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<i>Student Name: Rebecca Jane Carlton</i>		
<i>Student <u>University</u> Email: 1701268@student.uwtsd.ac.uk</i>		
<i>Module code: HPHE6010</i>	<i>Student ID number: 1701268</i>	<i>Educational support needs: Yes</i>
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<i>Supervisor: Dr Errietta Bissa</i>	<i>Word count: 10,586</i>	
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How does the British Museum represent Britain's Imperial past? A discussion of the acquisition information provided for the Parthenon Marbles, Rosetta Stone, Papyrus of Ani, Benin Bronzes and Hoa Hakananai'a in their Galleries, Webpages and Publications.

'A thesis submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in partial completion of BA Honours Heritage Studies with Museum and Archives'

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(Photograph taken by author)

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Introduction

Over recent decades the collection of the British Museum, the first public museum in the world, has come under scrutiny. A number of artefacts in their collection have become subjects of controversy in terms of how they were originally acquired, and the debate over the repatriation of some artefacts is a significant debate within the Heritage sector. This dissertation will examine the transparency of the British Museum in acknowledging Britain's colonial past and the contested acquisition of objects within their collection. Five objects have been chosen as case studies. The dissertation will consider the challenges faced by the British Museum in reflecting acquisition issues in its display, and in the variety of the British Museum's physical and digital resources, in the context of the British Museum's aim to provide 'education of humanity' (The British Museum, 2019).

The British Museum was founded by an act of Parliament in 1753 with the collection of Sir Hans Sloane. The British Museum today holds a vast collection containing 11 million objects. It is a universal and encyclopaedic museum, with a collection that spans the globe and world history. It was therefore important for the purposes of this dissertation to have case studies of objects that represent the British Museum's collection. The first case study, the Parthenon Marbles, is synonymous with debate and controversy over its acquisition and claims for repatriation to Greece. The Rosetta Stone from Luxor and Rosetta /Al -Rashid in Egypt, is the second case study, again it is a prominent object in the British Museum's collection. Case Study 3 is the Papyrus of Ani, a version of the Book of the Dead that is vital in understanding the funerary rites of Ancient Egyptians. The Benin Bronzes are the penultimate case study, a collection of bronze plaques and bronze masks from Benin City in modern day Nigeria. The final case study is the Hoa Hakananai'a statue from Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in the South Pacific Ocean.

All the objects in these case studies were obtained by the British Museum between 1800 and 1901 a period representing the height of British Imperialism across the globe (Ashcroft, et al., 2007). The acquisition of each of these objects is a unique representation of the manner of British imperialism and colonialism of that era, with some of the objects being a plunder of war, or gifted, or bought on the black market. Each case study will therefore look at the background historical context, and the acquisition information.

In examining the British Museum's transparency towards its past, it is important to analyse the sources produced by the British Museum and the trustees of the British Museum. Chapter Two, the Discussion will be split into three different sections that will look at the ways a museum uses its resources for education, that being primarily display signs, technology and publications. This predominantly includes a consideration of the online collection catalogue, webpage and blogs. In terms of publications it was important to look at a variety of resources, this includes A History of the World in 100 Objects¹ book series and radio broadcasts/podcasts produced in partnership with the BBC, the *Objects in Focus* book series and past and present Guidebooks. Within the Object in focus book series two books are included, these being on the Rosetta Stone and Hoa Hakananai'a. *HOW100* considers all the objects in the case studies except for the Papyrus of Ani.

The debate over the repatriation of museum objects in recent years has reached a high point, with the recent report published under French President Macron recommending the return of African artefacts taken under French colonial rule (Adams, 2018; Rea, 2018). The 2020 protests of the Black Lives Matter Campaign have also highlighted and increased concerns with Eurocentric colonial perspectives being taken as a world view and misrepresenting the evidence and experience of the colonised in world history.

Post-colonial perspectives, examining the counter narrative of those people who lost their objects, are therefore a necessary aspect of the repatriation and acquisition debate within this dissertation particularly in highlighting these unheard/unrepresented perspectives that have until recently been largely ignored within the European museum experience.

Methodology

In assessing the transparency of presentations of the acquisition history of its objects, a series of sources were examined to determine what kind of relationship the British Museum has with its colonial past. The sources were in the main examined for the detail and type of acquisition information. In addition, looking at the wording of the text and use of language was considered, in order to assess what the British Museum attempts

¹ Henceforth, shall be known as HOW100.

to achieve by selecting and displaying particular pieces of information, are whether there was any attempt to justify or avoid the means of acquisition.

In this dissertation it was important to look at a variety of artefacts with different origins and different acquisition stories. It was crucial to include the Parthenon Marbles as they are synonymous with repatriation debates and its associated media attention, controversy and attention from British Museum visitors. Similarly, the Rosetta Stone is a prominent artefact in the British Museum and brings in large crowds, and also has a vast collection of merchandise in the British Museum Shop showing the popularity of the artefact (The British Museum Shop, 2020). Both objects have received most coverage in books and publications. The Hoa Hakananai'a and the Benin Bronzes have also received attention due to requests for their repatriation. It was also important to get a variety of different objects from different origins, as well as case studies of objects that had a different acquisition pathway. It was paramount to include the papyrus of Ani as this case study varies from the other case studies in that it was acquired through the black market. In addition, the Papyrus has not been the subject of publications, including nothing from the British Museum itself.

The display signs, and the physical and digital resources were chosen primarily because these resources are accessible to the general public either in person, in the British Museum or online. In order to access the acquisition information, it was necessary to consider what information the British Museum is informing, at its face value, and ask what visitors see. The display signs are highly significant as they are the first and sometimes the only form of communication with the public. Display signs are a balancing act of giving enough information to educate and choosing which details to include, whilst keeping text short and precise. This could mean that details may be overlooked, and further compromised by having to adapt information to ensure access to a number of varying needs within the audience.

During the writing of this dissertation the online collection database was updated and changed format, and during that time the opportunity to update information on the webpages was not taken up. This is where it should be possible to provide the widest access to the most detailed information, as the collection database has a wider reaching audience (The British Museum, 2020) and could include further details, links to blogs or webpages

produced by the British Museum or other external sources in order to provide the option of greater depth of learning. The British Museum publications potentially provided varying degrees of transparency depending on the type of publication and the aims of the source. With *HOW100*, the presentation of the acquisition history is not the main aim of the text, however it was important to look at this source as it is a multi-faced resource - a book, radio programme and podcast broadcast and partially produced by BBC Radio 4. This is a relevant source as not only does the source draw on four of the case studies, but also reaches a significant audience.

Another publication that was included is the current guidebook, a vital source as it introduces the objects, gallery spaces, civilisations and exhibitions and after the display signs is most likely to be widely accessed by museum visitors. It provides basic information on the British Museum and collections as well as highlighting specific objects on display, and it also includes a map. All of the resources chosen for this dissertation are available to the general public either online or in the British Museum and are the primary means to inform and to educate the public and communicate the British Museum's key messages.

