase from the BM collection in Ikebana: Living Flowers of Japan (5 July – 19 August 2007). The weekly changeovers, conducted by members of Ikebana International, represented different schools of arrangement and drew increasing crowds, many of whom returned to the BM especially to take part. The Korean Moon Jar (20 September – 21 October 2007) focused on a rare 17th–18th-century masterpiece from the collection, one of only 20 remaining in the world. Timed to coincide with Chuseok, the Korean harvest moon festival, this stunning display attracted 9% of the overall visitors to the BM during the period. Divine Cat: Speaking to the Gods in Ancient Egypt (8 November 2007 – 27 January 2008) juxtaposed the latest scientific findings on one of the BM’s best-loved objects – the dignified bronze Gayer-Anderson cat from Ancient Egypt – with an insight into the practice of votive objects in Ancient Egypt. The popularity of this
exhibition exceeded all expectations and made it the most successful Asahi Shimbun Display so far in terms of visitor numbers. The findings from the exhibition will inform the new permanent display of the cat in Room 4. Church and Emperor: An Ethiopian Crucifixion (6 March – 5 May 2008), with support from the Headley Trust, set out for Easter a powerful 19th-century Ethiopian crucifixion showing scenes from the life of Abune Selama, Patriarch of the Ethiopian Church from 1841–67.

In the new Prints & Drawings gallery, Italian Prints 1875–1975 (1 February – 3 June 2007) was followed by a two-part exhibition of Prints and Drawings: Recent Acquisitions (28 June 2007 – 9 March 2008) viewed by more than 220,000 people. Works included a 1550 design for a chapel by Taddeo Zuccaro, a 1943 watercolour landscape by Paul Nash and a recent Julian Opie screenprint of ‘Ruth smoking’. In Room 91, Chinese religious paintings representing Gods, Guardians and Immortals (8 February – 5 August 2007) led on to Faith, Narrative and Desire: Masterpieces of Indian Painting in the British Museum (9 August – 11 November 2007). Part of the London-wide ‘India Now’ season, the exhibition was highly praised. ‘Remarkable,’ said William Dalrymple in the Guardian, while the London Review of Books called it ‘utterly engaging . . . one butts eagerly against the glass cases in which this exhibition is housed.’ A 14th-century handscroll, acquired with the help of the Art Fund, lent its title to Fascination with Nature (10 January – 5 August 2008), an exhibition that focused on the depiction of birds, flowers and insects in Chinese porcelain and paintings.

Radha and Krishna in a garden, 1840 Masterpieces of Indian painting from the BM collection were displayed in Faith, Narrative and Desire to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Indian Independence.

Combustione I, 1965 Alberto Burri was one of several Italian printmakers whose work (many from a collection recently donated to the BM) featured in Italian Prints 1875–1973.
New galleries

In June 2007, His Excellency Rasoul Movahedian opened a new suite of BM galleries above the Enlightenment Gallery. The Rahim Irvani Gallery of Ancient Iran, funded by Maryam and Vahid Alaghband, highlights the achievements of the Achaemenids, Parthians and Sasanians, encompassing the farthest reaches of the vast Persian empire. The origin of cities is discussed, videos and monumental 19th-century casts from Persepolis set the context. Celebrated BM objects such as the Cyrus Cylinder are beautifully displayed.

The refurbished Weston Gallery of Roman Britain, one of the BM’s most popular, reopened following essential building improvements, generously supported by the Garfield Weston Foundation. Exquisite Late Roman jewellery and tableware from Mildenhall and elsewhere are shown, as are bronze heads of Claudius and Hadrian. Improved facilities have allowed new objects to be displayed, including the Ashwell hoard, purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund.

Galleries on prehistory and the birth of agriculture document 12,000 years of settlement in the Middle East and Europe. Dancers adorn a bowl from southern Iran; a shaman’s headdress survives from Yorkshire. Later artefacts such as the Mold gold cape of 2200–1400 BC, found in Wales, show the sophisticated artistry of the age of Stonehenge and Avebury.

Mold gold cape, 2200–1400 BC
New prehistory galleries explore the earliest existence of mankind, and feature among other rare artifacts a ceremonial Bronze Age cape found in Flintshire in 1833.

Mayan sculpture recast
From 1881–94, explorer Alfred Maudslay prepared plaster molds of ancient sculptures he encountered on Mayan sites. Cast in London, several of these impressive figures are now on public display on the East Stairs. (Height 3.85m)

Roman Britain
The refurbished Weston Gallery of Roman Britain (above right) sets out this important, and popular, period of history, from the Vindolanda writing tablets to objects such as this silver-gilt votive plaque, found in Hertfordshire. (Height 10.6cm)

Oxus Treasure
Fine gold and silver found on the banks of the river Oxus are among important Achaemenid and other works displayed in the beautiful new Rahim Irvani Gallery of Ancient Iran.
Northwest Development

With Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners, the BM is redeveloping the northwest corner of the Bloomsbury site to build a new Centre for Conservation and Science and special exhibitions galleries.

Porcelain flask, 1723–35

With delicate famille rose enamelling, this Yongzheng Period porcelain is among the rarities collected by Percival David and soon to be housed in the BM’s new Sir Joseph Hotung Centre for Ceramic Studies.

The Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries were officially named following a ten-year sponsorship agreement. The popular galleries are unique outside Japan in allowing the span of Japanese civilisation to be seen in one place, from archaeological artefacts to modern Manga. The East Stairs now display Mayan casts from Mexico and casts of Achaemenid sculptures from Persepolis. The Round Reading Room was reconfigured with a temporary platform over the historic wooden desks to present The First Emperor and will remain available for the Hadrian exhibition in 2008. Other BM improvements included repairs to the south façade, a new staff cafeteria and completing the restoration of the BM’s front gates.

Forthcoming plans for 2008/9 include several new galleries: Nebamun, funded by the R. & S. Cohen Foundation; Medieval, funded by Jill and Paul Ruddock; Clocks and Watches, funded by the Djangoly Foundation. The Sir Joseph Hotung Centre for Ceramic Studies will house the renowned Percival David Foundation collection of Chinese ceramics as well as a students’ room and library. The BM is grateful to Sir Joseph Hotung for his continuing generosity.

The BM has appointed Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners (formerly Richard Rogers Partnership) as architects for its project to transform over 8000 sq.m. in the northwest corner of the Bloomsbury site. The Northwest Development – one of the largest building projects in the BM’s history – will include a state-of-the-art exhibition space three times larger than the current space; a logistics hub for the secure dispatch and receipt of loans; and a new advanced BM Centre for Conservation and Science. The Northwest Development will provide the modern facilities that the BM urgently needs.
Research

New displays would not be possible without extensive programmes of research. The BM is an internationally acclaimed centre of research in areas as diverse as archaeology, art history and anthropology. Conservation and science ensure the welfare of the vast collection, while academic enquiry by BM staff and others across the BM’s great library of human history brings new discoveries to light. In July 2007 a visiting scholar’s work with an Assyrian tablet written in cuneiform — one of the oldest forms of writing known to us — confirmed the historical existence of a Babylonian eunuch mentioned in the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah. Amid extensive media coverage, the Telegraph summed it up nicely: ‘Tiny museum tablet yields discovery of Biblical proportions’. Worldwide public interest underlined the importance of continual investigation into the existing collection.

