

Members'
highlight
object trail



Welcome back

This trail takes you on a journey through our galleries, looking at Museum highlights and objects acquired and funded with contribution from British Museum Friends. We invite you to rediscover the permanent collection through our Member-exclusive gallery trail – and learn more about some of the collection's lesser-known but fascinating objects.

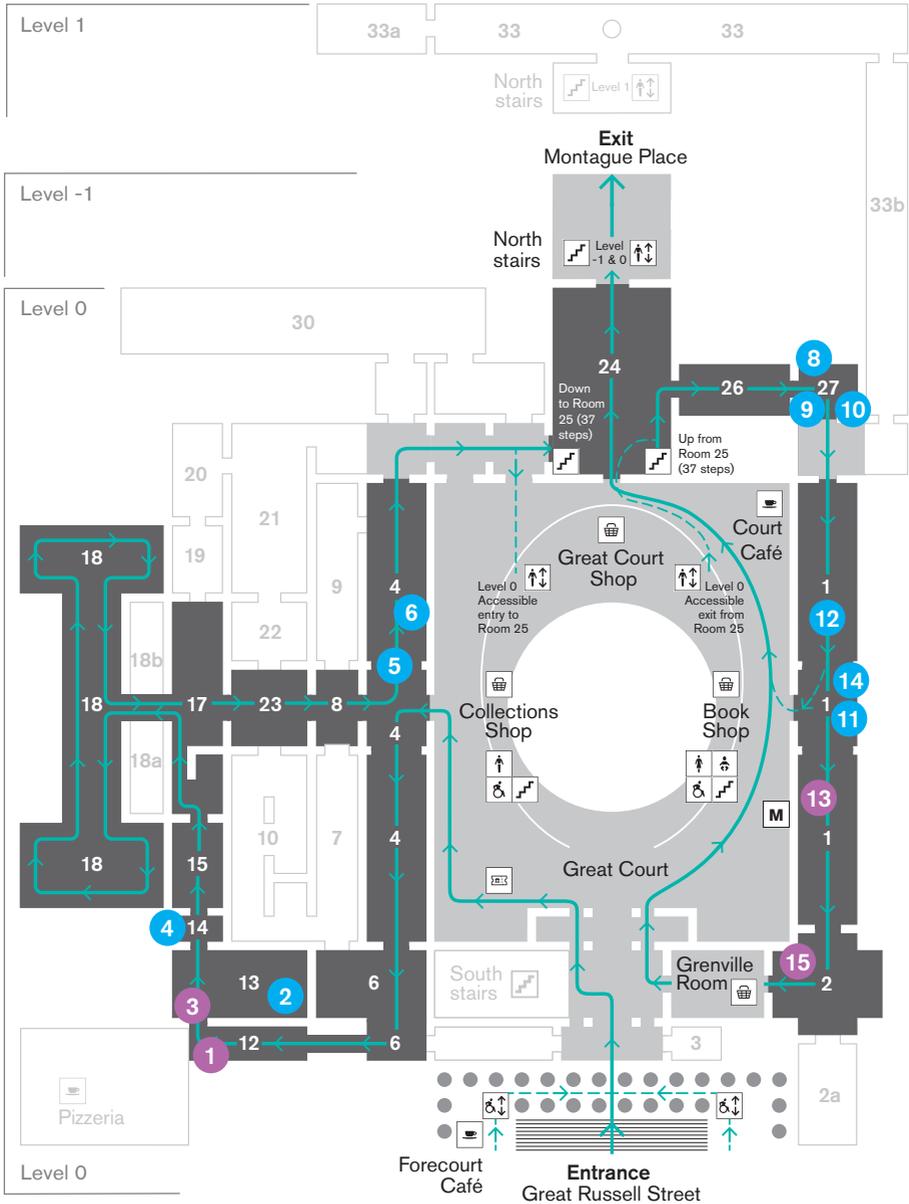
The trail has been designed so you can engage with an exciting variety of objects and get the most out of your visit.

Objects in focus

Our new one-way route through the Museum lets you safely enjoy incredible cultures from around the world. The route should take approximately 90 minutes. You can find details of all the objects on this trail – and millions more – at britishmuseum.org/collection

Start your journey in Room 4 and follow the route shown on the map and the signs throughout the Museum.