Throughout the dissertation several additional sources were used that were published externally to the British Museum. The foundations of the dissertation were built from two books: '*Loot*' by Sharon Waxman, and '*The Return of Cultural Treasures*' by Jeanette Greenfield (Waxman, 2008; Greenfield, 1996). These two books were what inspired a consideration of the subject in the first place and provided key information in the case studies concerning the Parthenon Marbles and the Rosetta Stone (Waxman, 2008; Greenfield, 1996). *Loot* focused on the removal of objects from ancient civilisations of Egypt, Greece and Rome (Waxman, 2008). Greenfield's book was more varied and covered a wider range of topics from the removal of items from ancient civilizations to art removed from the Germans/Nazis after the World War II by the USSR and included information on the removal of the Benin Bronzes (Greenfield, 1996). The briefing paper on the Parthenon Sculptures produced by the House of Commons library in 2017 was also key in information regarding the Parthenon Marbles (Woodhouse & Pepin, 2017). Ivan Lindsay's '*History of Loot and Stolen Art from Antiquity until the Present day*' was another key book containing information on the removal of the Parthenon Marbles, the Stone and the Benin Bronzes (Lindsay, 2014). For the Hoa Hakananai'a and the Papyrus of Ani there was very little

information published externally to the British Museum's publications. The primary source for the Papyrus of Ani is the documentary '*The Egyptian Book of the Dead*' (The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 2006), which describes the timeline of events that occurred in the acquisition of the Papyrus. For the Hoa Hakananai'a and the Rosetta Stone, the Object in Focus series was the main sources for information concerning acquisition of the items. Journal articles were used in covering museum education and ethics such as '*Museum education and Archaeological Ethics: An approach to the illicit trade of Antiquities*' and '*Exhibition Ethics – An overview of Major Issues*' (Gazi, 2014; Argyropoulos, et al., 2014). Theory articles included '*The British Museum: An Imperial Museum in a Post-Imperial World*' and '*A 21st Century Empire: The British Museum and its Imperial legacies*' and these provided information on the use of language in displays, example of successful museum display and vital theoretical approaches (Duthie, 2011; Rooney, 2019).

Chapter 1: Case Studies

Case Study 1: Parthenon Marbles

The Parthenon (Elgin) Marbles are a collection of artefacts from the Parthenon that include metopes, sections from the frieze and sculptures. The Parthenon Marbles have been among the most controversial items in the British Museum collection since 1817 when the Museum first displayed them (Greenfield, 1996). Today the Parthenon Marbles are in Gallery 18 of the British Museum, with most of the displayed information on the Parthenon located in Galleries 18a and 18b (See A1-3).

Background

Built in the 5th century BCE, the Parthenon is a temple dedicated to the goddess Athena built from marble from the quarries on Mount Pentelicon, near Athens (Woodford, 1981, p. 19). When it was first constructed there were 92 metopes on the Parthenon; 15 are now in the British Museum and 39 are in the Acropolis Museum (Woodford, 1981; Greenfield, 1996). The 160-metre-long frieze, depicting the Panathenaic Festival procession, consisted of 115 panels of which only 97 survive: 56 in the British Museum; 40 in the Acropolis Museum, while other pieces are in the Louvre and other European Museums (Woodford, 1981; Greenfield, 1996). The British Museum also holds 17 pediment figures (Greenfield, 1996).

In 1817 Athens and Greece had been under the control of the Ottoman Empire since the 15th century (Lindsay, 2014). The Parthenon had been turned into a Church during the 6th century under the Byzantine Empire, a Mosque when the Ottomans took control of the area (Greenfield, 1996) and later it was used to store gunpowder. When the Venetians sieged the Acropolis in 1678 the Parthenon was hit by a cannonball, which in turn ignited the gunpowder, causing damage to the Parthenon, the Parthenon Marbles and the structure (Greenfield, 1996; Waxman, 2008).

Acquisition

In 1799, Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin and British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, travelled to Constantinople, accompanied by his secretary William Hamilton (Lindsay, 2014). Elgin sent a team to Athens to make drawings and casts of artefacts of the Parthenon. They found the condition of the site to be poor. It was still being used to store gunpowder and some of the marble was being burnt for its raw materials (Lindsay,

2014). The team were refused entry to the site (Lindsay, 2014). Hamilton eventually arranged access for a fee of £5 per day but the team were not permitted to make drawings of the sculptures located higher up on the Parthenon.

In 1801 Dr Philip Hunt, the British Embassy chaplain, (Lindsay, 2014) was sent to Athens to seek an update (Lindsay, 2014). Hunt suggested to Elgin to go above the head of the Dizdar² to Constantinople and receive a firman³ (Lindsay, 2014). Hunt's letter was received by Elgin immediately after Nelson's victory in the Battle of the Nile and so British power was rising and the Sultan Selim III was giving out honours to Elgin (Lindsay, 2014; The British Museum, 2020). Selim III granted the firman, although its wording is contested today, and the dismantling of the Parthenon Marbles promptly began (Lindsay, 2014; Greenfield, 1996). Pediments were removed from the east and west side, 247 of the 542 ft of metopes panels were dismantled, 56 of the 97 surviving frieze panels were also removed (Lindsay, 2014; Greenfield, 1996). By 1803 all of the dismantled Parthenon Marbles had been boxed into 200 chests, some of them having been cut into smaller fragments for transportation to the UK. (Lindsay, 2014; Greenfield, 1996; Leontsinis, 2010).

In 1816 Elgin offered to sell the Parthenon Marbles to the British Government and a Parliamentary Inquiry was held which agreed to offer Elgin £35,000 (Lindsay, 2014, p. 193). Elgin accepted the offer; the Parthenon Marbles were put into the care of the British Museum and were put on public display in 1817 (Beard, 2004, p. 161)

The Parthenon Marbles have been on permanent display in the British Museum since their 1817 installation, only being removed during the Second World War. Today, they are displayed in a custom-built gallery, Gallery 18, constructed in the 1930s but not regularly opened until 1962, financed by Joseph Duveen (Beard, 2004, p. 161).

Arguments for repatriation and remaining in the British Museum

Since the installation of the Parthenon Marbles controversy and debate has surrounded the nature of their acquisition and was the subject of Parliamentary Inquiry (Lindsay, 2014). In the 1830s the Greeks gained independence from the Ottoman Empire (Koliopoulos & Veremis, 2010) and the new nation began to develop an emblematic

² The local ruler of the acropolis

³ A Royal warrant.

relationship with the Parthenon (MacGregor, 2010). Currently, the Greek Government wants the return of all surviving sculptures and to have them reunited (BCRPM, 2018) In 1983 the Greek Government made a formal request for the return of the Parthenon Marbles, but this was rejected in 1984 (Woodhouse & Pepin, 2017). After the New Acropolis Museum was built in 2009, the Greek government and UNESCO invited the UK Government and the British Museum Trustees into a mediation process to solve the issue, however, the UK government and the British Museum declined the request (Woodhouse & Pepin, 2017). It has been suggested that the Greek Government may be able to request a loan of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece, but Greece will have to accept the trustees' title of ownership over the Parthenon Marbles, and this they refuse to do (Woodhouse & Pepin, 2017; Squirres, 2019).

