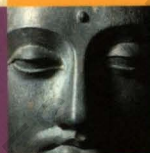


THE BRITISH MUSEUM

£5



VISITOR'S GUIDE

With self-guided tours
of the collection

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

VISITOR'S GUIDE

There is no correct way to visit the British Museum, which is home to an astonishing range of cultures, periods and types of material – it's up to you, your interests, and how much time and energy you have. This practical guidebook offers 5 tours of major cultural and geographic areas covered by the Museum, supplemented by 10 thematic tours suggesting less obvious ways of viewing some of the thousands of objects on display.

Fully illustrated in colour, with maps and detailed directions for making your way around the Museum, it is a perfect companion for first-time visitors who want to savour the highlights of the collection. The author also provides a variety of ideas for longer or repeat visits to pursue particular interests. The flexible format makes it easy to decide for yourself how long you wish to spend – from as little as an hour to as long as a day.

Written by John Reeve
Former Head of Education
The British Museum

With fold-out cover flaps

Front: List of tours

Back: Complete floorplan



THE BRITISH MUSEUM



VISITOR'S GUIDE

With self-guided tours of the collection



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John Reeve

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JFR



Silver drinking horn (rhyton) from Turkey, 5th–4th century BC. A fine example of the art of the Achaemenid empire, which dominated the ancient Near East from the age of Cyrus and Darius in 6th-century BC Iran and beyond until Alexander the Great conquered in 334 BC. (52)

previous page

The Buddhist goddess Tara, gilded bronze, from Sri Lanka, 8th century AD. (33)

opposite page

Head of Christ from the Hinton St Mary mosaic, Roman Britain, 4th century AD, the earliest securely dated head of Christ. (49)

Front cover illustrations (*top to bottom*): details of the ancient Egyptian figure of Katep; Buddhist sculpture from India; ancient Greek vase painting by Exekias.

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How to use this guide

There is no right way to visit the British Museum – it's up to you, and how much time and energy you have.

If this is your first visit then take Tour 1, and after that see whether you want to know more about the ancient world (Tour 2), or other parts of the Museum (Tours 3, 4 or 5).

If you know the Museum already, start with one of Tours 2–5, or take a thematic tour (Animals, Jewellery, Money, Pottery, Sculpture, Seven Wonders, Time, Writing). Two new galleries (Enlightenment, and Living and Dying) are also featured (pp.78–81).

If you have children with you, you might start with Tour 1, and then use the family audio tour with Stephen Fry (see opposite) or take a back pack or family trail.

You can return to the Great Court at any time for coffee, lunch or tea. You might combine a tour with self-guiding yourself using this guide.

Note that numbers in bold refer to gallery numbers.

Tours of the Museum

Highlights tours by professional tourist guides will introduce you to some of the major ancient cultures. Enquire and book at the Information Desk in the Great Court.

EyeOpener tours by specially trained volunteer guides introduce individual galleries or specific areas of the collection, 10 times or more a day. Meet in the gallery: details in a special leaflet and in 'What's On', available from the Information Desk and Box Office.

Gallery talks by curators and educators, and other events, are also listed in the free 'What's On' leaflet.

Or take an audio tour:

Highlights audio tour

Short commentaries on some of the most important star objects and less well-known artefacts from the Museum's collection. Available in English and Spanish from the Weston Great Hall, main entrance.

Family audio tour

Join Stephen Fry on a trail of bodies, beasts and board games.

Enlightenment gallery audio tour

Neil MacGregor, Director of the British Museum, is your guide to a new permanent exhibition called Enlightenment: Discovering the World in the 18th Century (1), displayed in the magnificently restored room formerly known as the King's Library.

Parthenon audio tour

In-depth commentaries on the Parthenon sculptures by curator Ian Jenkins. Available in seven languages from the Parthenon galleries (18).

And use the Reading Room:

To find out more about objects that you see or the cultures from which they come, use the **Paul Hamlyn Library** in the Round Reading Room, and the **COMPASS** database also available there, and online at www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass.



