

Rediscovering the Past / The formation of museums

The 18th-century Age of Enlightenment had gifted the world an invaluable new way of thinking: reasoned argument based on the critical examination of evidence, particularly of objects, but of texts as well. It also gave the world a new type of institution – the museum. Here was an encyclopaedia of objects where expert and non-expert alike could examine the workings of the natural and man-made world for themselves. In the 19th century, museum collections grew in size and scope. We learned more about each of the world's cultures, past and present. Now, as the modern world grew smaller, we were able to discern the similarities and differences between cultures. What was it that made us human? The European model for museums spread around the world. In Turkey, museums displayed ancient cultures to promote an Ottoman imperial identity, then a Turkish national one.



Working Number: AT 037
Name: Decoration of the Egyptian collection of Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna
Holding Museum: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Egyptian Collection
Date: 1873
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The museum display in Vienna evokes the ancient context in vivid style.



Working Number: DE 002
Name: Ishtar Gate
Holding Museum: Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, State Museums
Date: 605–562 BC; excavated in 1902
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Painstaking reconstruction results in awesome displays in Berlin.



Working Number: FR 005
Name: The Great Hall of the Musée Assyrien in the Louvre
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1862
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The first display of Assyrian remains anywhere in the world was at the Louvre in Paris.



Working Number: IT2 029
Name: A Room in the Egyptian Museum
Holding Museum: Soprintendenza Archeologia del Piemonte: Authority for the Archaeological Heritage of Piedmont
Date: 1852 (Original engraving)
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The European nations come to see museum collections as a must-have feature of a modern, cultured state.



Working Number: LB 019
Name: Archaeological Museum of the American University of Beirut
Holding Museum: -
Date: 1868
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The Archaeological Museum of the American University of Beirut is the third oldest museum in the Near East after Cairo and Constantinople. The museum collections are organised chronologically and thematically. It was founded in 1868 after Luigi Palma di Cesnola gifted a collection of Cypriot pottery to the newly formed American University of Beirut. Di Cesnola was an Italian-American who used his posting as a diplomat to conduct important archaeological work in Cyprus.



Working Number: PT 001
Name: National Museum of Soares dos Reis
Holding Museum: -
Date: 1795
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The Carrancas Palace is a neoclassical palace built by the Moraes e Castro family. Later it accommodated English generals during the Napoleonic invasions, before becoming a royal residence. In 1833, King D. Pedro IV made it the National Museum of Soares dos Reis, Portugal's first public museum. It was inspired by the spirit of protecting cultural and national heritage so typical of liberalism.



Working Number: RO 031
Name: Egyptian mummy
Holding Museum: National Museum of Romanian History
Date: 22nd dynasty (c. 950–730 BC); beginning of the 20th century
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The small private collections of travellers find their way into public collections.



Working Number: TN 020
Name: Musée de Carthage
Holding Museum: -
Date: 19th century
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The Museum of Carthage houses magnificent Punic and Roman artefacts excavated at Carthage during the 19th century. It was founded in 1875 on the premises of the White Fathers seminary.



Working Number: UK 108
Name: 'The Younger Memnon'
Holding Museum: The British Museum
Date: 19th Dynasty; donated to the British Museum in 1817
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Comprehensive collections allow scholars and visitors to compare the world's cultures.



Working Number: DZ 099
Name: Library museum
Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités
Date: 1863–1895
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Museums open in the Arab and Ottoman world, first in the west, then in the east.