Over the past 200 years the British Museum has developed responses to the claims for repatriation. These include:

- The location of the Parthenon Marbles in the British Museum is at a midway point between the US and Europe.
- They are displayed in a unique context in the British Museum with art and artefacts from all over the world, and spanning world history, giving a unique global and historical perspective
- Agreeing to the return of the Parthenon Marbles could start a mass repatriation of objects, emptying museums.
- The Parthenon Marbles were given better care in the British Museum and were saved from further destruction and damage by war, the site's use as gunpowder storage and natural events.
- The entire body of Parthenon Marbles will always be incomplete as many of the Parthenon Marbles have been lost or destroyed over time. Calls to repatriate on these grounds are futile.
- The legal charter that established the British Museum prevents the return of such artefacts from the collection.
- Too fragile to travel.

(Lindsay, 2014, p. 197)

One of the primary arguments against repatriation is the 'better care' provided by British Museum, that they are more knowledgeable and skilled custodians of the Parthenon Marbles and so can care for them more appropriately. The Parthenon Marbles have been damaged twice, by contemporary standards, since the British Museum acquired them. Firstly, the Parthenon Marbles had become dirty due to air pollution and the British Museum's heating system (Beard, 2004; Robertson, 2019). In a modern-day context this would show a lack of care, however, 19th and earlier 20th century knowledge of the effects of air pollution was limited, and the damage would not have been preventable. Subsequently the Parthenon Marbles were damaged again under the influence of Joseph Duveen, the funder of the new gallery in which the Parthenon Marbles were to be exhibited. Duveen wanted them to be white and seen in the Neo-Classical image that was depicted of all classical art (Beard, 2004, pp. 168-169; Robertson, 2019). The Parthenon Marbles were cleaned with copper tools which removed the dirt, but also removed details on the Parthenon Marbles' surfaces (Waxman, 2008, p. 248). Waxman states that the handling of this has received possibly more criticism than the actual event itself, due to the British Museum's attempt to minimise the issue possibly fearing it would impact negatively on the 'better care' defence against repatriation (Waxman, 2008). There is a lack of clarity on this from the British Museum, with Mary Beard suggesting that WWII events took precedence, and the information was only released to the public some 60 years later (Beard, 2004, pp. 168-169).

Another aspect of the 'better care' argument is that the Parthenon Marbles were saved from destruction and decay. For another 200 years, the remaining Parthenon Marbles were open to further damage in several ways. Firstly, the locals and the military garrison were dismantling the site to use the lead for bullets and the Marbles as a building material for new buildings (Beard, 2004; Waxman, 2008). Secondly, air pollution (Yocom, 1979; Waxman, 2008) in Athens, like that in London, created a reaction causing decay, disfigurement (Yocom, 1979), decolourisation and the stones to crack (Yocom, 1979). BCRPM have refuted this argument, stating that all the remaining Parthenon Marbles are now housed in the Acropolis Museum have been cleaned with laser technology that retains their natural patina (Yocom, 1979; British Committee for the Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, 2018). Further arguments are natural events such as rain, wind, and earthquakes

were also liable to cause damage (Yocom, 1979) and that the Parthenon Marbles are too fragile to travel (Smith, 2014). However, in 2014 the British Museum loaned out the Illissos sculpture to Russia (BBC News, 2014; Woodhouse & Pepin, 2017) thus essentially voiding this position. The only one of these arguments presented in the Museum's resources is the 'global and historical perspective' argument, within the Parthenon leaflet (see Chapter 2).

Case Study 2: Rosetta Stone

The Rosetta Stone, object number EA24, is one of the best-known objects in the British Museum's collection second to the Parthenon Marbles. Today, the Rosetta Stone is in the centre of the Egyptian Sculpture Gallery (See A15- A17).

Background

The Stone was discovered in Fort St Julian, near the town of Rosetta in Egypt, in 1799 (Greenfield, 1996, p. 115). It is a significant artefact within Egyptology due to the relationship between the languages on the stone rather than content of the text, which is an agreement between the Pharaoh and a group of clergy and priests (Ray, 2008). The text's depiction in three languages: hieroglyphs, Greek and Demotic (the everyday language of the ancient Egyptians), (Ray, 2008). Allowing for the first translation of hieroglyphs by Thomas Young and Jean- Francois Champollion (Cuno, 2012).

Acquisition

In July 1798, Napoleon invaded Egypt. At the time, the Mamelukes controlled Egypt under the Ottoman rule of Selim II (Ray, 2008). During Napoleon's invasion, in the summer of 1799, French troops were rebuilding the walls of the forts including Fort St Julian, and it was here that Pierre Francois-Xavier Bouchard found the Rosetta Stone (Ray, 2008). The Stone and other finds were sent to the Institute d'Egypte in Cairo and from there to Alexandria. In August 1801 General Menou surrendered to the British, requested an armistice, and signed the Capitulation of Alexandria (Ray, 2008; Lindsay, 2014; Greenfield, 1996). Under this treaty, the Rosetta Stone and other finds became the spoils of war and were handed over to the British (Greenfield, 1996). (Greenfield, 1996, p. 116). (Lindsay, 2014, p. 175; Ray, 2008).

The Rosetta Stone was escorted to England by Colonel Turner on board a French frigate called L'Egyptian arriving in Portsmouth (Lindsay, 2014; Ray, 2008). The Stone was presented to the Society of Antiquaries of London who then passed it to the British Museum. The Rosetta Stone had by this time gained two inscriptions on the left and right sides reading; 'Captured in Egypt by the British Army 1801' and 'Presented by King George III, after King George presented the stone to the Museum (Ray, 2008). These inscriptions have since faded but are still present (See Appendix A23 and A24) (Ray, 2008).

Case Study 3: Papyrus/ Book of Ani

Object number EA 10470, the Papyrus of Ani /Any (sometimes called the Book of the Dead of Ani), was acquired by the British Museum by E. A. Wallis Budge in 1888 (The British Museum, 2020). The 78 ft long scroll is cut into 37 individual pieces of which three sections, EA 10470/33, EA 10470/7 and 10470/6 are displayed upstairs in the Ancient Egyptian Galleries. Section EA 10470/33 looks at the function of amulets that would have been placed on the body (The British Museum, 2020). EA 10470/7 shows the Ba spirits of Ani and his wife (The British Museum, 2020). The final section on display is EA 10470/6 which depicts the funeral procession and the opening of the mouth ceremony (The British Museum, 2020)(See A29- 35).