The Reading Room (1854–7) in which Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital* and which is now open to all visitors for the first time as an information centre. The upper storeys house part of the ethnography library.

Welcome to The British Museum

The British Museum is one of the world's most visited museums and covers an astonishing range of cultures, periods and types of material. Unlike the Louvre or the Hermitage it is not based on a royal collection in a former royal palace; unlike either of those museums or the Metropolitan Museum in New York it doesn't collect Western oil paintings. It does, however, collect graphic art (prints, drawings and watercolours) from both East and West, as well as paintings from Asia.

The Museum today reflects many moments of its past history. From its foundation in 1753 as the oldest national, public and secular museum anywhere, it presents the Age of Enlightenment and Discovery in the new Enlightenment gallery (1) in the restored former King's Library. This is the oldest part of the Greek Revival building that from the 1820s replaced the converted aristocratic mansion in which the Museum first opened in 1759.

The 18th- and early 19th-century passion for the classical is reflected in the number of Greek and Roman galleries on three floors and their extensive coverage of the Mediterranean world and its neighbours (11–23; 69–73; 77–85). The 19th-century interest in ancient Egypt and the Bible lands is evident in the collections of what are now the Departments of Ancient Egypt and the Sudan (4, 61–66) and the Ancient Near East (6–10, 51–59, 88–89). Asian cultures have

Ugandan pots
(19th–20th century)
made for the Baganda
king's palace. (25)



Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753), doctor, naturalist and founding father of the British Museum. He was an avid collector of natural history, books and everything from Chinese art to North American ethnography. The breadth of his interests and collecting decisively influenced the Museum. As an Enlightenment polymath, his world is explored in the Enlightenment gallery (1) where his bust by Rysbrack can be seen. His aim was 'satisfying the desire of the curious, as for the improvement, knowledge and information of all persons.'





Lycurgus Cup, Roman glass, 4th century AD. (41)

been an interest since the beginning, and as a result the British Museum has one of the Western world's most comprehensive collections from China, Japan, Korea, South Asia (particularly India) and South-East Asia (33a and b, 34, 67, 91, 92–4).

This curiosity about the whole world and the urge to collect and understand it is at the core of the Ethnography collections. These are included in galleries for Africa (25), North America (26), Mexico (27) and the new Wellcome Trust Gallery (24) on living, dying and well-being in world cultures. This is the current public face of a Department that embraces collections brought back from Captain Cook's voyages to the Pacific in the 1770s (see the *Enlightenment gallery*, 1), textiles from all over the world including tents, contemporary Aboriginal Australian art, boats, a rice barn from Indonesia constructed inside the Museum, and papier-mâché skeletons from Mexico for the 'Day of the Dead' festival. Fieldwork in recent years has contributed to collections from Central Asia, Papua New Guinea, Bolivia, Eastern Europe, the Nicobar Islands and Madagascar, to name only a few.

In another thematic collection, the Coins and Medals Department presents money of all kinds from around the world in 68 (see p.56) as well as art medals (some are on show in 46 and 47) and modern badges. Money is also displayed in temporary exhibitions in 69a and in galleries such as Asia (33).

'Yarla Jukurrpa (Bush Potato Dreaming)', by Victor Jupurrula Ross of Yuendumu, Northern Territory, Australia. Acrylic paint on canvas, 1986. © Victor Jupurrula Ross/DACS 2003



The original universal ambition of the Museum to embrace all knowledge in the arts and sciences is depicted on the pediment above the main entrance. This ambition, now shared with other national museums and galleries in Britain, was partly realised in this building, at least for a time: the natural history collections left in the 1880s, after more than a century; the British Library departed finally in 1998. The national collections of painting and portraits are in the National Gallery, Tate and the National Portrait Gallery; the Victoria & Albert and Design Museums have taken on the leading role in inspiring, collecting and displaying design. The Victoria & Albert Museum and British Library also collect Asian and Islamic art, as does the British Museum. Many major museums and galleries in Britain collect British art and archaeology, but this Museum has the national collections of British archaeology and of prints and drawings, including much British art, notably by Blake and Turner. Prints, drawings and watercolours ranging from Leonardo da Vinci to Pablo Picasso are shown regularly in temporary exhibitions.