Conservation and scientific research span every department in the museum. Preparing objects for loan and special exhibitions prompts renewed investigation into under-studied corners of the collection, as well as into much-examined artefacts such as the Gayer-Anderson Cat. Analysed prior to a special display, the bronze cat revealed new information about how it was originally made and later modified. Other investigations ranged from recently excavated materials from Tell es-Sa‘ideyeh in Jordan to Roman wall paintings from the tomb of the Naos to the great dragon tiles of the Ming Dynasty.

The wide range of conservation and scientific work was reflected in the 2007 BM Technical Research Bulletin, a new annual publication in which topics included the black bronzes of Burma, the long-term effects of ultraviolet light on fabrics, Aztec conch shells and a study of corrosion in iron. Scientific techniques developed through research into the collection have an international impact. With a major grant from the Leverhulme Trust, a non-invasive method of studying painted and varnished surfaces (using a technique known as optical coherence tomography) is being developed by the BM with colleagues from the National Gallery, Nottingham Trent University and the University of Kent. The technique has already proved able to map holes of deterioration in pitted glass, without physical samples having to be taken.

The generosity of the Friends, who donated over £100,000, and major donations from the John Ellerman Foundation, 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust, Patrick Deane and the Mercers’ Company enabled the BM to acquire two new scanning electron microscopes. The specimen chambers have been specially selected to allow the study of large and awkward objects hitherto not capable of being examined in such detail. The equipment will have a major impact on the BM’s work and is already prompting new lines of enquiry and collaborative projects.

BM expertise is sought nationally and internationally. In 2007/8 conservators travelled to Zagreb, Croatia to advise on the Krapina Neanderthal remains. Curator Helen Wang was UK director of a project to catalogue the collections of celebrated archaeologist Aurel Stein in the Hungarian Academy, Budapest. Staff participated at excavations at Miletos and visited museum colleagues in Athens to discuss research, loans and collaborative projects. The BM is assisting an international project on Neolithic jade axes, mined in the Alps and traded across Europe around 4500 BC. Coins from a recent excavation at Pompeii are being catalogued, and Mexican and American colleagues have joined the BM for a world overview of coins used from antiquity to the present day.

Academic colleagues and other visitors from around the world make use of the BM as a resource. An Israeli conservation scientist was awarded a Rothschild Fellowship to study the residues in Merv ceramics at the BM. The Institut Français d’Archéologie Orientale, based in Cairo, is working with the BM and colleagues in Prague to publish the world’s oldest papyri. VIPs included Saïd Ould Mahmoud, the mayor of Timbuktu; Jacob Russ, a Canadian Naga Nation chief; and Dr Abbas al-Hussainy, Chairman of the Iraqi State Board for Antiquities and Heritage.

As well as producing the BM’s own popular and research publications, staff make substantial contributions to world scholarship. Among the hundreds of books, articles and web resources (an area of increasing impact) in which BM research appeared were Spirit and Life: Masterpieces of Islamic Art from the Aga Khan Collection; an online edition of First Millennium cuneiform lexical lists; a catalogue on colonial collections published by the Rijksmuseum; and a Spanish study of shamanism.

Neolithic jade axe
BM contributions to international research include a project on the trade of jade axes across Europe around 4500 BC. This example was found in Canterbury. (Length 21.9cm)

Biblical discovery
World press in 2007 reported on research into the BM collection of cuneiform tablets. A researcher assessed historical evidence of the existence of a biblical figure named in the Old Testament. (34 x 35mm)
Celebrations for Chinese New Year included Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett presenting a performance of highlights from Monkey: Journey to the West. The day drew a record 35,000 visitors, the largest number ever for a single public event at the BM.
Learning

Animating the collection, bringing its ideas and arguments to life, is a driving force behind the BM’s public programming. *The First Emperor* was the centrepiece for the year’s events. Extensive community engagement enabled the BM to establish new links with Chinese groups across London. Almost 600 community members attended a special exhibition preview, with 25 young Chinese volunteers acting as interpreters. Many had never visited the BM before.

For schools, an online *First Emperor* pack included teaching materials and slideshows of high-resolution images for use in the classroom. Teacher-led morning visits enabled 350 pupils an hour to see the exhibition, while the BM’s own sessions included the East Asian Yellow Earth Theatre Company transforming the space for 7–11-year-olds. The children met a charioter, dancer, imperial official or archaeologist, then saw a short play telling the life of the emperor Qin Shi Huangdi. Praise from teachers was extensive: “Wonderful!” wrote one. “A truly valuable learning experience.” All sessions were completely booked, as were slots added later to deal with the high demand. Over 11,000 students saw the exhibition.

The press (and many online photo-sharing sites) were delighted with the transformation of the Great Court with a new terracotta army, this one of miniature clay warriors made by several hundred children during October half-term. Family activities throughout the year included Chinese games and making lanterns, hats and dragons in the Hotung Gallery. Adult events ranged from sell-out lectures on Chinese history and a study day, *East meets West*, to a busy season of contemporary Chinese films.

*The First Emperor* programme peaked with the Bloomsbury-blocking crowds who came to the BM to celebrate Chinese New Year on 9 February. The Year of the Rat was welcomed blocking crowds who came to the BM to celebrate Chinese New Year on 9 February. The Year of the Rat was welcomed.

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Almost 600 community members attended a special exhibition preview, with 25 young Chinese volunteers acting as interpreters. Many had never visited the BM before.

For schools, an online *First Emperor* pack included teaching materials and slideshows of high-resolution images for use in the classroom. Teacher-led morning visits enabled 350 pupils an hour to see the exhibition, while the BM’s own sessions included the East Asian Yellow Earth Theatre Company transforming the space for 7–11-year-olds. The children met a charioter, dancer, imperial official or archaeologist, then saw a short play telling the life of the emperor Qin Shi Huangdi. Praise from teachers was extensive: “Wonderful!” wrote one. “A truly valuable learning experience.” All sessions were completely booked, as were slots added later to deal with the high demand. Over 11,000 students saw the exhibition.

The press (and many online photo-sharing sites) were delighted with the transformation of the Great Court with a new terracotta army, this one of miniature clay warriors made by several hundred children during October half-term. Family activities throughout the year included Chinese games and making lanterns, hats and dragons in the Hotung Gallery. Adult events ranged from sell-out lectures on Chinese history and a study day, *East meets West*, to a busy season of contemporary Chinese films. Events throughout the year highlighted the BM collection’s cultural diversity. The Manga family film season sold out with hits such as *Naruto the Movie: ninja Clash in the Land of Snow* and *Porco Rosso: Pigs in Planes*. Other film seasons ranged from contemporary Caribbean cinema to a Bollywood hit about Indian resistance and cricket. The Big Draw on 13 October featured dragons and drew nearly 20,000 visitors, while other workshops focused on Mexican sculpture and Roman mosaics. The Way of Tea was illustrated in the Mitsubishi Corporation Japanese Galleries, as was basket-making by Living National Treasure Hayakawai Shokosai. Lectures included Colin Thubron talking about the Silk Road and Julian Richards discussing archaeology at Stonehenge.