Background

The Papyrus of Ani is a significant religious document and an elaborate Book of the Dead, a collection of spells and magic to guide the owner, in this case Ani and his wife, through the Duat to their afterlife. Books of the Dead were popular between 1500 BCE and 400 CE; there are estimated to be over 25,000 different versions. The Ani Papyrus is unique for its artistic quality and the collection of spells that it holds. The Papyrus of Ani contains 65 prayers and magical spells, with 150 accompanying coloured illustrations. The Papyrus of Ani was created c.1250 BCE and is from Luxor/ Thebes. The Book of the Dead is seen as the oldest example of religious texts. Ani was a royal temple scribe, who would have overseen the granary, and would have tallied the offerings to the gods. (The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 2006).

Acquisition

Whilst on expedition to Egypt in the late 1880's Budge arrived in Cairo to hear that there was a newly discovered and unexcavated tomb in Luxor (The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 2006). At the time, purchasing antiquities was illegal in Egypt but the black market was huge (The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 2006) and the Cairo Museum was not considered capable of appropriately caring for artefacts (The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 2006). Budge proceeded to Luxor where he met with a local black-market dealer who had a papyrus, with an unbroken wax seal, which had been looted from the unexcavated Luxor tomb (The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 2006). Despite its illegality, Budge purchased the papyrus, was then arrested and jailed by the French authorities, and the papyrus was confiscated. Budge

stole back the papyrus, smuggling it back to Cairo before moving onto Britain (The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 2006). Once at the British Museum, Budge cut the papyrus into sections and glued them to wooden boards for display purposes. Budge then translated the hieroglyphics and published it (The Egyptian Book of the Dead, 2006).

Case Study 4: Benin Bronzes

The Benin Bronzes are a collection of items from Benin City, in the Edo State in modern day Nigeria, containing plaques and masks and commemorative heads belonging to the Benin Oba (the King) (Greenfield, 1996; Plankensteiner, 2016). Some parts of the collection have been a part of the British Museum since 1897 after the raid on the city by the British (Plankensteiner, 2016; Waxman, 2008). Today some of the Benin Bronzes are in the Sainsbury galleries, on the lower floor in Room 25, as part of the African galleries. 56 of the Benin Bronzes are in the Sainsbury Gallery of the British Museum, displayed facing forward, away from the wall, and are not directly fixed to the wall but are attached to metal strips in 8 x 7 formation with a display sign attached to one strip (Google Arts and Culture, 2020).

Background

The Benin Bronzes are made from ivory, wood, and brass, a mix of copper and zinc, rather than bronze which is an alloy of copper and tin (Jenkins, 2018, p. 138; Cuno, 2008, p. xxiii), and would have been used for royal gifts and to decorate the palace walls and pillars; the commemorative heads placed in memorial alters to the (Cuno, 2008, p. xxiii; Civilizations- Episode 4 Encounters, 2018; Gunsch, 2018). They were first produced in the 13th century (Civilizations- Episode 4 Encounters, 2018; Gunsch, 2018). Benin was a major centre of trade, between the British, Portuguese, Dutch, French and Benin community, in important goods such as pepper, ivory, cotton, textiles, palm oil, and slavery (Cuno, 2008, p. xxiii)the people of Benin received textiles, fine silks and Mediterranean coral (Cuno, 2008, p. xxiii).

Acquisition

In 1892, the Oba Ovonramwen and the British Vice-Counsel Henry Gallwey signed a treaty guaranteeing Britain free trade and British handling of Benin (Plankensteiner, 2016). The Oba did not follow the terms of the treaty, which may have been misunderstood by the Oba (Plankensteiner, 2016). The Oba and the Benin state therefore continued to function as before (Plankensteiner, 2016). In 1897, the Vice-Counsel of the British trading post, G.R. Phillips, pressed for a visit with the Oba to reprimand him for not following the trade agreement. The Oba asked for the visit to be postponed due to the Edo's annual sacred religious rituals, but Phillips ignored the Oba's message and travelled (Plankensteiner, 2016;

Greenfield, 1996) with six other British government officials, two traders, an interpreter, and two hundred and fifty men with weapons in their luggage (Meyerowitz, 1943; Plankensteiner, 2016). Philips and his men were ambushed by Edo warriors and chiefs; only 2 survived. A British naval expedition, led by Admiral Rawson with 1500 men, was mounted against Benin City as retribution (Greenfield, 1996; Meyerowitz, 1943; Plankensteiner, 2016). The expedition landed in Benin in February 1897. The British invaded Benin and proceeded to raid and seize between 2,000 to 3,000 Benin bronzes and sculptures (Greenfield, 1996, p. 120; Waxman, 2008, p. 219). The chiefs and the Oba surrendered to the British (Plankensteiner, 2016) the Benin Bronzes were shipped to London and were sold at auction and dispersed (Plankensteiner, 2016). By 1901, all the seized Benin Bronzes were in public and private collections (Gunsch, 2018). The British government gifted some of the Benin Bronzes (Brown, 2018) and others are on loan to the British Museum by descendants of the soldiers on Rawson's expedition (Gunsch, 2018; Greenfield, 1996, p. 121).

Case Study 5: Hoa Hakananai'a

Object Number Oc1869,1005.1 is from Rapa Nui, or Easter Island, a remote island in the Pacific Ocean, and the place of origin of Hoa Hakananai'a (Pitts, et al., 2014). Hoa Hakananai'a, meaning hidden friend or stolen friend, has been on permanent display in the Museum since 1869. It is presently located in in Gallery 24, as part of the Living and Dying exhibition (Tilburg, 2004; British Museum, 2006, pp. 116-117). The statue has recently been the subject of debate over its repatriation, and talks have taken place between the British Museum and Rapa Nui chiefs. The statue received further attention due to its inclusion as one of six artefacts in a Royal Mail stamp collection to commemorate the British Museum's 250th anniversary (Collect GB Stamps, 2020) (See A47-A49).

Background

Standing at 2.42 metres tall, Hoa Hakananai'a is one of the Rapa Nui statues, or moai, believed to embody ancestors and hold their spirits (Underwood, 2005). Created in c.1000-1100 AD, Hoa Hakananai'a is a unique moai for three reasons. Firstly, due to its unusual location on Rapa Nui (Pitts, et al., 2014, p. 294) on its own on top of a cliff overlooking the sea near the town Orongo, half-buried inside a stone roofed house (Pitts, et al., 2014). Secondly, most moai statues are made from tuff, a soft volcanic rock, whereas Hoa Hakananai'a is made from basalt (Pitts, et al., 2014, p. 294; Tilburg, 2004). Finally, on the back of the Hoa Hakananai'a are symbols relating to the Birdman cult, the Tangata Manu. These symbols would have been added after it was constructed and are believed to have been painted (Pitts, et al., 2014; Davletshin, 2012).