The history and archaeology of Britain are seen in a wider world

left

Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), 'Bust of a Warrior in Profile', metal point on cream-coloured prepared paper. In the style of his master Verrocchio whose studio he entered c.1470, this may represent the Persian king Darius.



right

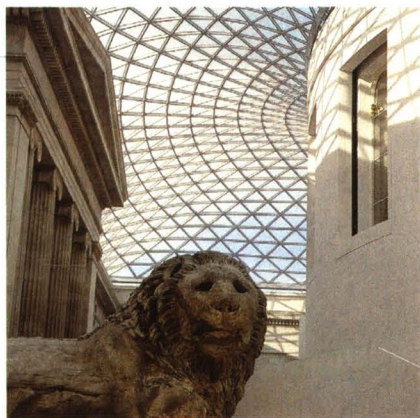
Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), study for 'Les Femmes d'Alger' of 1906–7, drawing in bodycolour and watercolour. © Succession Picasso/DACS 2003



and European context in the Upper floor galleries (36–50) from the age of Stonehenge to the present day. Through partnerships with museums such as Norwich, Manchester, Exeter and the Sutton Hoo Visitor Centre, the Museum's archaeological collections travel extensively and joint projects are developed. Museum archaeologists excavate in Britain and other parts of the world.

Today the Museum plays a significant role internationally, working with museums, collectors, archaeologists, researchers and artists from Japan and Korea to Mexico and Brazil. Its scope is unparalleled, and because of its continuity of collecting and research, so too is the depth of the evidence it offers for world cultures. The challenge is how to keep abreast of cultural change and new interpretations, and how to renew displays and facilities. The Great Court, the Museum's Millennium project at the heart of the Museum in space previously occupied by the Library, epitomises physically this process of renewal. It gives you the opportunity to choose how to construct your own Museum visit rather than forcing you through a particular route. The purpose of this guide is to help you do just that.

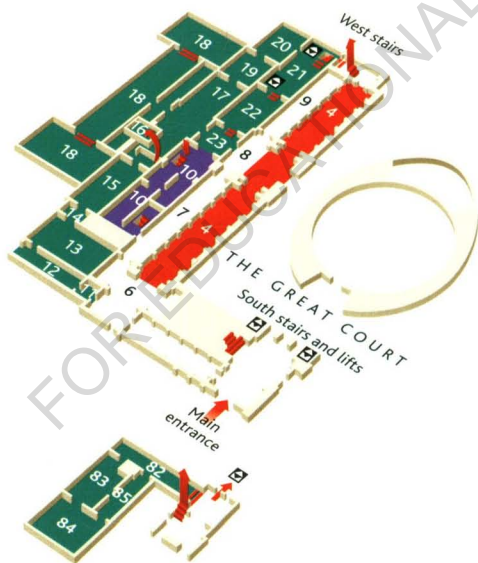
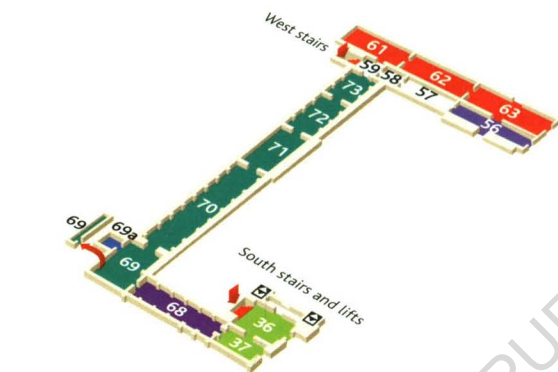
The Great Court, designed by Norman Foster as the Museum's Millennium Project. The facades of Smirke's 19th-century building have been restored (left), the Round Reading Room is faced in stone and opened to all visitors for the first time (right), and an astonishing glass roof now covers the whole space. Sculpture includes the lion from Knidos (see *Animals tour*, p. 44).



