

Rediscovering the Past | The formation of museums |

Museums in Europe

The history of the Arab and Ottoman world was new and exciting for the European public.

The major European powers needed cultural institutions befitting their political status: the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, the Hermitage in St Petersburg, the Imperial Museums in Vienna. The growth of national identity in the early 19th century caused museums to spring up across Europe. They educated and entertained a public who increasingly lived in cities. They also cultivated the sense of taste and design, and an appreciation of technical achievement. The great International or World's Fairs stimulated the development of such museums, providing the founding collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, for example. The rate of museum foundation increased as the 19th century advanced, with mass education becoming normal, forging citizens of modern nations striving towards "progress".



Working Number: UK 099

Name: Firman

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: 1815

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The official permit (or firman) confirming the appointment of Henry Salt to the post of British Consul in Egypt, dated 23 December 1815. The imperial cipher at the top is flanked by floral motifs. This is a fine manuscript with exquisite Arabic calligraphy and watercolour and gold floral decorations. When Salt arrived in Egypt in 1816 he obtained permission from the Pasha, Muhammad 'Ali, to collect antiquities for the British Museum.



Working Number: UK 100

Name: Henry Salt's 1817 excavations at the Pyramids and Sphinx

Holding Museum:

Date: The British Museum

Materials: 1817

Curator -

Justification: On his arrival in Egypt, Salt sponsored and recorded the excavations of Captain Giovanni Battista Caviglia at the Giza pyramids and Sphinx. Caviglia discovered new chambers in the Great Pyramid and a lost chapel beneath the head of the Sphinx.



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: When Henry Salt and J. L. Burckhardt donated this colossal bust of Ramesses II to the British Museum in 1817, it created a sensation, and came to be known as the "Younger Memnon". It was removed

from the Ramesseum in Thebes by the explorer Giovanni Belzoni, who transported it to Alexandria, from where it was shipped to England.



Working Number: UK 109

Name: 'The Younger Memnon'

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: 1817?

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Belzoni used ingenious means to transport the colossal bust of Ramesses II. The details of such logistical exploits fascinated Victorians as much as the objects themselves.



Working Number: UK 105

Name: Salt Watercolours

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: 1817

Materials: -

Curator Justification: A watercolour scene, showing the king before various gods from the tomb of Seti I in the Valley of the Kings, Thebes, drawn by Henry Salt shortly after the discovery of the tomb by the explorer Giovanni Belzoni in 1817. The freshness of the colours in the tomb amazed the early travellers.



Working Number: UK 101

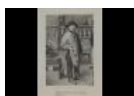
Name: Nebamun tomb paintings

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: C14th BC; acquisition date: 1821

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Salt's excavator, Yanni d'Athanas, discovered and removed the exquisite wall paintings from the 18th-dynasty tomb of Nebamun. Here Nebamun counts the flocks of geese being brought before him.



Working Number: UK 103

Name: Nebamun tomb paintings

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: 1861

Materials: -

Curator Justification: "A study in the Egyptian Antiquity department of the British Museum, London, Published December 1st 1861 by Day & Son, Lith [ographers] to the Queen – H[enry S[tacey] Marks". A young man wearing a smock stands in the Egyptian gallery. The colossal stone scarab and a Sekhmet statue

are on display, and behind him, on the wall-mounted shelves, two fragments of the Nebamun wall paintings can be seen.



Working Number: UK 102

Name: Nebamun tomb paintings

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: 1820–1830

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Tracings of the fragile wall paintings from Nebamun's tomb were made at the British Museum before they were mounted in the 1830s, so that no fragments would be lost.



Working Number: UK 104

Name: Nebamun tomb paintings

Holding Museum: The British Museum

Date: 1820?

Materials: -

Curator Justification: Copies of correspondence between Henry Salt and the British Museum record 1820 as the date when the tomb of Nebamun, now lost, was first discovered.



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:

In 1824 King Carlo Felice of Savoy bought the Egyptian antiquities collected by Bernardino Drovetti, General Consul of France in Egypt from 1803 to 1830. He wanted to give to the Piedmontese capital an archaeological museum able to compete with all the other museums around Europe. Together with the material that was already part of Savoy's collection there were more than 5,000 pieces. A catalogue of the collection was made in around the 1820s by Jean-François Champollion, famous as the decipherer of Egyptian hieroglyphs.



Working Number: IT2 043

Name: Bowl

Holding Museum: National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography "Luigi Pigorini"

Date: Second Dynasty; purchased in 1904

Materials: Breccia

Curator Justification: Following the successful excavations by Petrie and Jacques De Morgan, Luigi Pigorini decided to

expand the Egyptian archaeological collection in the "Museo Preistorico Etnografico e Kircheriano" where he was the director at the time. Most were donated by David Randall-MacIver in 1901 from his work for the Egypt Exploration Fund in El-Amra, Upper Egypt. In 1905 came material from the Italian Archaeological Mission in Egypt (excavations of Hammamiye) led by Ernesto Schiaparelli, director of the Egyptian Museum in Turin.