Among the year’s popular successes were the new Thursday Lates. Opening hours were extended on the first Thursday of every month to present a range of free events, turning the Great Court into a tumbling city square. One month saw Chinese music and beer alongside fan-dancing and Mahjong, while in December, calligraphy vied with tea appreciation, and martial arts cried out alongside Kunqu opera. Around 10,000 people stopped by to sample the BM Lates in 2007/8.
People

The BM is a vast and bustling environment – larger than neighbouring Russell Square, with the equivalent of nearly a thousand full-time staff working at the Museum. In 2007/8 over 16,000 visitors a day from around the world passed through the doors of the BM. Enjoying the collection and the public programming that surrounds it is only made possible to visitors at home and abroad by the commitment and passion of BM staff working across the organisation.

Volunteers, too, are an integral part of the BM’s work. Presently celebrating their 20th anniversary as a formal group (though their history of support for the BM reaches back much further), the BM’s 350 volunteers perform a range of tasks for the institution, from academic research and cataloguing to front-of-house event management. Recent work has involved introducing the collection at local libraries and other community centres.

Among the volunteers’ most successful roles are daily gallery tours and running the BM’s Hands-On desks, at which the public is allowed to handle real artefacts from the collection. ‘Your volunteer is worth his weight in gold,’ one visitor wrote in, while another described the Hands-On point as ‘brilliant. Both volunteers were very good at explaining things to both children and adults. It really made my seven-year-old’s visit.’

So popular is the object-handling programme that the BM volunteers helped set up a similar programmes in other museums across the UK.

The support of the BM Friends is likewise invaluable to the BM, and includes significant help in acquiring new objects. Recruitment to the Friends leapt enormously in 2007/8 with the immense success of The First Emperor exhibition. Over 6000 new memberships have brought the number of BM Friends to 17,500, a record figure.

The sense of commitment brought by the staff, volunteers and Friends is one the BM seeks to inspire in all visitors. That the BM is a shared resource, a public collection for all, draws on the understanding of the BM’s long history as a civic space, where all cultures can be represented and ideas debated in a forum free from the pressures of politics and power. Being a part of initiatives such as the recently announced World Collections Programme or the Museum Mile fosters a sense of a cultural community in the Capital.

The BM’s extensive national and international presence widens that remit to a world-wide programme of cultural and academic activity. Acknowledging cultural interaction becomes not just a means of defining current preoccupations, but a force for improving relations between different groups.

Within the Museum, the consequences of such interaction are discussed through topical exhibitions and public debate,
Who needs to be British?
Guardian debate at
the British Museum
24 April 2007

Ziauddin Sardar,
broadcaster and
writer on
contemporary Islam

Lisa Jardine,
professor of
Renaissance studies
and cultural critic

Jon Snow,
journalist and
Channel 4 news
presenter

Andrew Marr,
political journalist
and broadcaster

Bob Rae,
legal and public
policy adviser
The New China
Guardian debate at the British Museum
14 November 2007

Jonathan Fenby, former editor, South China Morning Post
Isaac Mao, blogger, venture capitalist and promoter of free media
Jon Snow, journalist and Channel 4 news presenter
Sun Shuyun, author and documentary film-maker
Steve Tsang, reader in politics, University of Oxford
which use the collection as a starting point for thinking about other cultures and examining our own. To mark the 200th anniversary of the Act of Union between Scotland and England, the BM and the Guardian hosted ‘Who needs to be British?’, a public debate chaired by Jon Snow. The views ranged from historian Lisappard’s refusal to assimilate to a post-imperial label to broadcaster Zindel’s Sardhín’s pokes of Britain’s acceptance of multiple identities. Other popular debates included ‘The New China’, co-hosted with the Guardian, and, with the London Review of Books, two cross-national debates about ‘America: The View from Here’, with Simon Schama and others, and whether China could have discovered Europe.

What is Britishness?
Three 18th-century caricature ‘maps’
sharla Scotland (left), Ireland (lower left) and England and Wales (lower right).
From Geography Bewitched: engravings after drawings by Robert Dighton, 1794.
Loans and tours across the UK

The BM extends the collection well beyond the confines of its celebrated building in London. Loans and exhibitions are the main focus, while programmes of training and research are organised both with the partners and their wider contacts throughout the country. Touring the collection, with generous support from the Dorset Foundation, has been a great success. In 2007/8 a total of 2344 objects were lent to 164 UK venues.

Spotlight tours from the BM enable outstanding objects to be seen by many who might not otherwise have access to them. *The Emperor’s Terrapin* showed a beautiful 17th-century Mughal jade sculpture to more than 264,000 people in venues across the UK, most recently in Bradford and at the Horniman Museum in London. Previewing the 2008 BM major exhibition on Hadrian, *The Face of an Emperor: Hadrian Inspects the Wall*, supported by BP toured a bronze head of the Roman ruler to venues at either end of Hadrian’s Wall: Tullie House, Carlisle and Segedunum Roman Fort and Museum, Wallsend. The rare surviving bronze, probably made to mark Hadrian’s visit to London in AD 122, had never left London since its rediscovery in the River Thames in 1834.

Other powerful objects to tour included Romuald Hazoumé’s *La Bouche du Roi*, acquired in 2007 with the assistance of the Art Fund and BM Friends. The multimedia artwork is comprised of 304 masks made of petrol cans, the sound of slaves lamenting and a seven-minute film about motorcyclists who run petrol between Nigeria and Benin. Taking the form of the late 18th-century slave ship, the *Brookes*, it makes a powerful statement about African history. The artist himself appeared to speak to audiences about the piece in Hull, Liverpool, Bristol and Newcastle. The tour received support from Arts Council England. Other high-profile loans include the display of the world-famous bog body known as ‘Lindow Man’ at Manchester Museum in 2008/9.

‘The exhibition was excellent, perfectly suited to the space in which it was displayed,’ said the Bolton Museum of *Made in Africa*, a Partnership UK tour of some of the oldest objects created by humans. ‘The objects carried the kudos we hope to achieve from the BM partnership.’ The exhibition was also seen in Andover, Torquay and Wrexham.

Ancient Greeks: Athletes, Warriors and Heroes is the largest group of Greek artefacts ever lent by the BM. Linked to both a new BM web resource (www.ancientgreece.co.uk) and the Cultural Olympiad, the project is funded by the Department for Culture Media & Sport (DCMS) and Department for Children Schools & Families (DCSF). It has been seen at Gosport, Leicester (where attendance exceeded 43,000) and Luton before travelling to Lincoln, South Shields and...
Glasgow in 2008/9. Forthcoming tours include Fabric of a Nation, a collaborative reworking of a BM exhibition of Glamaign textiles, which will travel to the Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead, Bradford and Harlepool.