Introducing ancient civilisations

The galleries on the Main floor were designed to house large pieces of sculpture from the ancient world. In the first century of the Museum's history, from the mid-18th to the mid-19th century, interest focused on ancient Greece and Rome, and then on ancient Egypt and the ancient Near East (especially what are now Iraq and Iran). You can explore these and other civilisations in greater depth in later tours.

From the Great Court go through the West door to the centre of the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery (4) and turn left.



Stonehenge (c.2100 BC)

Minoans (c.2050 BC)

Babylon (1792 BC)



This gallery is arranged broadly chronologically after an introductory display (at the far left end) featuring the Rosetta Stone which was discovered by Napoleon's army at Rosetta in the Nile Delta. The same text on this slab is written in two Egyptian scripts and Greek; this enabled the meaning of Egyptian hieroglyphs finally to be deciphered. You will soon notice hieroglyphs on many other Egyptian exhibits, such as the king list opposite, and in the Upper floor galleries.

Several exhibits show the scale of Egyptian temples and sculpture: the giant fist, columns, and the massive torso of Ramesses II (c.1270 BC) in the distance. On a more intimate scale (on the left-hand side) is the sculpture of a husband and wife holding hands, with a detailed depiction of the wigs they are both wearing and their stiff linen clothes. Like all sculptures here (and most elsewhere in the Museum) this would have originally been painted.



Egyptian nobleman and his wife (c.1325 BC). (4)

opposite page
The Rosetta Stone
(196 BC). (4)

below left
Head of Ramesses II
(c.1270 BC). (4)

below right
Rahotpe seen with a
table of offerings, from
his tomb (c.2600 BC).
(64)



Ramesses II (1270 BC)



Alexander the Great (336 BC)

Mycenae (1500 BC)

Assyrians (800 BC)

Rome (509 BC–410 AD)

Tutankhamun (1340 BC)

Solomon (966 BC)

Parthenon (447 BC)



Cycladic figurine
(c.2800–2300 bc). (11)



Nereid, from the Nereid
Monument (c.400 bc). (17)



Parthenon sculptures (18):

above
Horse of Selene from the pediment
(447–432 bc).

left
Horsemen from the frieze.

At this point, leave 4 and
turn left to 17
(Greek and Roman).

The development of Greek art
over 1,500 years is traced in
11–16 down to the 5th century
bc (see Tour 2, p.16). In 17 is the
reconstruction of the so-called
Nereid Monument, from Lykia,
south-west Turkey. The tomb of
a local ruler, it is decorated with
sculpture in the Greek style
(c.390 bc) including the wind-
swept Nereids, daughters of
the sea god Nereus.

Ahead of you in 18 are the
friezes, metopes and pedimental
sculpture of the Parthenon,
(5th century bc). They form
one of the greatest surviving

achievements of classical art,
illustrating both myths and
historical events. To your left
and right idealised warriors on
horseback follow a procession
up on to the Acropolis in Athens.
The climax comes immediately
opposite you as a new robe is
presented for the shrine to the
goddess Athena. The seated gods
(much larger in scale than the
humans) look on. Notice (to your
right) from one angle of the east
pediment, the head of one of the
tired horses that has pulled the
chariot of the moon goddess
Selene across the sky.