Ground floor



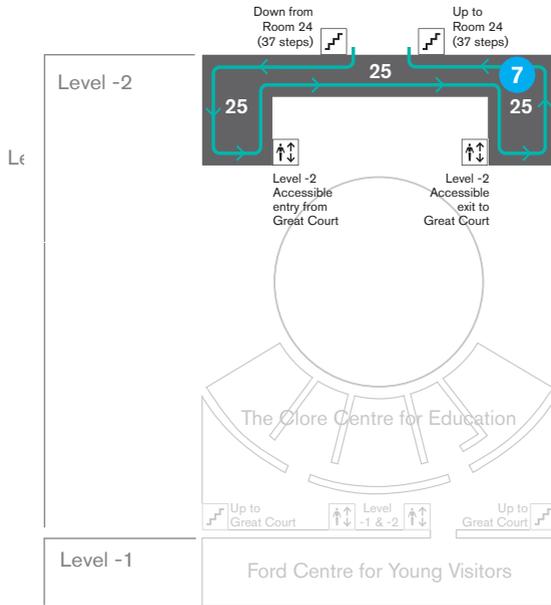
1 Room numbers

1 Trail stop number

1 Trail stop number for objects acquired with support from British Museum Friends

Lower floor

Up to 21



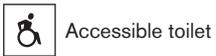
Toilets



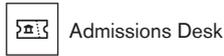
Café



Lift



Accessible toilet



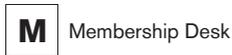
Admissions Desk



Level access lift



Baby changing



Membership Desk



Shop



Stairs



1

Terracotta group of three dancers in a ring

Room 12

This sculpture of three dancers holding hands in a ring is typical of the ritual dances depicted on Minoan Crete pottery and frescoes.

In the *Iliad*, Homer talks of a 'dancing floor, like that which once in the wide spaces of Knossos'. Though it is often problematic to associate archaeological remains to textual traditions, excavations at Knossos have revealed circular structures, which some have identified as dancing floors.



2

Statuette of Egyptian god Thoth

Room 13

This glazed limestone statuette of a baboon was made in the sixth century BC in Naukratis, a port in the Nile Delta that was home to traders from across the eastern Mediterranean. Note the discrete layer of greenish glaze that survives on its surface, and the object's finely modelled features.



3

The Elgin Amphora

Room 13

Made during the Geometric period in Greece (900–700 BC), this amphora was probably used to hold wine at the funerary feast of a wealthy individual. The vase is attributed to 'Dipylon Painter', who is named after the ancient gate of Athens next to the cemetery where many of his works have been found. It was restored from a group of fragments excavated in Athens for Lord Thomas Elgin by the artist Giovanni Battista Lusieri, between 1804 and 1806.

Terracotta group of three dancers in a ring, Greece, 1300 BC.

Glazed limestone statuette of a baboon, Egypt, 6th century BC.

The Elgin Amphora, Greece, 760–750 BC.



4

White-ground alabastron

Room 14

This alabastron – an oil or perfume vessel – features a scene showing a ceremony devoted to Bacchus (also known as Dionysus), the Greek god of wine. On the left and right are Maenads (female followers of Bacchus). Around the flask is an inscription, in Greek alphabetic script, naming Pasiades as the potter.



5

Granodiorite sacred boat of Mutemwia

Room 4

The 18th Dynasty Egyptian queen Mutemwia, wife of Thutmose IV and mother of Amenhotep III, is shown in the guise of the goddess Mut, protected by the wings of a vulture and enthroned upon a sacred boat. The prow is elaborated with heads of the goddess Hathor and hieroglyphs at the feet of the figure, giving the name and titles of the queen. Each side of the boat is incised with a *wedjat-eye* (a symbol of protection and healing) and the prow is inscribed with cartouches (an oval shape around the names of royalty in hieroglyphic inscriptions) containing the name of Amenhotep III.



6

Naophorous limestone figure of Panehesy

Room 4

Panehesy was an ancient Egyptian overseer of the treasury. He is known from several other monuments, but this statue is the only one to name his father and the king under whom he served. Panehesy holds between his hands a *naos*, a small portable shrine, containing the figures of the deities Horus, Osiris and Isis.

White-ground alabastron,
Greece, 520–500 BC.

Granodiorite statue in the
form of Mutemwia, Egypt,
1400 BC.

Naophorous limestone
figure of Panehesy, Egypt,
19th Dynasty.



7

Nkisi figure in dog form (Kozo)

Room 25

This sculpture of a two-headed dog is an *Nkisi*, an object containing an empowering spirit. It was produced in Central Africa, likely in the late 19th century, by the Kongo people. This sculpture represents the association drawn by the Kongo people between wild animals and the dead, who are buried away from villages, in forests or across rivers. Domesticated animals like dogs live in villages but are also used to hunt game in the forests. They are therefore considered to be mediators between the worlds of the living and the dead. This two-headed *Kozo Nkisi* is a particularly potent representation of this dual role. Powerful medicines bound with resin or clay, a substance particularly associated with the dead, are placed on the animal's back, empowering it to act on behalf of the *nganga*, or ritual specialist. To instruct the *Nkisi* spirit in a particular task, the *nganga* would drive an iron blade into the figure, with an accompanying invocation.