Rapa Nui Island had its first European (Dutch) explorers in 1722, and the Spanish arrived on the island in 1770 (Salmond, 2009; Pelta, 2001, p. 16 & 19; Underwood, 2005; Beech, et al., 2006). Sir James Cook visited in 1774, and by the time the French arrived in 1862, the population was decreasing through slave raids and epidemics of smallpox (Pelta, 2001, p. 25; Underwood, 2005; Arnold, 2000). The people of Rapa Nui were converted to Roman Catholicism after French missionaries arrived on the island in the 1860's, as a result of which nearly all the moai statues were laid on the ground or their necks were broken (Fischer, 2006; Pelta, 2001). The only two that survived were Rano Raraku and Hoa Hakananai'a. As Hoa Hakananai'a featured images of the Birdman cult, the symbol of another religion, the chiefs kept the statue hidden out of sight (Pelta, 2001; Tilburg, 2004).

Rapa Nui people believe the statue holds a spirit and that it stood watch to protect the tribes (Bartlett, 2019; France-Presse, 2018). Requests for repatriation in 2018 have assigned the statue as a 'he' and that he has a soul. The islanders also see that Hoa Hakananai'a is an ambassador for the island in the British Museum and to western culture (Bartlett, 2019).

Acquisition

HMS Topaze departed from England at the beginning of 1867 intending to survey and verify the positions of the Pacific Ocean islands. The frigate, under the command of Commander Powell and Lt William Metcalfe Lang, arrived at Easter Island on 31 October 1868 (Tilburg, 2004). The British were welcomed when they docked at Hanga Roa, the locals sold wooden carvings to the ships (Tilburg, 2004). Four of the crew, including Lt. Harrison, Lt. Dundas, Richard Saint Hill and Dr Palmer, were taken around the island by locals to take a statue as a souvenir back to Britain. On the third day, another group from the ship went on a different route to Vinapu, and a third party travelled to the Orongo store building. The third party with Dr Greenfield found the statue, standing upright opposite the door, its back to the sea and buried to its shoulders (Tilburg, 2004, p. 36). The chiefs of the Island were given shipbuilding material by Commander Powell and Hoa Hakananai'a was seen as a payment (Tilburg, 2004). To get the statue out of the ground and the building, 40 men demolished the building (Tilburg, 2004, p. 38). The next day 60 crew members, sent by Powell, went to collect the statue with the help of two hundred Rapa Nui men (Tilburg, 2004; Pelta, 2001). Once dragged to the shore the moai statue was floated to the ship and was then hoisted aboard HMS Topaze. A second statue called the Moai Hava was also brought back to the UK. During this journey, the red and white paint that was on the statue washed off (Pitts, 2014). Once Hoa Hakananai'a was on board, the ship travelled back to the UK and Hoa Hakananai'a was given to Queen Victoria. The Queen then presented the statue to the British Museum (Digby, 1972, p. 116).

Chapter 2: Discussion

This section will analyse and discuss the primary means by which the British Museum presents the acquisition history of the Parthenon Marbles, the Rosetta Stone, the Papyrus of Ani, the Benin Bronzes and the Hoa Hakananai'a, through their display signs, online database entries and webpages, and their publications. Throughout this discussion the language of the texts will also be considered. As language 'constructs knowledge', a British Museum's choices create certain narratives to history, and this can be seen throughout the British Museum's sources. The context of the discussion is the aim of the British Museum, as stated in their Governance and Principles document, 'to hold a collection representative of world cultures for the benefit and education of humanity' (The British Museum, 2019; Wanniarachchi, 2020).

Education through the objects and the display signs

Display signs are the primary means by which museums establish communication with the public. The signs also contain information that is used to identify the object to the public. The text on display signs is generally short and precise, however, signs enhance the knowledge of the public, the key role of museums, and are a way of informal learning (Perrot, 1997; Argyropoulos, et al., 2014). This creates a tension and each display sign must balance the two, to achieve an engaging and interesting display while encouraging learning and inquiry. An ideal approach is to engage with the object, have a hierarchy structure with more details at the end, create a human presence (by using pronouns) and assume no knowledge of the history of the object whilst using direct and accurate language and combining elementary and obscure information (V & A Museum, 2013; Maina, 2015).

The Parthenon Marbles are recognised by the British Museum and the public as one of the significant objects in the British Museum's collection. The popularity of the Parthenon Marbles is evidenced in the allocation of their three different gallery spaces, all of which contain display signs mostly commenting on the architectural history of the Parthenon Marbles. Furthermore, a recognition of their intrinsic cultural value of the Parthenon Marbles was historically evident with the custom commissioning of the room in the 1930's, as well as the design of the gallery space. The display of the Parthenon Marbles is the inverse of the original way that they were displayed on the Parthenon, with the Parthenon Marbles facing inwards to the centre of the gallery, possibly due to limitations of the space,

architecture, listed status and loadbearing capacity of the building (Beard, 2004). Additional information about the Parthenon Marbles is provided via display signs in the centre, with further information provided in Gallery 18a and 18b (Beard, 2004).

The main source of exhibited acquisition information on the Parthenon Marbles is a leaflet available in Gallery 18. Entitled 'The Parthenon Sculptures', it is a printed version of the Parthenon Marbles' webpage on the British Museum's webpage and contains the same information (See A9 and A10). Both the leaflet and the webpage follow the same format, being divided into four sections.

The first section provides information on the background of the Parthenon and a basic summary of the acquisition of the Parthenon Marbles. This section highlights that Elgin was 'acting with the full knowledge and permission of the Ottoman authorities' but omits the contextual and determining influences on the permission being obtained, for example, that the British were victorious over the French and this impacted on the Sultan Selim III as the British were gaining power. It also omits to mention the debate over the wording over the firman. The second section of the leaflet considers the position of the Greek government in terms of their request for repatriation of the Parthenon Marbles, possibly provided due to the pressure from the Greek government's campaign for the Parthenon Marbles to be returned. The third section describes the position of the British Museum within the repatriation debate and refers to the 'location' argument, highlighting the trustees' belief that the Parthenon Marbles location in the British Museum allows for an interweaving and cross-cultural connection of different narratives and discourses across civilisations. The final section of the leaflet looks at where each of the international collections of the Parthenon Marbles can be viewed, that being in Athens, London or temporary exhibits. This section mentions that the work begun by Lord Elgin was continued 200 years later by the removal of the sculptures from the Parthenon to their present location in the Acropolis Museum, followed by further statements that the Parthenon Marbles are studied and researched by an international community. The section on temporary exhibitions highlights the British Museum's loan of the Illissos sculpture to Russia as a new way to study and interpret the artefacts. The provision of a leaflet diverges from other displays within the British Museum in that handouts or leaflets do not accompany other objects (See A4, A5, A9 and A10). It could be argued that this additional provision

demonstrates transparency in addressing the acquisition and repatriation debate, however it could also be construed as justification for their legal acquisition of the Parthenon Marbles.