Later Greek art can be seen
in 19–23: 4th-century bc
fragments from the Mausoleum
at Halikarnassos, one of the

Ur (c.2685 bc)

Stonehenge (c.2100 bc)

Egyptians (c.3200 bc)

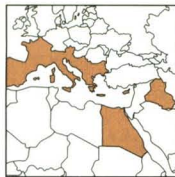
Cycladic (c.3000 bc)

Minoans (c.2050 bc)

Sumerians (4000 bc) writing

Pyramids (c.2650 bc)

Babylon (1792 bc)



Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, **21** (see p.70); and Hellenistic art, **22**. Room **23** gives a glimpse of Roman art, marble versions of now lost Greek originals showing athletes with perfect physiques, and in the centre the 'Crouching Venus'. To see Roman art, take the stairs down from **23** to **82–85** (Lower floor). Roman art is also on show upstairs in **70** and **49** (see Tours 2 and 3).

Before you go on to the Egyptian mummies upstairs (see box on next page) you can briefly visit the Ancient Near East.

Facing you as you leave **22** and **23** are the figures of giant man-headed bulls, **10**, from an 8th-century BC Assyrian palace. In the 7th century BC the Assyrian empire, based in what is now Iraq, stretched from Egypt to Iran.

If you pass into **10** you will see the lionhunt reliefs from the walls of Ashurbanipal's palace at Nineveh (c.645 BC), with their graphic portrayal of stylised violence.

*Return to the Egyptian sculpture gallery, **4**, and then go to the far, northern end, up the West stairs, to see the Egyptian mummies **62–63**.*



Ramesses II (1270 BC)



left
Colossal figure from the Mausoleum at Halikarnassos (mid 4th-century BC). (**21**)

right
Dying lion from Assyrian frieze at Nineveh (c.645 BC). (**10**)

Mycenae (1500 BC)

Assyrians (800 BC)

Rome (509 BC–410 AD)

Tutankhamun (1340 BC)

Solomon (966 BC)

Parthenon (447 BC)

EGYPTIAN MUMMIES

Before mummification was invented, bodies were dried out naturally in the desert, like 'Ginger' (64 – see p.20). To ensure a successful afterlife for the dead through mummification most of their internal organs – stomach, lungs, intestines, liver – were removed and preserved in distinctive jars (63, case 6). The brain, (although not the heart) was also removed, but not preserved. The rest of the body was packed with natural salt and tightly wrapped with bandages. Small figures (shabtis) were also buried to magically provide for the deceased. A range of animals sacred to the gods – bulls, crocodiles, cats and falcons – were also mummified.



Mummy case of Artemidorus, 100–120 AD. (62, case 22) from Roman Egypt.



left and above right
The gilded inner coffin of the priestess Henutmehyt, 1250 BC (63, case 9) (above right) and her painted wooden shabti box (left).

right
Mummy of a cat, after 30 BC. Cats were sacred to the goddess Bastet. (62)



Ur (c.2685 BC)

Stonehenge (c.2100 BC)

Egyptians (c.3200 BC)

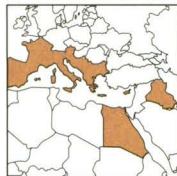
Cycladic (c.3000 BC)

Minoans (c.2050 BC)

Sumerians (4000 BC) writing

Pyramids (c.2650 BC)

Babylon (1792 BC)



Now either return to the Great Court via the bridge from **56**, or go via **61** (an introduction to Ancient Egypt) and cross the landing to **73–71** (Greek and Roman) and **70** (Rome).

The city of Rome was first occupied c.750 BC and began its epic expansion 400 years later. By 30 BC Rome had supplanted Greece politically, but Greek cultural influence remained strong. For more detail on these galleries see Tour 2 (p. 18).

In the gallery of Rome, City and Empire, **70**, see the cameo-glass Portland Vase, a technical masterpiece and the most famous survival of a rare kind of object that is extremely

difficult to make. Badly damaged in the 19th century, it has been restored twice. Wedgwood's copy of it can be seen in **47**. The bronze head of Augustus is from the Sudan, at the limits of Roman influence.

An extraordinary outfit made from crocodile skin (case 18) comes from Egypt, land of Cleopatra.

Continue through **69** (Greek and Roman Daily Life), **68** (Money) and **36–37** (Prehistory), and return to the Weston Great Hall by the South stairs.



