

Rediscovering the Past | The formation of museums |

Museums in the Arab and Ottoman world

Museums arose across the Arab and Ottoman world to preserve and display antiquities from past cultures locally.

In France's new North African colonies, learned societies mirroring those of the motherland were set up. In Algeria, Louis-Adrien Berbrugger worked to preserve ancient sites, prevent the export of antiquities, and found the Algerian Museum. In Egypt the khedivè (viceroy) of Egypt made Auguste Mariette the first Conservator of Egyptian Monuments (1858), tasked with preventing plundering, and regulating official excavations. In 1861, he became director of the new Egyptian Museum. The Ottoman Imperial Museum was founded in 1868. In 1881, the directorship moved from Europeans to the Turkish scholar Osman Hamdi Bey. The stricter 1884 Antiquities Law limited the export of finds from the Ottoman Empire. An active programme of Turkish excavations was begun, to fill the new museums. In French Mandate Syria, the National Museum of Damascus was founded in 1919. In British Mandate Iraq, Gertrude Bell strove to establish the Iraq Museum in Baghdad (1926).



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: TN 052

Name: Mosaic for the inauguration of the Musée du Bardo

Holding Museum: Musée National du Bardo

Date: 19th century

Materials: Mosaic

Curator
Justification: The Bardo Museum in Tunis holds magnificent Roman mosaics among its collection of antiquities from the region. It was opened in 1888, known then as the Alaoui Museum. At the top-right of this inaugural plaque is the Tunisian flag; at the top-left is the symbol of the French Resident-General. Bey 'Ali Pasha and the Resident-General, M. J. Massicault, were both present at the inauguration.



Working Number: TN 094

Name: Mosaic of Virgil

Holding Museum: Musée National du Bardo

Date: 19th century

Materials: Paper

Curator Justification: The Virgil Mosaic is one of the jewels of the Bardo Museum. Discovered in Sousse, ancient Hadrumetum, in 1896, this is the oldest representation of the poet yet known. Flanked by Clio (muse of history) and Melpomene (muse of singing), Virgil sits at the centre holding a parchment scroll. On it is written the eighth verse of the Aeneid, the epic telling how Aeneas fled from Troy, via Carthage, and founded Rome.



Working Number: TN 001

Name: Palais-Musée du Bardo

Holding Museum: -

Date: 19th century

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The Bardo Palace, of which the museum is part, is a complex of buildings from the 15th century. It was built on the model of princely residences of al-Andalus, marrying under the Husaynid dynasty, North African, Turkish and Italian architectural styles.



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: TN 030

Name: Musée Archéologique de Sfax

Holding Museum: -

Date: 1905

Materials: -

Curator Justification: The town hall of Sfax, second city of Tunisia, was built in 1906. Many of the masons and architects were Italians from Sicily, and Tunisians. Designed in Arabesque style, the ground-floor houses an archaeological museum offering visitors beautiful mosaics and other Roman remains found in the ruins of Thyna.



Working Number: DZ 099

Name: Library museum

Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités
Date: 1863–1895
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: The National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts in Algiers displays finds from throughout Algeria's history. It was founded as a library and museum by Louis-Adrien Berbrugger in 1838.



Working Number: DZ 100
Name: Library museum
Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités
Date: 1863–1896
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: The National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts in Algiers displays finds from throughout Algeria's history. It was founded as a library and museum by Louis-Adrien Berbrugger in 1838.



Working Number: DZ 101
Name: Library museum
Holding Museum: Musée Public National des Antiquités
Date: 1863–1897
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: The National Museum of Antiquities and Islamic Arts in Algiers displays finds from throughout Algeria's history. It was founded as a library and museum by Louis-Adrien Berbrugger in 1838.



Working Number: FR 007
Name: Musée de Cherchell. Fragments found in the excavations.
Holding Museum: National Library of France
Date: 1856–1857
Materials: -
Curator
Justification: Cherchell was the second museum founded by the French in Algeria (1840). Cherchell suffered from the importance attached to its counterpart in Algiers, founded two years earlier. Funding was insufficient to cope with the rich finds soon flowing into its storerooms, as illustrated by this photo taken in 1856. A new museum was built in 1908 to better house the Collections.



Working Number: UK 080
Name: Early collecting
Holding Museum: The British Museum
Date: c. 1863

Materials:

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Curator

Justification:

A colossal statue of the god Bes was found near the Agora of the ancient city of Amathus (Cyprus) in 1863. The British government attempted to obtain it for the British Museum, but it was sent to Constantinople by order of Sublime Porte. This illustrates the beginnings of a more official policy to claim antiquities for the Ottoman state and to exhibit them in museums. The first Ottoman Law on Antiquities was passed in 1869, followed by a more detailed one in 1874.



Working Number: TR2 183

Name: An old exhibition from Tiled Kiosk

Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums (Tiled Kiosk)

Date: The Tiled Kiosk: 15th century; The photograph: 19th century

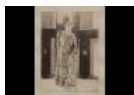
Materials:

Curator

Justification:

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The Tiled Kiosk at Topkapı Palace was a museum with strong political messages. The Turkish-style building itself reminded visitors of Ottoman imperial glory, although now partly remodelled in a European style. Guarding the entrance were two lions from Halicarnassus (Turkey), removed from the site to prevent their export from Turkey. On the portico statues of Bes and Jupiter, from Cyprus and Gaza, showed the area across which Turkish antiquities now came.