The BM/Hayward Touring Exhibitions continued in 2007/8 with Rembrandt as Printmaker travelling to Stoke-on-Trent and Blackpool, and Museum in Focus: Body to the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere, Cumbria, and the Shipley Art Gallery in Gateshead. Mind-forged Manacles: William Blake and Slavery Art (alongside loans from the Fitzwilliam Museum, the National Museum of Serbia and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture) explored how trade through Constantinople in the Middle Ages facilitated the exchange of artistic, philosophical, political and religious ideas across medieval Europe, Africa and the East.

The BM sends material on long- and short-term loan to a variety of institutions. Egyptian artefacts loaned to the new Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow. It received national press attention. Laura Cumming wrote in the Observer: ‘This selection of prints from the BM’s superb collection, by artist Julian Opie, shows another side of Hiroshige . . . it makes you consider him with new eyes.’

Encounters: Travel and Money in the Byzantine World was the first of a series of collaborations with the Barber Institute in Birmingham. Masterpieces of Byzantine, Eastern and Western art (alongside loans from the Fitzwilliam Museum, the National Museum of Serbia and the Hellenic Ministry of Culture) explored how trade through Constantinople in the Middle Ages facilitated the exchange of artistic, philosophical, political and religious ideas across medieval Europe, Africa and the East.

The BM sends material on long- and short-term loan to a variety of institutions. Egyptian artefacts loaned to the new Kelvingrove Museum in Glasgow have been viewed by more than five million visitors since it reopened in July 2006. A selection of Blake’s visionary drawings and watercolours by Signorelli, Fuseli and Blake were exhibited at the Roman Alcester Heritage Museum. The Chertsey Museum, discovered by the driver of a mechanical digger as he was excavating gravel from a channel of the River Thames, is the only known Iron Age shield made entirely of bronze. It was displayed at the Chertsey Museum until April 2008.

BM loans also featured nationally in many exhibitions organized by other museums and galleries. Indigo: A Blue to Dye For, organised by Manchester’s Whitworth Art Gallery, showed a curvilinear tablet and Japanese fireman’s coat and gloves from the BM among its explorations of the sources and uses of the colour. The exhibition was later displayed at Plymouth and Brighton and Hove. Coal, Flannelweave and Mythen: Irish and British Irons at Weston Park Museum, Sheffield examined Britain’s oldest Muslim community. The Anglo-Saxon Fuller Brooch was sent to Winchester for an exhibition on Alfred the Great. Material gathered from Polynesia and northwest America in the 18th century by George Vancouver was loaned to King’s Lynn for a celebration of the explorer’s 250th anniversary, while in Dante Rediscovered at the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere, Romantic interpretations of the Divine Comedy included drawings and watercolours by Signorini, Fuseli and Blake from the BM.

A model relationship for the BM is that of Sutton Hoo, where different objects relating to the celebrated Anglo-Saxon burial are loaned annually. In 2007, the Great Purse Lid was sent for display at the National Trust Visitor Centre – ‘a tasty bit of bling’ enthused the Suffolk Evening Star. Work on the Sutton Hoo material continues at the BM and the Sutton Hoo Helmet featured in the latest of the BM’s popular ‘Objects in Focus’ book series. Loans of important archaeological material included an Anglo-Saxon coin from the reign of Coenwulf (796–821) at the Bedford Museum and the Aliceau Tau Cross, which was displayed in Warwick and at the Roman Alcester Heritage Museum. The Chertsey Shield, discovered by the driver of a mechanical digger as he was excavating gravel from a channel of the River Thames, is the only known Iron Age shield made entirely of bronze. It was displayed at the Chertsey Museum until April 2008.

The BM’s programme commemorating the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade included support of several external exhibitions, including Breaking the Chains: Slavery, Abolition and the Making of Modern Britain in Bristol, and Life in West Africa at the Wiltshire Museum in Hull. Loans to major London exhibitions ranged from Spor Aye at the V&A Museum of Childhood to the Barbican’s Seafront: Art of Sea from antiquity to Now, to which the BM loaned 50 objects including lascivious Renaissance satyrs and 18th-century corset phalldases.
Chertsey Shield, 400–200 BC
Discovered in the Thames near Chertsey in Surrey in 1985, the only known Iron Age shield made entirely of bronze was on show at the Chertsey Museum in 2007/8.
(53.6 x 46.5cm)

Fuller Brooch, late 9th century
With 'sight' taking centre stage, the Anglo-Saxon silver brooch is the earliest known personification of the five senses. It was displayed in Winchester as part of an exhibition on Alfred the Great.
(Diameter 11.4cm)
National work

Work with national organisations results in a variety of talks, publications, exchanges, research and training. The BM’s Partnership UK unites 17 principal museums and galleries with a wider network that embraces many other organisations across the country. At the annual conference in March 2008, discussion focused on ways of looking at different histories of the world through museum collections, joint international and research initiatives and the BM as a distributed national collection.

BM staff from all departments speak throughout the UK, as well as internationally, to local groups and professional bodies. Among the many talks were curator Jonathan Tubb’s public lecture ‘Archaeology and the Bible’ in Lampeter; Irving Finkel discussing the philosophy of board games at Granznath; Laura Phillips addressing the International Committee of Money and Banking Museums on how to run object-handling events for visitors; and Sheila Canby elucidating ‘Spirit and Life’ with the Prince of Wales and the Aga Khan at London’s Ismaili Centre. John Curtis, Keeper of the Middle East collection, provided a cultural briefing for British Army officers about to be deployed in Basra.

Twenty-six of the BM’s research projects are in partnership with UK universities, ten supported by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and one by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Collaborations included hosting, with University College London and funding from the AHRC, a series of one-day workshops on collecting issues. An academic conference on the poetry of Rumi was organised with the Iran Heritage Foundation. The BM Clore Centre saw cross-cultural encounters debated in Adoption, Captivity and Slavery, a conference organised with the University of Plymouth and the Royal Anthropological Institute.

Researching ancient Britain

At Saham Toney in Norfolk, bones, teeth and shells (left) show evidence of a warm, forested environment 125,000 years ago, but no sign of humans. It is one of many the BM is examining as part of a collaborative national research project on the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain. Finds at Happisburgh, Norfolk (right) may prove to be the earliest human habitation in northern Europe, 700,000 years ago.

Ongoing archaeology work includes the large-scale project on the Ancient Human Occupation of Britain, a collaboration with several national partners funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Other national archaeological research has led to the discovery of what may be the earliest evidence of human habitation in northern Europe at Happisburgh, Norfolk. Material suggests the site may be at least 700,000 years old. The project is funded by the BM Townley Group, Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), British Academy and Leverhulme Trust.

The AHRC supported five PhD studentships to work with the collection, including research into the public perception of museum displays. Students from Birmingham and Oxford, Venice and Heidelberg, attended classes in handling cuneiform tablets. Trainee curatorships supported, among other topics, the study of early scientific instruments, with funding from the Worshipful Company of Scientific Instrument Makers. With King’s College, London, the BM has set up an MA course in the Enlightenment.