Working Number: IT2 039

Name: Palette

Holding Museum: National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography "Luigi Pigorini"

Date:

Materials: Naquada II; excavated in 1902

Curator

Justification: Following the successful excavations by Petrie and Jacques De Morgan, Luigi Pigorini decided to expand the Egyptian archaeological collection in the "Museo Preistorico Etnografico e Kircheriano" where he was the director at the time. Most were donated by David Randall-MacIver in 1901 from his work for the Egypt Exploration Fund in el-Amrah, Upper Egypt. In 1905 came material from the Italian Archaeological Mission in Egypt (excavations of Hammamiye) led by Ernesto Schiaparelli, director of the Egyptian Museum in Turin.



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: 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 antiquities anywhere in the world was that of the Louvre, opening in May 1847. It attracted great interest. The objects came from Paul Émile Botta's excavations at Khorsabad.

As well as being French Consul in Mosul, Botta was also a doctor, explorer and archaeologist. Having found little of interest at Nineveh, Botta moved to Khorsabad, where he had heard that interesting objects were being found. Nineveh would later prove a great success for his English friend, Austen Henry Layard.



Working Number: SP 074

Name: General View of the Erechtheion (Athens)

Holding Museum: National Archaeological Museum

Date: c. 1871

Materials: Ink on paper; engraving

Curator Justification: In 1871 the Spanish frigate Argiles was dispatched on a scientific mission to document sites and collect antiquities around the Eastern Mediterranean: Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Cyprus and Egypt. The need was felt for the National Museum of Archaeology in Madrid to have collections like those in Britain or France. The results of the expedition were published in lavish volumes.



Working Number: AT 037

Name: Decoration of the Egyptian collection of Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna

Holding Museum:

Date: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Egyptian Collection

Materials: 1873

Curator Justification: -

The decoration of the Egyptian collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is a spectacle in itself. This image shows a copy of the paintings from the "Tomb of Chnum-hotep II in Beni Hassan", made for the Egyptian Pavilion of the World's Fair Exhibition held in Vienna in 1873.



Working Number: AT 036

Name: Decoration of the Egyptian collection of Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna

Holding Museum:

Date: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Egyptian Collection

Materials: 1873

Curator Justification: -

The decoration of the Egyptian collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna is a spectacle in itself. This image shows a copy of the paintings from the "Tomb of Chnum-hotep II in Beni Hassan", made for the Egyptian Pavilion of the World's Fair Exhibition held in Vienna in 1873.



Working Number: AT 027

Name: Mummy board and inner coffin for Nes-pauti-tau

Holding Museum: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Egyptian Collection
Date: 21st Dyn, c. 1000 BC; excavated in 1891
Materials: Wool covered with linen cartonnage; painted, vanished
Curator
Justification: The entire set of coffins was made in Thebes for the Amun priest named Nes-pauti-taui. The mummy board and both coffin lids bear the same decorative scheme. We see enormous ornamental collars of foliage and flowers. The hands, which are separately applied, hold the djed-pillar and the blood of Isis. The faces and wigs are also superimposed.



Working Number: AT 019

Name: Statue of Athlete – Ephesos

Holding Museum: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

Date:

Materials: 2nd century AD (copy after a Greek original from the last quarter of the 4th century BC); found in 1895

Curator

Justification: Bronze

Roman copy of a Greek statue, from Ephesus (Turkey). After competitions in the palestra or sports arena, it was customary for the athletes to clean the sand from their oiled bodies with a strigil, or scraping iron. The Ephesian athlete seen here has already finished this task and, with his hair still wet with sweat, is now in the process of cleaning the strigil itself.



Working Number: AT 022

Name: Tomb relief from Palmyra

Holding Museum: Kunsthistorisches Museum, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities

Date:

Materials: AD 3rd century

Curator

Justification: One of the strengths of the great European collections was the range of material available. Visitors could compare objects from many cultures. This highlighted both diversity and cultural influences, often profound. This relief of a woman and a man from Palmyra (Syria) was given to the Imperial collection by James Samson, an Austrian diplomat of the Ottoman Empire. Palmyra was a cosmopolitan desert city. These Roman-looking citizens are accompanied by a text in Aramaic.



Working Number: SP 079

Name: View of the Arab Courtyard: National Museum of Archeology, Madrid

Holding Museum: National Archaeological Museum

Date: 1900–1936

Materials: Photograph

Curator
Justification: The National Museum of Archaeology created an "Arab courtyard" from the outset in 1878, unusually early for a European museum. Its displays included the Alfajería arch, a copy of the fountain of the Lions and the bronze lamp from the Alhambra Palace. This room was one of the first museum galleries focusing on Arab or Islamic pieces in Europe. The courtyard survived until the Spanish Civil War in 1936.