Bronze head of the Roman Emperor Augustus, c.27–25 BC, from Meroë, Sudan. (**70**)



left
The Portland Vase,
1st century BC–1st century
AD, Roman cameo-glass.
(**70**, case 12)

right
The Warren cup, c. 50–70
AD, Roman silver. Its
Hellenised style and
subject matter suggests
that it comes from a
Greek community in the
eastern Mediterranean.
(**70**, case 12a)

Ramesses II (1270 BC)

Alexander the Great (336 BC)

Mycenae (1500 BC)

Assyrians (800 BC)

Rome (509 BC – 410 AD)

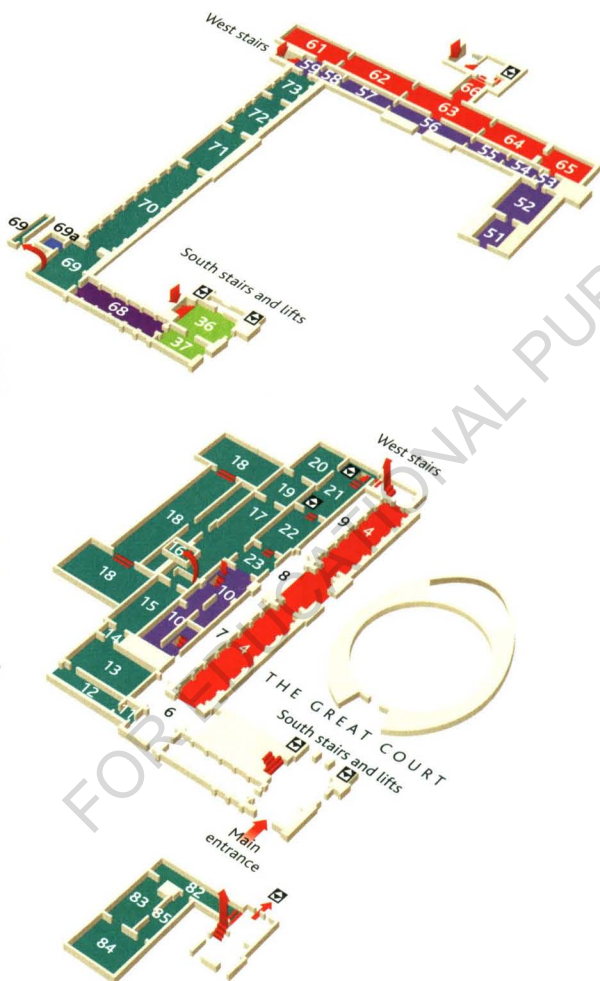
Tutankhamun (1340 BC)

Solomon (966 BC)

Parthenon (447 BC)

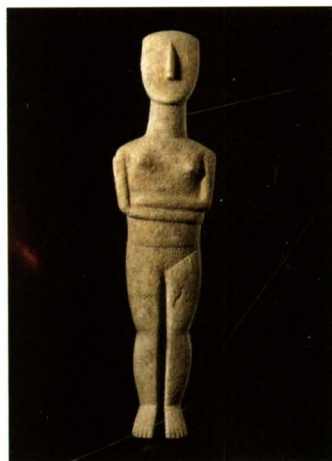
Further into the ancient world

From the Great Court, go through the West door into Egyptian Sculpture, 4, and then left; at the far end turn right and enter the earliest of the Greek galleries, 11.



Greek and Roman art, Rooms 11–23

Art from the Cycladic Islands, 11, dates from a period (c.2500 BC) when many great civilisations such as Egypt, India and China were developing. The pure, stylised qualities of its figure sculpture have attracted modern artists such as Picasso, Moore, Brancusi and Modigliani. The ancient culture of another island, Crete, 12, includes exquisite jewellery, powerfully decorated pots and a bronze bull-leaper (c.1600 BC) (case 1) linked with the legends of King Minos and the minotaur.