National work with young people included, with a £250,000 grant from the AHRC, developing teaching materials for UK schools based on the BM’s successful Money in Africa research project. The UK Youth Parliament, a forum for young people of diverse backgrounds from across the country, met at the BM on 10 October 2007. The intergenerational event included 77-year-old Abdool Alli of the Haringey Forum for Older People, who said: ‘It was good working with so many young people today. Young and old need to work together more to participate in decision-making.’
Portable Antiquities and Treasure

‘Perhaps the most successful project to engage a wide public with the practice of archaeology anywhere in the world’ is how British Archaeology described the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). A key component of the BM’s national strategy, PAS is run in association with the Museums, Libraries & Archives Council, with 62 partner organisations across England and Wales. Using Finds Liaison Officers and other experts, PAS encourages the recording of all archaeological finds in the UK by amateurs and professionals alike. Culture Minister Margaret Hodge called it an ‘incredibly successful scheme’. A government review in 2008 is examining how the scheme can be funded and managed in the future, one option being transferring full responsibility to the BM.

In the ten years since its inception, more than 320,000 finds have been made available to all through the PAS website (www.finds.org.uk), the largest online database of its kind in the world. Increasingly, its frontline archaeological work is being supported by research into the wealth of material recorded by PAS, with a number of advanced academic studies now being done into UK archaeology using PAS data.

At a time when its future funding is being debated in the UK, the PAS model is of great interest abroad. Roger Bland, Head of Portable Antiquities and Treasure, has spoken extensively on the scheme. Briefings in 2007/8 included Warsaw, New York and Washington. The Archaeological Institute of America praised PAS as ‘one of the few viable models for archaeologists throughout the world’ in a time of ‘continual warfare and destruction of cultural property’.

The highlight discovery of the year was the Vale of York hoard, which was widely reported in the media. BBC News called it ‘the most important Viking treasure find in 150 years’. Uncovered by two metal-detectorists from Leeds and reported under the Treasure Act, the rare collection includes European and Islamic coins, silver ingots, a gold arm-ring and a gilt silver cup made in France or Germany around AD 900. The goods were probably buried for safety by a wealthy Viking leader following the conquest of the Viking kingdom of Northumbria in AD 927. The BM and York Museums Trust are working jointly to acquire and exhibit this outstanding find.

Every year PAS provides the country with details of significant finds that might otherwise disappear undocumented into private ownership. Fascinating UK discoveries in 2007/8 included a lead pilgrim’s badge of Thomas à Becket found in Lincolnshire. The construction of a stable block in Derbyshire turned up two extremely rare gold coins from the reign of Carausius (AD 286/7–93), one struck in London, the other in Rouen – proof once again that a single European currency is not a new concept. Evidence in north Yorkshire for the first-century AD cult of Mithras – a Persian religious rite that quickly spread throughout the Roman Empire – emerged in the form of a slinging bronze figurine of Cautopates, one of the traditional companions of Mithras.

Vale of York hoard
In 2007, the most significant find of Viking Treasure in 150 years turned up in north Yorkshire. It included a gold arm-ring, silver-gilt vessel and 617 European and Islamic coins.

Becket pilgrim badge, 1300–1400
This lead pilgrim badge found in Lincolnshire in 2007 is a miniature copy of the reliquary of St Thomas à Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. It would have been worn on its owner’s hat or cloak. The jewels on the original are here represented by tiny moulded pellets.

Imperial coins, AD 286/7–93
Two gold aurei of Roman usurper Carausius were found in Bradley, Derbyshire, one showing Pax alone on the obverse, the other showing the emperor clasping the hand of Concordia.
Touring exhibitions and loans in the UK 2007/8

Touring exhibitions

1. Bell's Collection, Glasgow
   "Mind, Morale, and Memory: William Blake and Slavery:
   9 Nov 2007 – 6 Jan 2008

2. Tullie House, Carlisle
   "The Face of an Empire: Hadrian's Britain and the Walls:
   8 Feb – 13 Apr 2008

3. Dove Cottage, Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere
   "Dante Rediscovered: From Blake to Beckett:
   15 Aug – 18 Nov 2007

4. Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool
   "Renaissance as Printmaker:
   50 Jun – 6 Sep 2007
   "The Moon Reflected:
   8 Mar – 26 Apr 2008

5. Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester
   "Mind, Morale, and Memory: William Blake and Slavery:
   16 Jun – 6 Apr 2008

6. National Museums Liverpool
   "La Bouche du Roi:
   4 Aug – 2 Sep 2007

7. Worcestershire County Borough Museum
   "Made in Africa:
   15 Oct – 15 Dec 2007

8. Bean Gallery, Birmingham
   "Our Homes: Iconography of Home

9. Bristol City Museum and Gallery
   "La Bouche du Roi:
   15 Sep – 29 Oct 2007

10. Torquay Museum
    "Made in Africa:
    26 Jul – 6 Oct 2007

11. Hampshire Museum Service
    "Ancient Greeks: Athletics, Warriors and Heroes:
    31 Mar – 29 Jun 2007
    "Made in Africa
    29 Mar – 29 Jul 2007
    "Aft the Great:
    5 May – 21 Jul 2007
    Works of Art:
    2 Feb – 27 Apr 2008

    "The Emperor's Tongue:
    6 Jan – 29 Jul 2007

13. Fort Hall, London
    "The Atlantic Slave Trade:

14. Wardown Park Museum, Luton
    "Ancient Greeks: Athletics, Warriors and Heroes:
    15 May – 8 Jun 2008

15. Bedford Museum
    "Gold, Gods and Kings:
    24 Jul – 15 Dec 2007

16. Customs House, King's Lynn
    "George Vancouver:
    25th Anniversary:
    16 May – 1 Oct 2007

17. New Walk Museum, Leicester
    "Ancient Greeks: Athletics, Warriors and Heroes:
    1 Dec 2007 – 2 Mar 2008

18. Weston Park Museum, Sheffield
    "God, Funerary and Myths:
    25 Sep 2007 – 19 Apr 2008

    "Mind, Morale, and Memory:
    William Blake and Slavery:
    7 Apr – 20 May 2007
    "La Bouche du Roi:
    2 Jun – 15 Jul 2007

20. Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle
    "Early Greek:
    29 Sep 2007 – 20 Jan 2008

21. Tyne & Wear Museum, Newcastle
    "Music of the Air:
    (Shipley Art Gallery):
    21 Jul – 2 Sep 2007
    "La Bouche du Roi:
    (Leicester Art Gallery):
    10 Nov 2007 – 3 Feb 2008
    "Dancing Feats:
    (Arbeia Roman Fort):
    5 Jan – 27 Apr 2008

Loans

1. UK loans
   A full list of cities to which the BM sent loans can be found on page 75
British Museum in the World

Television, radio and print

Television and radio increasingly help the BM to broadcast its work to a wider international public. The Museum, ten half-hour programmes narrated by Ian MacMillan for BBC2, gave television viewers what the Guardian praised as a wonderful ‘sneaky peek behind the scenes at the BM’. The series opened in May 2007 with an audience of 2.7 million and maintained good viewing figures throughout its run. It has been sold to television stations in South America, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Australia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Belgium, Finland, Poland, France and Canada. As one viewer wrote of the BM team’s efforts, ‘I never realised how much work went into it. It gave me a greater respect and appreciation for the Museum.’