Working Number: SP 080

Name: National Museum of Archaeology No. 9 (Arab Courtyard) Monuments and Epigraphy of Islamic Spain

Holding Museum: National Archaeological Museum

Date: c.1917–1936

Materials: Cardboard; print

Curator
Justification: The National Museum of Archaeology created an "Arab courtyard" from the outset in 1878, unusually early for a European museum. Its displays included the Alfajería arch, a copy of the fountain of the Lions and the bronze lamp from the Alhambra Palace. This room was one of the first museum galleries focusing on Arab or Islamic pieces in Europe. The courtyard survived until the Spanish Civil War in 1936.



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: One of the mummies is that of Bes-An, priest of Amun from Thebes, 22nd–23rd dynasties.



Working Number: RO 032

Name: Two Egyptian mummies

Holding Museum: National Museum of Romanian History

Date: Undated; 1906 (included in the National Museum of Antiquities collection)

Materials: -

Curator
Justification: There are three mummies in the collections of the National Museum of Antiquities of Romania. They were acquired in 1906, but otherwise nothing is known of their provenance or purchase in Egypt.



Working Number: RO 030

Name: Egyptian vases

Holding Museum: National History Museum of Romania
Date: 3800–3500 BC; bought by Mihail C. Sutu in 1870
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The civilisations of the Middle East provoked wide interest. As well as the major museum collections, there were many smaller collections in private hands. In time these would often be donated to the public collections. Little is known of the origin of these funerary vessels, but it is known that they were bought by Mihail C. Sutu in 1870. They now form part of the collection of the National History Museum of Romania.



Working Number: DE 001
Name: Pergamon altar
Holding Museum: Museum of Islamic Art at the Pergamon Museum, State Museums
Date: 170 BC; discovered in 1864
Materials: -
Curator Justification: The German excavators of the early 20th century moved archaeology into a more professional era with their architectural training. The museum collection in Berlin reflects this, focussing on architectural reconstructions of the Mesopotamian, Hellenistic, Roman and Islamic material. The Pergamon Museum owes its name to the discovery in 1864 of a Hellenistic acropolis in Pergamon, Turkey. German engineer Carl Humann had seen lime-burners burning ancient remains and urged the museum to excavate.



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: The Museum of the Ancient Near East in Berlin opened in 1899. One of its most magnificent displays is the Ishtar Gate and Processional Way from Babylon. The German expedition brought back many thousands of fragments from the site. After years of painstaking work, the ancient brickwork was reconstructed for all to see.



Working Number: UK 089
Name: Cast of a Neo-Hittite relief
Holding Museum: The British Museum
Date: 8thC BC; Exavacted 1911–13
Materials: -
Curator Justification: Plaster cast of a Neo-Hittite relief excavated at Carchemish by David Hogarth, Leonard Woolley and T. E. Lawrence between 1911 and 1913. The originals, since damaged, are now in Ankara. There was a

tradition in the early 20th century of making casts of objects from digs and in collections, and circulating copies to colleagues. While modern creations, these casts are valuable objects in their own right as they sometimes preserve details no longer visible on the originals.



Working Number: IT2 033

Name: Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico “L. Pigorini” (National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography), Exhibition Room

Holding Museum:

Date: National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography “Luigi Pigorini”

Materials: Post 1912

Curator Gelatine bromide negative impressed on glass plate

Justification: The origins of the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico L. Pigorini in Rome can be traced to the foundation, in 1875, of the Royal National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography. The purpose of this new institution, in part, was to gather the remains of Italian prehistoric culture and the early cultures of other European and non-European peoples in a central museum located in the new capital of the Kingdom. Above all, it was to support and promote research by palaeo-ethnologists.



Working Number: IT2 034

Name: Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico 'L.

Holding Museum: Pigorini' (National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography), Exhibition Room

Date: National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography

Materials: “Luigi Pigorini”

Curator Post 1912

Justification: Gelatino-bromide negative impressed upon glass plate

The origins of the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico L. Pigorini in Rome can be traced to the foundation, in 1875, of the Royal National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography. The purpose of this new institution, in part, was to gather the remains of Italian prehistoric culture and the early cultures of other European and non-European peoples in a central museum located in the new capital of the Kingdom. Above all, it was to support and promote research by palaeo-ethnologists.



Working Number: IT2 035

Name: Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico “L.

Holding Museum: Pigorini” (National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography), Exhibition Room

Date: National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography

Materials: “Luigi Pigorini”

Curator Post 1912

Justification: Silver bromide negative impressed on glass

The origins of the Museo Nazionale Preistorico Etnografico L. Pigorini in Rome can be traced to the foundation, in 1875, of the Royal National Museum of Prehistory and Ethnography. The purpose of this new institution, in part, was to gather the remains of Italian prehistoric culture and the early cultures of other European and non-European peoples in a central museum located in the new capital of the Kingdom. Above all, it was to support and promote research by palaeo-ethnologists.