The other key sources addressing the Parthenon Marbles' acquisition history are two of the display signs in gallery 18a (See A6 –A8). One provides a timeline of history of the Parthenon. The timeline entry for the year 1801 describes Lord Elgin acquiring the sculptures after receiving permission from Sultan Selim III. The language here is of interest, as it implies that there were no issues at the time of the Parthenon Marbles' removal. The other display board, entitled 'Lord Elgin and the Parthenon,' contains further details. The language that is used here is crucial, in the section that states, 'Elgin appealed to Ottoman officials and was granted written permission to remove any pieces of Parthenon Marbles with inscriptions, and figures.' Within the display galleries there is nothing present that looks at contemporary views from Greece, minimal information about the position of the Greek government and no mention of the meaning of the Parthenon Marbles to Greece and its cultural identity. The display signs focus is primarily on the architecture and mythology of the Parthenon Marbles and not the relationship of the Parthenon Marbles to modern-day Greece. There is a notable absence of any post-colonialist focus on the 'others' /colonized view (Ashcroft, et al., 2007) and the narrative effectively maintains the power and the legacy of the British Imperialism (Rooney, 2019; Wanniarachchi, 2020).

The Rosetta Stone in Gallery Room 4 has four display signs with one dedicated to explaining the provenance entitled 'The History of the Rosetta Stone' located on the back of the display case (See A18- A21). This describes the destruction of Egyptian temples following the introduction of Christianity; the use of temple rubble in the construction of new buildings; the finding of the Rosetta Stone in 1799; and that when the French were defeated the Rosetta Stone was 'surrendered to the British forces as part of the treaty of Alexandria in 1801'. It describes the inscriptions on the side made when the Rosetta Stone reached Britain, and that within 25 years of the Rosetta Stone's discovery hieroglyphics were deciphered. This sign highlights that the Rosetta Stone was acquired as a spoil of war but does not detail the conflict that occurred between the French and the British. Nor does it provide concrete information on the Rosetta Stone to be transferred. The British Museum holds a replica of the Rosetta Stone in the Enlightenment gallery, the sign for which invites

visitors to touch the Rosetta Stone and directs them to the original for further information (see A23 –A26).

The Benin Bronzes' acquisition information is presented in a display sign entitled *The Discovery of Benin Art by the West*. The sign describes how the British discovered and removed the Benin Bronzes from Benin City, as well as describing the British colonial control over the city after they sacked it (Google Arts and Culture, 2020). It further outlines the retaliation by the British against Benin City and mentions that the items were taken as bounty by the British and sold on to cover the cost of their expedition (Google Arts and Culture, 2020). The line between information and justification is finely balanced within this display. It could be argued that the lack of inclusion of alternative accounts of the condition of the Benin Bronzes when they were found, is due to lack of space (First Contact-Civilisations, 2018). However, it could also be seen as a justification for their removal, particularly as the sign space is used to highlight a positive outcome for their removal - ed Africa's artistic and cultural influences to flourish internationally (Google Arts and Culture, 2020). The sign goes on to mention that other museums in the UK and Europe bought the plaques when they were originally auctioned. This could suggest that the British Museum are saying that they are not alone in holding the Benin Bronzes, especially as it identifies multiple museums (Google Arts and Culture, 2020). The same sign, however, is transparent in its mention of the removal and the selling of the Benin Bronzes to cover the costs of the expedition, and that the Benin Bronzes were plunder from the sacking of Benin City.

The acquisition history of the Hoa Hakananai'a is presented on two signs, one located on the front and one on the back of the pedestal. The front display sign provides a cultural and historical background to Rapa Nui people, the Birdman cult, and moai statues, and highlights that the moai represent ancestors and 'could embody their spirits'. This display further discusses the provenance and unique nature of the Hoa Hakananai'a, stating that the Admiralty gifted the statue to Queen Victoria, who then presented it to the British Museum. The British Museum demonstrates that they recognise the gender of the statue as an ancestor/person of male gender, referring to Hoa Hakananai'a with the pronoun 'him' throughout the display (See A50- A54). The second section of the display on the back of the pedestal, entitled 'How did Hoa Hakananai'a get here?' is significant as it describes how the statue was obtained. It discusses where the statue was found and that 'Commodore Richard

Powell decided to bring him to Britain.’ The rather clumsy wording here, suggesting that the statue was chosen and taken and not presented by the islanders to the crew as stated in other sources produced by the British Museum (BBC Radio 4, 2014; MacGregor, 2010) is problematic, as its inaccuracy could be read as denying the gender of the Rapa Nui. The sign mentions one of the Rapa Nui describing the journey of the Hoa Hakananai’a to the boat; the statue’s subsequent journey to England; and provides some information on the second moai statue that came into British hands on the same expedition, the Moai Hava. Furthermore, the Hoa Hakananai’a as a section titled ‘Hoa Hakananai’a today’. This discusses the request for the repatriation of the Hoa Hakananai’a and the Moai Hava statues and includes information about the Rapa Nui people travelling to the British Museum to present offerings to the statue. The display also mentions that Rapa Nui is part of Chile. The display also states, ‘In 2019, Museum staff travelled to Rapa Nui for discussions, and dialogue with the community continues’ thus showing that the British Museum is engaging with the possible return of the moai statue to Rapa Nui.

In contrast to the other case studies, the Papyrus of Ani is unique in that its display signs do not provide any acquisition information, focusing instead on the funerary beliefs of the Egyptians and how the Papyrus fits within and has informed that context (See A29- A35). There appears to be an unwillingness to engage with the acquisition history of the papyrus, and it is possible to conclude that this may be due to the Papyrus’s provenance as a black-market acquisition. It appears that where the acquisition history is unclear or contested, as with the Parthenon Marbles, it creates controversy which attracts visitors and that resulting pressure means that the British Museum has to show some engagement with the objects’ contested history. However, information on the acquisition history of an object which has been acquired by overtly illegal means, through the black-market, and smuggled out of its country of origin, remains elusive (Argyropoulos, et al., 2014; Gazi, 2014).

Education through technology

Recent museums closures due to the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that the online British Museum experience is presently the only means of engagement available to the public, via their webpage and social media channels. The British Museum, one of the few world museums to do so, has digitised the majority of its collection in online databases with entries containing artefact and document information. This section will consider these webpages relating to the case studies, and where relevant, blogs, and Trustee statements (Gazi, 2014).

Every section of the Parthenon owned by the British Museum is included in their collection database online, however for the purposes of this discussion the contents of the webpage the Illissos statue only will be considered (Number: 1816,0610.99, See A11-A14) (The British Museum, 2020). It is interesting to note that the Parthenon Marbles do not have acquisition information online. Standard across all the online Parthenon Marbles entries is the phrase 'Purchased from Thomas Bruce, 7th Earl of Elgin' (The British Museum, 2020). This is unlike the other case studies online pages.