Drawing on last year’s highly successful, Masterpieces of the British Museum, BBC4 commissioned a follow-up series from Fulmar Television and Film called Masterpieces of the East for broadcast in early 2008. The half-hour programmes used six star objects from the BM and the V&A to present the religion, art and history of the Indian subcontinent. Early Buddhist carvings from the Great Stupa at Amaravati featured, as did a beautiful painted miniature of the Hindu gods Shiva and Parvati and a Sri Lankan statue of the Buddhist goddess, Tara.

Worldwide television and radio coverage of The First Emperor exhibition was extensive and a good showcase for the Museum’s international work. Hong Kong’s Phoenix TV followed the arrival of the warriors and the installation of the exhibition. A live link from the Reading Room on the opening morning ran for 20 minutes and included an interview with curator Jane Portal. National broadcasts included Dan Snow’s hugely popular hour-long special for BBC2 and a feature with John Wilson on Radio 4’s Front Row. Other international television coverage included the opening of the new Rahim Irvani Gallery of Ancient Iran, which was filmed by Iranian broadcaster Seda o Sima. A visit by Iranian vice president Parviz Davoodi in July 2007 was filmed by Jon Snow for Channel 4.

Woman’s Hour programmed not just First Emperor curator Jane Portal discussing Chinese art, but a series of seven interviews with women at the BM. Curator Richard Blurton was interviewed for BBC Asian Network, while Julie Anderson spoke on the Arabic station Radio Athena in Sudan on archaeology at Dangrek. Planning and research for the BM’s collaborative 100-part radio series with the BBC, A History of the World at the British Museum, continues, as does filming for a forthcoming BBC2 television feature with Dan Snow focused on the BM’s next major exhibition, Hadrian: Empire and Conflict.

Other work included film internships at the BM and a DVD made by the Pan-African Youth and Student Internationalist
Link, Peacemakers UK and other groups with the help of the BM’s Broadcast Unit. Pyramidquest took footage from the BM’s Resistance and Remembrance Day commemorating the abolition of the slave trade in Britain to frame a documentary about African identity and the BM collection. A short film reconstructed a Parthenon metope, one of the 92 carved fight scenes that ran around the outside wall. Using 3D-scanning, the film replaced missing heads and lost limbs and showed (as BBC News reported) the brightly painted colours originally used. The film can be seen in the Parthenon galleries, with a Danish version showing at the National Museum in Copenhagen, where two heads from the metope are housed. A film documenting collections in Vanuatu, From Tui to lobster bling Vanuatu long British Museum, featured the work of BM curators Lissant Bolton and Julie Adams.

Books and DVDs published by the British Museum Press (BMP) are sold worldwide. In 2007/8 the BMP published 42 titles, from specialist monographs to Draw Like an Egyptian, one of several popular activity books for children. The First Emperor’s success led to record-breaking sales in the Museum shops. Best-sellers were the giftbook The Terracotta Warriors (68,000 copies), First Emperor DVD (19,000 copies) and Pocket Timeline of China (9000 copies).

Several new titles – including The Parthenon Sculptures in the British Museum and Master Drawings of the Italian Renaissance – were recommended in the national press. David Thompson’s Watches drew on the BM collection of over 4000 timepieces, while Robin Cormack’s Icons examined the BM’s Byzantine and Russian icons. From Bactria to the Punjab explored Ancient Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Greek Architecture and its Sculpture was shortlisted for the Runciman Prize, and Christian Art for the Art, Christianity and Enquiry book award. Two exhibition catalogues, A New World: England’s First View of America and Italian Prints 1875–1975, made the Art Newspaper/AXA Art Award 2007 shortlist. A New World was also nominated for the Berger Prize for British Art History. Collaborations outside the BM included the BM/Barber Institute catalogue for Encounters: Travel and Money in the Byzantine World, which won the 2007 Lhotka Prize and joint runner-up for the Art Newspaper/AXA Art Award 2007. The Ikon Gallery produced an elegant catalogue of woodblock prints from the BM’s Hiroshige collection.

Overseas publications included an updated catalogue for the exhibition in Dubai of Word into Art and a Spanish edition of Art and Empire to accompany the BM touring exhibition in Alicante. BMP titles in translation included books on Ancient Egypt in Polish and Hungarian; on Ancient Greece and Byzantium in Romanian; on the history of money in Korean, Chinese, Czech and Russian; and on ancient astronomy in Japanese.
International access to the BM’s vast collection took a huge leap forward with a relaunch of the Museum website in May 2007. Now accessible under the new domain name, www.britishmuseum.org, the website was redesigned to make it more attractive and easier to use. Basic visitor information is now available in seven languages. In 2007/8, 46 million web pages were viewed on the BM site by more than seven million people.

The BM’s ultimate aim is to display all of its collection online for everyone to use. The vast project began in the 1980s and the first phase came to fruition in 2007 with the release in October of 260,000 records, most from the Department of Prints and Drawings, including 50,000 drawings and 180,000 prints. As Antony Griffiths, Keeper of the department, said, ‘It is the greatest revolution in the history of the department since the first Print Room was opened in 1808.’ About 50% of the records have accompanying images – from Michelangelo drawings to Tasmanian portraits – and are now available worldwide, permitting detailed study and use of the Museum’s own research. Not just a reference database, the new online collection permits users to zoom in to high-definition digital images to examine details and work at a very refined level with the material. The process governing the use of images for non-commercial purposes has been simplified, so that valuable staff time is no longer consumed on matters that can now be dealt with digitally. Images for academic publication or for print runs of less than 4000 can be downloaded for free, encouraging use of the collection for scholarship. Commercial images remain on sale at www.bmimages.com.

The success of the online database has drawn praise from around the globe. James Fenton in the Guardian could find no museum website ‘remotely comparable as a research tool’ and he was thrilled that anyone could now print out high-quality colour images of important works in the BM collection and study them. Since their launch, the online collection pages have been viewed over a million times, and use of the BM website has nearly trebled, with visitors spending on average 17% longer on the site.

The remaining computerised database of 1.4 million records (and by no means yet the entirety of the BM collection) is continually being uploaded and well, subject to funding, be published by 2009 with over 300,000 images, making the BM website the world’s largest public collections database for a non-scientific museum. The records will include antiquities from Egypt and Sudan; artefacts from central and south-east Asia, India, China, Japan, Korea and other countries of the Far East; the BM collection from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, the Pacific, and the Americas; and, finally, late in 2009, records relating to banknotes, coins and medals.

The BM’s digital presence extends to many projects internationally. Antony Griffiths was part of a group in Florence advising on computerising the Uffizi print collection. The Museum went to UCLA to join leading world collections of cuneiform in agreeing a process of international information sharing. The BM’s contribution includes the digitisation of the famous Royal Library of King Ashurbanipal of Assyria, as well as collaborating with the University of Mosul on a new institute devoted to Ashurbanipal’s library. The Cyprus Digitisation Project is making material from the sites of Kourion and Amathus available, and a two-year project examining more than 23,000 historical photographs and artworks from Oceania and North America, funded by the Getty Foundation, will see the BM material fully catalogued and scanned for online use. The BM’s long-term work with Oxford’s Pitt-Rivers Museum to recatalogue and scan historic photos of Tibet was published online for all to access. The programme was supported by the AHRC, who featured it as one of their star projects.