Working Number: TR2 182

Name: The statue of Hadrian

Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums (Tiled Kiosk)

Date: The Tiled Kiosk: 15th century; the photograph: 19th century; emperor Hadrian: 76—138 A.D.

Materials:

Curator

Justification:

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Now the Istanbul museums used the arrangement of objects to make statements. The Roman Emperor Hadrian served as the focal point of the main hall, dedicated to Greek and Roman antiquities. This placed Turkey within the European narrative of descent from classical antiquity. The statue itself, which came from Crete, was displayed next to a text from Jerusalem, warning gentiles not to transgress the limits of the Temple court. This again showed the extent of Ottoman territorial control.



Working Number: TR2 184

Name: An old exhibition from Tiled Kiosk

Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums (Tiled Kiosk)

Date: The Tiled Kiosk: 15th century; The photograph: 19th century

Materials:

Curator -
Justification: The visitor to the Tiled Kiosk stepped back in time, from modern Istanbul into an early Ottoman building, through relics of Christian rule back to classical and pre-classical antiquity.



Working Number: TR2 185
Name: An old exhibition from Tiled Kiosk
Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums (Tiled Kiosk)
Date: The Tiled Kiosk: 15th century; The photograph: 19th century
Materials:
Curator -
Justification: The display strategy emphasized the rich collections available to the Museum.



Working Number: TR2 134
Name: Istanbul Archaeological Museums
Holding Museum: Istanbul University, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi (Rare Books Library)
Date: 1891
Materials: Photograph
Curator
Justification: The Istanbul Archaeological Museum was founded as the Imperial Museum in 1868. In 1881, its first Turkish director, Osman Hamdi Bey, was appointed. An active archaeologist, he was also a painter and founded the Sanayi-i Nefise, the Fine Art School, where students were taught art, architecture and archaeology. The Museum is now housed on the site of that school. Here we see the Istanbul Archaeological Museum as it was in 1891.



Working Number: TR2 180
Name: Sarcophagus of the mourning women
Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums
Date: It is thought to be the sarcophagus of the King of Sidon, Straton (374-358 BC)
Materials: Stone work
Curator
Justification: The design for the three new Istanbul Archaeological Museums was based on the Sarcophagus of the Crying Women, found in Sidon (Lebanon). The sarcophagus itself is based on a Greek temple. The museums' design thus mirrors contemporary European fashions, while stressing a local identity.



Working Number: TR2 083
Name: Osman Hamdi Bey (During the excavation of Mount Nemrut)
Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums
Date: 1883

Materials: Photograph

Curator Osman Hamdi Bey launched the first Turkish scientific excavations.

Justification: He carried out archaeological excavations at Mount Nemrut, Laguna (Mu#la) and at Sidon (Lebanon).



Working Number: TR2 084

Name: Osman Hamdi Bey (During the excavation of Mount Nemrut)

Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums

Date: 1883

Materials: Photograph

Curator Osman Hamdi Bey launched the first Turkish scientific excavations. He carried out archaeological excavations at Mount Nemrut, Laguna (Mu#la) and at Sidon (Lebanon).

Justification:



Working Number: TR2 085

Name: Osman Hamdi Bey (Getting mold of Antiochus relief During the excavation of Mount Nemrut)

Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums

Date: 1883

Materials: Photograph

Curator Osman Hamdi Bey launched the first Turkish scientific excavations. He carried out archaeological excavations at Mount Nemrut, Laguna (Mu#la) and at Sidon (Lebanon).

Justification:



Working Number: TR2 086

Name: The excavation of Mount Nemrut

Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums

Date: 1883

Materials: Photograph

Curator Osman Hamdi Bey launched the first Turkish scientific excavations. He carried out archaeological excavations at Mount Nemrut, Laguna (Mu#la) and at Sidon (Lebanon).

Justification:



Working Number: TR2 087

Name: Osman Hamdi Bey (During the excavation of Lagina, together with French archaeologists Cammonard and Cartier)

Holding Museum: Istanbul Archaeological Museums

Date: 1892

Materials: Photograph

Curator Osman Hamdi Bey launched the first Turkish scientific excavations. He carried out archaeological excavations at Mount Nemrut, Laguna (Mu#la) and at Sidon (Lebanon).

Justification:

Osman Hamdi Bey's excavations at Lagina were carried out with French archaeologists Joseph Chamonard and Jacques Cartier.



Working Number: ET1 072

Name: Egyptian Museum, 1867

Holding Museum: Bibliotheca Alexandrina

Date: 1867

Materials: -

Curator Justification: In Egypt the khedivè (viceroy) of Egypt made Auguste Mariette the first Conservator of Egyptian Monuments (1858), tasked with preventing plundering, and regulating official excavations. In 1861, Mariette became director of the new Egyptian Museum.



Working Number: TR2 133

Name: Istanbul Archaeological Museums

Holding Museum: Istanbul University, Nadir Eserler Kütüphanesi (Rare Books Library)

Date: 1891

Materials: Photograph

Curator Justification: Ottoman interest in antiquities blossomed in the 1860s: the minister for education requested provincial governors to send antiquities to the imperial museum. Newspapers took an increasing interest in them, and access to museums widened. History had become part of modern identity.