This is inconsistent with online entries for other objects, however this difference in presentation may be due to *The Parthenon Sculptures* British Museum leaflet in Gallery 18, which is also available in webpage version, and a Trustee statement (The British Museum, 2020) commenting that the Parthenon Marbles belong in both the Acropolis and the British Museum. Each museum tells complementary narratives about the Parthenon Marbles, one against the backdrop of Athenian history and the other against the backdrop of world history (The British Museum, 2020). The statement refutes allegations surrounding the Parthenon Marbles (The British Museum, 2020). This includes 'The Parthenon sculptures now in the British Museum were stolen' (The British Museum, 2020). This statement mentions that Lord Elgin 'acted with the full knowledge and permission of the legal authorities of the day in both Athens and London'. It then goes on to say that the legality of the acquisition was debated at the Parliamentary Inquiry and was found to be legal and asserts the willingness of the British Museum to loan the Parthenon Marbles to the Acropolis Museum in Athens. These two webpages attempt to demonstrate the openness of the British Museum in both their presentation of the events that transpired and their position now. However, the lack of balance in not providing the terms of the Greek

argument for repatriation, although coherent, provides a one-sided point of view that does not appear to allow room for future resolution of the issue.

Acquisition information on the Rosetta Stone object entry is provided under 'Curator's Comments' and within a blog section entitled 'When was it found?' (See A27 and A28) (British Museum, 2017; British Museum, 2020) and states that after the treaty of Alexandria was signed, the Rosetta Stone and other finds transferred hands to the British as a result of their victory (British Museum, 2017; British Museum, 2020). The provision of this information is open in how the objects were obtained (British Museum, 2020). But, again, there is a failure on the webpage to mention any of the claims for repatriation of the Rosetta Stone to Egypt or any allusion to the colonial conditions that bypassed the Egyptian peoples' part in any decision-making concerning the future of their heritage (British Museum, 2020; British Museum, 2017; Waxman, 2008).

The Papyrus of Ani online entry contains minimal information, only citing the date that the papyrus was obtained and who obtained it (See A36- 43). This reflects the same issue of absence of information present in its display sign. This brings into question the Museum's principle of openness to fulfil their aims and mission. The British Museum's hesitation to address the illicit trafficking of artefacts in their collection highlights the British Museums difficult relationship with Britain's controversial and colonial past (The British Museum, 2019; Argyropoulos, et al., 2014). The Benin Bronzes' acquisition information is presented more generously, with each of the Benin Bronzes covering two sections on its online entry. The *Curator's comments* give a general view of the object and its origins (See 44-46). The *Acquisition notes* provides the means of the acquisition, seizing, but avoids relating the punitive nature of the circumstances leading up to it (The British Museum, 2020).

Similarly, the Hoa Hakananai'a the *Acquisition notes* section includes two brief sentences on the acquisition of the Hoa Hakananai'a, with the wording 'removed from the original location during the HMS Topaze expedition' (See A55-A57) (The British Museum, 2020). This provides little information on the events. In addition, the use of the word 'removed' gives an overly simple and negative connotation to the complexity of the circumstances of the British obtaining the statue and adds to an inconsistency evident in the display sign, the object entry, and in HOW100.

Publications and Research

A major aspect of educating the public and a keyway to see the transparency of the British Museum is through the institution's publications and research. This section will explore *The History of the World in a 100 Objects* book and podcast series, which include the Parthenon Marbles, Rosetta Stone, Benin Bronzes and Hoa Hakananai'a. *The British Museum Objects in Focus* series will also be considered. This series includes editions on the Rosetta Stone and Hoa Hakananai'a. Furthermore, this section will look at a selection of current and past guidebooks.

The Parthenon sculpture of the Centaur and Lapith is considered in Chapter 27 of *HOW100* (BBC Radio 4, 2010; MacGregor, 2010). Although this section of the series focuses on controversial and disputed objects, the majority of the information contained in the chapter and podcast concerns the materiality of the actual sculptures and the mythical and contemporary discourse depicted on the Parthenon Marbles. In the introduction there is mention of the acquisition and debate, acknowledgement of the Greek call for repatriation, and that the Parthenon Marbles stand as an emblem and a rallying cry for modern Greece. The phrase that Lord Elgin 'removed' the Parthenon Marbles from the Parthenon, seen elsewhere within the British Museum sources, is repeated (BBC Radio 4, 2010; MacGregor, 2010). However, there are no details concerning the acquisition, and the disregard for the debate by saying that it overshadows other debates concerning the Parthenon Marbles (BBC Radio 4, 2010; MacGregor, 2010).

Similarly to the Parthenon Marbles, Chapter 77 of *HOW100* book focuses on one Benin Bronze - *The Oba with Europeans*, Object Number Af1898,0115.23 (MacGregor, 2010). The podcast/chapter provides contextual information to the history of the Benin Bronzes and Benin (MacGregor, 2010, p. 489). With transparency of the British Museum most evident in one section of the podcast. This describes the start of the conflict, with Philips going to meet with the Oba, and the consequent British expeditionary force's vengeance on Benin (BBC Radio 4, 2010; MacGregor, 2010). The source however provides little detail on the events that transpired, although it is mentioned that there is a lack of clarity in the evidence. This could be due to a lack of evidence existing and the lack of testimonies from the chiefs that were executed (BBC Radio 4, 2010; MacGregor, 2010). The

lack of discussion concerning how the plaque got into the hands of the British Museum, and that the Benin Bronzes were looted from the palace and religious sites, demonstrates that the British Museum does not paint a full picture. Information is omitted that could influence opinion on the history of British involvement in Africa, and the British state and the British Museum and that history, lacking the perspective of the colonized and continuing the legacy of the British colonial power (Rooney, 2019; Wanniarachchi, 2020).

‘Meeting the Gods,’ Chapter 70 of *HOW100*, has Hoa Hakananai’a as its subject (MacGregor, 2010, p. 423). It discusses religious objects (MacGregor, 2010, p. 423). It is evident that the British Museum understands the role that the moai played in religion, as an ancestral figure, referring to the (BBC Radio 4, 2014). The effort that it took to remove the statue from the house is not engaged with, instead it states that the statue was ‘presented’ by the chiefs to HMS (BBC Radio 4, 2014; MacGregor, 2010, p. 455). This suggests that Hoa Hakananai’a was gifted and not exchange as Objects in Focus series (Parkinson, 2005). Overall, *HOW100*’s presentation of how the statue was obtained and its focus on the history of Rapa Nui, though the topic is not the main focus of the source but does attempt to display the information (BBC Radio 4, 2010; MacGregor, 2010). The use of different euphemisms to describe the way the same object was removed is both confusing and shows that they are not ‘keepers of the tangible truth’ but instead continue to be complicit in the colonial legacy of the past (Wanniarachchi, 2020; Perrot, 1997).

Chapter 33 of *HoW100* focuses on the Rosetta Stone (MacGregor, 2010). Whilst considering the Rosetta Stone’s hieroglyphics; the invasion of Napoleon’s army into Egypt; and the British win against Napoleon, it discusses the provenance and discovery of the Rosetta Stone and the handing over of the Rosetta Stone to the British under the Treaty of Alexandria. The source also describes the graffiti on the side of the Rosetta Stone. The information provided concerning the acquisition, although not fully detailed or debated, is positive, and does show transparency the British Museum tries to achieve through the book section.