Ur (c.2685 BC)

Stonehenge (c.2100 BC)

Egyptians (c.3200 BC)

Cycladic (c.3000 BC)

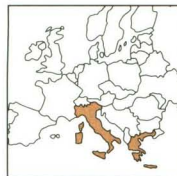
Phoenicians (1700 BC)

Sumerians (4000 BC) writing

Pyramids (c.2650 BC)

Mummification (c.2300 BC)

Babylon (1792 BC)



Following the chronological thread of galleries **13–15** you can see the development of sophisticated ceramics and their painted decoration showing scenes from myth, daily life, theatre and sport; and the emergence of naturalism in sculpting the human form. In addition to the Parthenon (**18**), other architectural and funerary sculpture from Athens can be seen in **19** (behind the Nereid Monument). The Hellenistic Gallery **22** brings us to the last climax of Greek culture – the age of Alexander the Great (356–323 bc). This reflects naturalism in sculpture such as the bronze head of Sophokles, and complex combinations of sculpture and architecture as in the column

drum from Ephesos (Turkey), from one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World (see p.71). By this date the influence of late Greek culture extended to southern France (see *Celtic Europe*, **50**), north-west India and Pakistan (see *Gandharan sculpture in South Asia*, **33**), Egypt, and southern Russia.

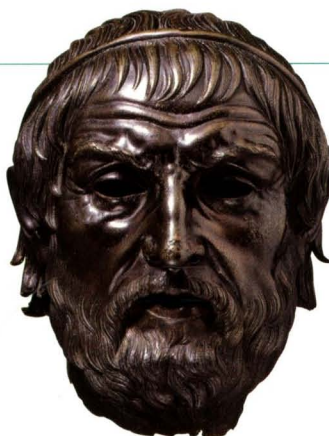
On the Upper floor you can see more Greek and Roman art in a geographical context.

Return to the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery, 4, left and up the stairs at the end, turn right at the top and explore Greek and Roman art further, starting in 73 (p.18). Alternatively, at this point you could go ahead to 59, Ancient Near East (p.19).



opposite page
Cycladic figurine
(c.2800–2300 bc). (**11**)

left
Minoan gold pendant
from the Aigina Treasure
(c.1750–1500 bc). (**12**)



right
Head of Sophokles,
Hellenistic period
(300–100 bc). (**22**)

Ramesses II (1270 bc)

Etruscans (c.850 bc)

First coins (620 bc)

Iran (c.550 bc)

Alexander the Great (336 bc)

Mycenae (1500 bc)

Assyrians (800 bc)

Rome (509 bc – 410 ad)

Tutankhamun (1340 bc)

Solomon (966 bc)

Homer (c.750 bc)

Hanging Gardens
of Babylon (c.580 bc)

Battle of Marathon
(490 bc)

Parthenon (447 bc)

ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

Greek horse and rider from southern Italy (c.550 bc). (73)



Part of colossal statue from Cyprus (c.490–480 bc). (72)

Etruscan terracotta sarcophagus (c.150–130 bc). (71)



In 73 (Greeks in Southern Italy) begin with a bronze horseman (c.500 bc) singled out by sculptor Henry Moore, and see also displays of characteristic Greek vases from this region. The mix of Greek and other cultures on Cyprus is shown in 72, especially in the variety of stylised and naturalistic sculpture. In 71 you can see Etruscan and other cultures from Italy before the Roman empire, including, at the far end, the painted terracotta sarcophagus of a reclining woman, and a reconstruction of her head.

Continue through 70, Rome: City and Empire (see p.15), to 69, Daily Life, or retrace your steps to 59.

Ur (c.2685 bc)

Stonehenge (c.2100 bc)

Egyptians (c.3200 bc)

Cycladic (c.3000 bc)

Phoenicians (1700 bc)

Sumerians (4000 bc) writing

Pyramids (c.2650 bc)

Mummification (c.2300 bc)

Babylon (1792 bc)