Exhibitions overseas

BM exhibitions tour internationally as a popular means of fulfilling the BM’s ambitions to be a museum of the world for the world. Through touring exhibitions and individual loans overseas, the BM loaned 1925 objects to 104 venues outside the UK in 2007/8.

Dubai hosted an expanded version of Britain Meets the World: 1714–1830, supported by Dubai Holding. The successful BM exhibition of 2006 presents art from countries across the Middle East derived from calligraphy. It was the first large-scale BM exhibition to be sent to the United Arab Emirates. Events included school visits every Monday and Tuesday, and a drawing competition for Arab students to win a trip to London to visit the BM.

The highly praised Britain Meets the World: 1714–1830, examining how British artists, travellers, scholars and traders engaged with new cultures through world exploration, ran at the Palace Museum, Beijing until June 2007. An editorial in China Daily recognised its importance alongside the terracotta warriors travelling to England: ‘Cultural cooperation and exchange are as vital as any other kind of relationship.'
Dubai

Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East
7 February – 30 April 2008

BM lights up Dubai

The BM's groundbreaking exhibition of contemporary art from across the Middle East toured to Dubai, where it was dramatically launched in the city centre.
between countries. . . . The more we understand each other, the less we will clash. This is truly the message of culture.'

*Treasures of World Cultures*, highlights from 250 years of the BM collection, was shown at the Palace Museum, Taipei from February to May 2007. The *Taiwan Journal* enthused that the 'Museum of the world brings cultural treasures to Taiwan' for all to see, not just those wealthy enough to travel to the BM in London. Research exchanges included a visit to London by scientists from Taipei, under the auspices of the Taiwanese National Science Council. The exhibition then went to Hong Kong as part of celebrations to commemorate the ten years since handover of the former colony. John Curtis, Keeper of the Middle East collection, provided the introductory lecture about the BM past and present: 'A Museum of the World for the World'. Over 620,000 people saw the exhibition at the two venues.


Egyptian tours included *Temples and Tombs: Treasures of Egyptian Art from the British Museum*, which was seen in Florida, North Carolina and New Mexico in 2007/8; *Mummies: Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana; and *Mummy: The Inside Story* at Kobe, Japan, enjoyed by 230,000 visitors. The BM also provided curatorial and educational support for the display of Tutankhamun material at The O2 in London.

Apart from its own touring exhibitions, the BM sends many loans across the world to support the work of other museums. In 2007/8 the BM lent Iznik pottery to Kuala Lumpur, a Parmigianino etching to Munich, Jacobean tiles to Belfast, Iranian finials to Paris, Egyptian statues to Ljubljana, and a 5th-century ivory casket showing the earliest known representation of the Passion narrative to the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth. Figures of Apollo and Aphrodite travelled to Paris and Athens for the international exhibition on the Greek sculptor Praxiteles. A plaque showing a Benin warrior and 44 other BM objects were seen in Vienna, Paris and Berlin before journeying to Chicago for *Benin Kings and Rituals*. 
International partners

The BM’s international work encompasses many different areas, from scholarly research in the UK to fieldwork and training abroad. Its programmes of professional development build long-term expertise and self-sufficiency for its international partners, while at the same time opening up new opportunities for exchange. In difficult political contexts, such scholarly work is essential to keep lines of communication open among nations and to foster an international community of inquiry and research.

The World Collections Programme, with DCMS funding of £1 million per year for three years, was set up in 2007 to use the collections and contacts of the BM, British Library, V&A, Tate Modern, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and Natural History Museum to foster engagement with institutions and publics in Asia and Africa. The aim is to build closer bilateral relationships with institutions overseas. New partnerships will be established and existing ones broadened, with a view to sharing staff expertise, technology and collections across the world. Chaired by BM Director Neil MacGregor, the programme hopes to draw on current international partnerships through the BBC World Service, British Council, Foreign Office and other UK bodies.

The BM’s first Empere exhibition in London highlighted the public desire for a greater understanding of Chinese history. The dialogue forged through cultural exchange remains a key focus of the BM’s international work in the Far East. Attention is given not just to Chinese civilisation, but to appreciating all world cultures. The ancient Olympic games are the focus of an exhibition in Shanghai and Hong Kong in 2008/9, while an exhibition on India, jointly presented with the V&A, is planned for the World Expo in Shanghai in 2010.

Work connected to the Middle East included preparations for a major exhibition in London about Shah Abbas, the great Safavid ruler of Persia in the 17th century. As well as BM visits to Iran, Iraqi, and Turkish curators are working in London on the BM’s Shia material. The collaboration is structured to foster research and training opportunities alongside planning for the exhibition, a model that has worked successfully in much of the BM’s Africa programme in Kenya, Ethiopia and elsewhere.

Tehran also announced that the comprehensive results of their eight-year project, which is supported by the British Institute of Persian Studies, has been led by BM curator Vesta Sarkhosh Curtis and M.E. Askari of the National Museum of Iran. The collaboration is structured to foster research with Libyans, Phoenicians and others. With areas of the sites at risk from redevelopment, the work is essential to capture what evidence there is for this important pre-Classical cross-cultural settlement.

New work with Arab Gulf states included projects in Oman and the BM exhibition ‘West into the East’ in Dubai. An EU-funded research project with the University of Saint Joseph in Beirut, Yarmouk University in Jordan and the University of Pisa is cataloguing semitic inscriptions in the Middle East, including those in the BM collection.

The Greeks in Ancient Egypt are the focus of an interdisciplinary study of the Nile Delta, funded in part by the Leverhulme Trust. Famous sites such as Naucratis and Deltana are being re-examined to reconnect excavated Greek material to its original contexts, foregrounding hitherto overlooked relations with Egyptians, Phenicians and others. With areas of the sites at risk from redevelopment, the work is essential to capture what evidence there is for this important pre-Classical cross-cultural settlement.

Africa remains a focus for the BM, with ongoing fieldwork in Sudan, Egypt and elsewhere, and programmes in east and west Africa sponsored in part by the DCMS and the Ford Foundation. Training opportunities especially have been sought by BM partners and one of the year’s successful exchanges was with colleagues from the National Museum of Kenya, with whom the BM signed a second Memorandum of Understanding. A new programme devised for Sudan National Museum provided training across all areas of museum work conservation, display, design, communications, marketing, security, education. The focus is less on intervention than on improving the museum’s capacity to implement its own programmes and changes. BM representatives from the various departments, together with Khartoum changed their perceptions of their own work.

A course on Collections Care in Addis Ababa, given in conjunction with the Horniman Museum, was opened by the Director General of the National Museum of Ethiopia, Jara Hailu/mariam, as part of an ongoing partnership. The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture has approached the BM for advice on setting up a new heritage institution to promote the cultures of Ethiopia. Other BM training workshops took place in Senegal, Mozambique and Ghana. Plans include a training programme in collection management in Nigeria.