8

Sandstone figure of Tlazolteotl

Room 27

This sandstone sculpture from Mexico's northern Gulf Coast depicts Tlazolteotl, a goddess associated with spinning, weaving, childbirth and curing. As the 'eater of filth' she was responsible for absorbing and absolving the guilt of sinners. Her spectacular fan-shaped headdress would originally have been made from beaten bark cloth and brightly painted. The first Spanish chroniclers give eye-witness accounts of these spectacular fan-shaped headdresses, made of brilliantly coloured feathers.



9

Pottery whistle figurine

Room 27

Made in Mexico between 300 and 1200 AD, this ceramic figurine of a woman in festival attire, with a child, also functions as a whistle. The woman's pose and rich dress, including an oval necklace pendant and elaborate feather headdress, suggest her involvement in a public event like a festival. Her headdress and eyes have been daubed with black chapopote, a blend of tar and rubber often applied to figurines dedicated to the earth deity. Her *quechquemiltl* (woven mantle) and skirt are decorated with different motifs. The mantle is adorned with a pair of birds with outstretched wings, perhaps referring to migrations marking critical moments in the seasonal cycle.

Nkisi figure in dog form, Democratic Republic of Congo, late 19th–early 20th century.

Sandstone figure of Tlazolteotl, Mexico, AD 900–1450.

Pottery whistle figure, Mexico, AD 300–1200.



10

Stone mask of Xipe Totec

Room 27

Dating to 1300–1521, this is a human face-shaped mask of the Aztec deity Xipe Totec. Made from acid lava stone, the inside is carved with a scene depicting Xipe Totec with four arms. Xipe Totec was celebrated in ceremonies which involved the wearing of the flayed skin of a human victim, and the mouth of the person wearing it protruding through the mouthpart of the skin is visible here. The form of their head-dresses is unique, and it is difficult to find parallels for the folded drapery and the slight central parting of the hair in Aztec sculpture.



11

The Sloane Astrolabe

Room 1

This unusually large, very accurately and elegantly engraved astrolabe was part of the founding collection of the British Museum, bequeathed by Sir Hans Sloane in 1753. It is the earliest and largest English astrolabe (mathematical instrument) to have survived from the Middle Ages, but shows a knowledge of Arabic astronomy and instrumentation. The inscribed names of three significant English saints (Dunstan 19 May, Augustine of Canterbury 26 May, Edmund 20 November) and the plate marked for London, make an English origin most likely.



12

Marble sculpture of foot

Room 1

This colossal right foot, dating to the first or second century AD and carved from Parian marble, was once part of a statue several times life-size, a scale only used in antiquity for images of gods and emperors. It wears an elaborate Greek sandal and may have belonged to a statue of a senior Olympian god, probably represented seated, as the standing figure would have been more than five metres tall. Some have claimed it to be the foot of Apollo.

Stone mask of Aztec deity Xipe Totec, Mexico, AD 1300–1521.

The Sloane Astrolabe, England, 1290–1300.

Parian marble foot sculpture, Italy, 1st–2nd century.



13

Marble bust of Charles Townley

Room 1

Charles Townley (1737–1805) collected many classical sculptures, which were eventually purchased for the nation after his death, at a cost of £20,000. They were housed in a new gallery at the British Museum, which opened in 1808. Townley was a Museum Trustee from 1791 until his death. Christopher Hewetson portrays his sitter in a naturalistic rather than a classicising style. The half-turn of the head, the springy curls of the wig and the folds of the rather disordered shirt and jacket depict a man of fashion.



14

Figure of a 'mermaid'

Room 1

Composed of the upper part of a monkey's body and a fish tail, this 'mermaid' is said to have been 'caught' more than 200 years ago. Prominent in ancient, medieval and modern mythology, mermaids (and, less typically, mermen) were presented as curiosities in European drawing-rooms and popular sideshows from at least the 17th century. A significant number of these seem to have originated in East Asia, especially in Japan. This example was donated by Princess Arthur of Connaught, and was said to have been caught in Japan and to have been given to her husband Prince Arthur by Seijiro Arisuye, according to a note in the box it was housed in.



15

Silver bracelet

Room 2

This object is part of a collection representing the work of native artists from South Alaska and British Columbia – foremost those of the Tlingit, Haida and the Kwakiutl people. The use of silver replaced copper as the principal material and established a new tradition for jewellery manufacture. These items were given away at *potlaches* (feasts) and, from the 1880s onwards, sold as souvenir art, as Alaska and northern British Columbia became cruise destinations.

Marble portrait bust of Charles Townley, Italy, 1769.

Figure of a 'mermaid', Japan, Edo Period, 18th century.

Silver bracelet, Alaska, 1890–1990.

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