Other international work included research in Asia into Hindu temples and early Gupta ritual sites, a catalogue of Kushan coins, and a study of trade across the Indian Ocean during the Roman Empire. The Victoria Memorial Hall Museum in Kolkata sent an intern to the BM for specialist training in the conservation of pictorial art. In Albania, post-extraction work took place in Apollonia and Butrint. South American collaborations included the study of Inca silver in Peru, in conjunction with Royal Holloway, and detailed research into the BM’s rare collection of pre-Incan Chimu textiles and other material. Recognised as an Independent Research Organisation by the AHRB, the BM is now able to apply for support open to universities to increase the scale of its research, attracting doctoral students and future curators to raise the profile of the collection and publish their research internationally.

Having attracted increasing numbers of applicants, the BM’s innovative International Curatorial Training Programme expanded in 2007, with generous support from Ben and Donna Rosen and the DCMS. Eighteen colleagues from China, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa took part in a six-week residency during which they were given training, shared skills and ideas, and used the BM collection for research. A vital part of the programme includes time at other UK museums in London, Cambridge, Oxford, Brighton and Bristol, as well as residencies in Cardiff, Lincoln, Newcastle and Glasgow. Beyond the core BM offering, all the curators showed an enthusiasm for learning about their colleagues’ cultures and institutions, and were keen to tell others about their own countries and backgrounds. As one participant explained: ‘It actually pushed away cultural, religious and political stereotypes about each other. Please do it again.’
BM across the continents

FRANCE: Paris
BM loans across Europe included new Luristan bronzes, such as this 9th-century BC bridle bit from Iran shown in Paris, and silver spoons inscribed in Greek from Sutton Hoo, seen by visitors to the Palazzo Grassi in Venice.

SLOVENIA: Ljubljana
Nearly two metres long, the wooden inner-coffin of Djedmontuiufankh dates from the 7th century BC. It was loaned to Slovakia for the exhibition, Egyptian Renaissance, one of several hundred Egyptian artefacts the BM sent round the world.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: Dubai
Iraqi artist Hassan Massoudy uses calligraphy to illustrate the poetry of Abu Ali. His work was seen in the BM exhibition, Word into Art, which ran in Dubai from February to April 2008 and featured more than 100 works from across the Middle East.

USA: Raleigh, NC
After 400 years, John White’s drawings of the New World revisited the country where he first made them. In 1587, White returned to England with a portfolio of what are now the earliest surviving images of America, all in the BM collection.

IRAN: Tehran
Work with Iranian colleagues led to a number of collaborations: cataloguing early Sasanian coins in Tehran; study of artefacts in London; and research in both countries for Shahs Abbas, a 2009 BM exhibition displaying treasures of Safavid art.

KENYA: Nairobi
Advice and training at the National Museums of Kenya has led to joint exhibitions, staff exchanges with the BM and a new Museum of Understanding. Current fieldwork in Kenya funded by the AHRC is exploring religious identity in the north.

GHANA: Legon
Students from Ghana were among those who attended the BM’s International Curatorial Training Programme in June 2007. A separate internship funded by the Leventis Foundation enabled an archaeologist from the University of Ghana to spend five months working with the BM collection.

CANADA: Whistler
The BM maintains good relations with First Nations communities across North America. Their contributions to the new North American gallery, due to open in 2010 to coincide with the Winter Olympics in Whistler, BC, include interpretation of the displays and new commissions.

VANUATU: Port Vila
As part of the Melanesia Project, staff undertook several months of fieldwork in Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, discussing how traditional artefacts were used and preserving them on film. Melanesian colleagues joined curators at the BM to study the collection in London.

PERU: Trujillo
International research included a study of fragile textiles of the Chimu, pre-Incan inhabitants of Peru. Other work with colleagues from the Americas explored the shaping culture of western Alaska and indigenous arts of the Great Lakes.

JAPAN: Tokyo
A hanging vase featured in an exhibition exploring cross-cultural influences between Japan and Europe. BM Japanese loans ranged from a delicate Hokusai drawing sent to Tokyo and Nagoya, to Hokusai prints shown in Birmingham and Blackpool. The BM’s Mummy in Kobe drew 230,000 visitors.

TAIWAN: Taipei
The BM is touring 300 Treasures of World Cultures across the Far East – a Goya drawing, Benin bronzes and this Greek statuette of Hermes of 200–100 BC. Over 430,000 people saw these highlights of the BM collection in Taiwan’s Palace Museum.

USA: Raleigh, NC
After 400 years, John White’s drawings of the New World revisited the country where he first made them. In 1587, White returned to England with a portfolio of what are now the earliest surviving images of America, all in the BM collection.

BM in the World

Pages 49-63 World.qxd  30/5/08  12:52 pm  Page 62
Appendices

Making the collection a greater resource of excellence than ever before
Fundraising and finance

The First Emperor was the most successful UK exhibition since Tutankhamun in 1972, with 115,000 visits. It attracted one of the largest sponsorship deals in the arts when Morgan Stanley generously agreed support. This allowed the BM to convert the Round Reading Room for the exhibition and mount an extensive and complex display.

On-site commercial activity also benefited from both the exhibition programme and visitor numbers in general, with profits of almost £2.5 million generated from retail and hospitality during the year.

As a result the BM will be able to invest in improved conservation facilities and a range of programmes to make the collection, especially the Chinese collection, available to the widest possible audience there and around the world.

The BM continues to rely on the generosity of a large number of private donors, sponsors, trusts and foundations. There were more than £13 million of pledges made during the year, allowing significant investment to improve gallery space and essential work on the infrastructure to bring it up to international standards. Support from both individuals and the corporate sector continues to increase and the BM has seen almost threefold growth since 2005/6 in both Patrons and Global Partners.

The BM continues to enrich its collection in many ways, spending more than £1 million on acquisitions and receiving large numbers of donated objects. The government’s acceptance-in-lieu scheme supports donors with generous tax incentives, which have done much to encourage giving. In the last ten years, acceptance-in-lieu has brought over £200 million worth of objects into the cultural sector. The BM would be keen to build on this success by extending these benefits, which are available on death, to lifetime gifts.

The next five years will be a time of considerable growth. DCMS have agreed to contribute £22.5 million towards the cost of the Northwest Development (£135 million). In addition the government has maintained until 2011 the real value of Grant-in-Aid, which, if it can be combined with increases in fundraising and a continuing programme of efficiencies, should allow the BM to achieve many of its ambitions.

Full audited report and accounts for the year ended 31 March 2008 will be available on the BM website, www.britishmuseum.org, and copies may be obtained by writing to the Head of Finance, British Museum, Great Russell Street, London, WC1B 3DG.
British Museum Review 2007/8

Partnership

Though in principal partner, the BM undertakes collaborative activities and loans with museums in the nine regions of England.

World loans

Between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008, BM

Activities and loans with museums

BM undertakes collaborative Partnership UK

Appendices

1. Overview

2. Exhibitions

3. Loans

4. Collections and Conservation

5. Education

6. Public Services

7. Administration