The *Objects in Focus* series covers the Rosetta Stone and the Hoa Hakananai’a. The transparency of the British Museum can be clearly seen in these two books, as is evident in the coverage of the objects’ provenance, and this series is the most comprehensive of the sources in terms of an acquisition context.

It details the proceedings from the discovery of the Rosetta Stone to the capitulation of Alexandria and details of the handover, when General Menou attempted to keep the Rosetta Stone (Parkinson, 2005), before further clarifying the confusing accounts published by the participants on the handover of the Rosetta Stone (Parkinson, 2005). In terms of Hoa Hakananai'a, extensive acquisition information is provided, including the background to the history of the island and statues, and the arrival of the Europeans and HMS Topaze (Tilburg, 2004, pp. 25-39), and there is an openness about the events that transpired. The story of the acquisition is explained at length in three sections. Compared to other British Museum sources which deliver a single element of a complex and hidden narrative, the Objects on Focus series provides details of a number of sources to describe a timeline of events, including writings about Hoa Hakananai'a journey and Sketches of where they found him by Dr J.L. Palmer, and Lt M.J. Harrison and Commodore Powell from the crew of HMS Topaze (Tilburg, 2004). However, the account of events given by the British Museum is one-sided, telling the British side. This may be for a multitude of reasons; one of which could be the limited number of sources from the people of Easter Island. Both sources use language to construct a colonising narrative, concealing the ethical issues behind obtaining the case studies, thus maintaining the power and the legacy of British Imperialism (Wanniarachchi, 2020; Rooney, 2019).

The current guidebook is an important resource representing the British Museum and another primary means of educating the public and covers all of the objects except for the Papyrus of Ani. Although not key for a guidebook, there is little to none acquisition history for the objects, with only the Hoa Hakananai'a given a brief location history, and there is no mention of any debates over the acquisition and repatriation of the case study. The lack of acquisition information could be due to the type of source, as a guidebook will provide a brief window into the British Museum's collection and would therefore not necessarily include details but just a brief statement to show that they acknowledge the debate. In comparison to the other case studies such as the Benin Bronzes and the Papyrus of Ani, where there is no mention of the artefact at all, shows that that the British Museum acknowledge the status of this object to their collection (British Museum, 2006, p. 117).

Similarly, to the current guidebook, the 2003 guidebook only acknowledges the Hoa Hakananai'a acquisition, referring to the statue being 'excavated from a sacred house in

Rapanui in 1868' (Reeve, 2003, p. 66). This suggests that it was carried out by archaeologists, i.e. trained professionals that took archaeological data and drawings (Reeve, 2003, p. 66). This description suggests that the British Museum at the time had no sense of controversy surrounding the removal of the objects in the collection (Reeve, 2003, p. 66). Though this was published before the claims for repatriation it shows how ignorant the British Museum is towards its own colonial past and that it took pressure from outside the British Museum from a foreign governance to see the past.

Conclusion

Overall, there is a degree of transparency from the British Museum in their display signs in certain aspects of their exhibition and display, although this transparency becomes more opaque with particular objects. Acquisition information in the display signs is presented usually as a singular narrative and is less reflective of nuance and divergence from that dominant voice. Certain aspects of presenting acquisition in the exhibitions and display are emphasised and others omitted. In particular this appears to be the case when those artefacts' acquisition is controversial and draws attention to the British Museum. With the Rosetta Stone there is an ambivalence demonstrated towards the history of the acquisition. The Hoa Hakananai'a display provides more detail and moves closer to the ideal approach suggested by the V&A with the signage highlighting the British Museum's current engagement with negotiations for the repatriation of the statue (V & A Museum, 2013). This is similar to the increased engagement the British Museum shows with the Parthenon Marbles display with the leaflet clearly acknowledging the repatriation debate. It is likely that the repatriation calls from the Greek Government and the expectations of visitors have pressured the British Museum to engage within its signs and other communications. The display signs for the Benin Bronzes show that the British Museum have acknowledged their responsibility to inform visitors of the acquisition information, however the shallow nature of their narrative and their justification of some aspects of the acquisition weakens the British Museum's aim to provide the collection for the 'education of humanity', instead leaving it open to accusations of being the keepers of 'glorious looted treasures' (The British Museum, 2019; Wanniarachchi, 2020; Gazi, 2014).

The British Museum's online database entries show inconsistencies towards the acquisition information and lacks detail. This is highlighted in the online entry for the Benin Bronzes where the British Museum directs the controversial history of the acquisitions away from the British Museum to the actions of the British government (The British Museum, 2020). The omitted information from the section may provide the reader with a different impression of the plaques' acquisition (The British Museum, 2020). A lack of transparency online is further shown on the online entry for the Papyrus of Ani, with only the name of the collector and the year of acquisition provided. The Hoa Hakananai'a entry shows a similar lack of acquisition information.

The aim of the publications and resources produced by, or in partnership with, the British Museum is to introduce the objects to the public and to provide education on them. The transparency of the British Museum towards acquisition information is seen more positively in the *Objects In Focus series* with a greater level of detail for the two included artefacts. *HOW100 series* shows willingness to acknowledge and engage with acquisition histories, and has transparency, but not much detail or depth in its discussions. This is seen consistently throughout the dissertation in reflections on the resources produced by the British Museum, in the lack of discussion and detail in the online collection database and in the *HoW100* book and podcasts, and this calls into question the principles of the British Museum in terms of its objectives to educate and inform ‘humanity’ about the history of the objects in their collection and the object’s context (The British Museum, 2019).

The British Museum is making attempts to be open with the acquisition history of these objects but the presentation does not meet the challenges of contemporary demands of an emerging post-colonial culture. It is important for the British Museum to have this discussion as this is the direction of travel, as is evidenced by French President Macron’s report on the repatriation of African artefacts and the increase of attention on racial and colonial oppressions driven by the decolonisation movement and the Black Lives Matter protests. Although this dissertation does not focus on repatriation, it is directly linked to the acquisition history of objects, and the avoidance of information or challenging of acquisition histories signifies the reluctance of the institute to move forward into the 21st century. This is in some ways institutionally understandable. If the British Museum were to begin to openly and honestly acknowledge acquisition histories, they could be opening the door to a mass repatriation of objects and an emptying out of the Imperial and colonial museum of the past. Despite this anxiety, the British Museum could work towards demonstrating to visitors, through their display, online information and new publications, that their exhibits are not ‘objective’ and that any interpretation of their collection is subjective, open to question and debate and is filtered through a political and cultural historical with many perspectives and histories (The British Museum, 2019; The British Museum, 2019; Gazi, 2014). The British Museum’s strategy ‘Towards 2020; the British Museum’s Strategy’ identifies that ‘histories must be told by many voices (The British Museum, 2019). The British Museum must be a space in which contested readings of history may be heard and

discussed (Gazi, 2014). This positive statement implies an acknowledgement and a willingness to move forward in presenting the voices of the colonised, and is to be welcomed (Gazi, 2014).

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Appendix



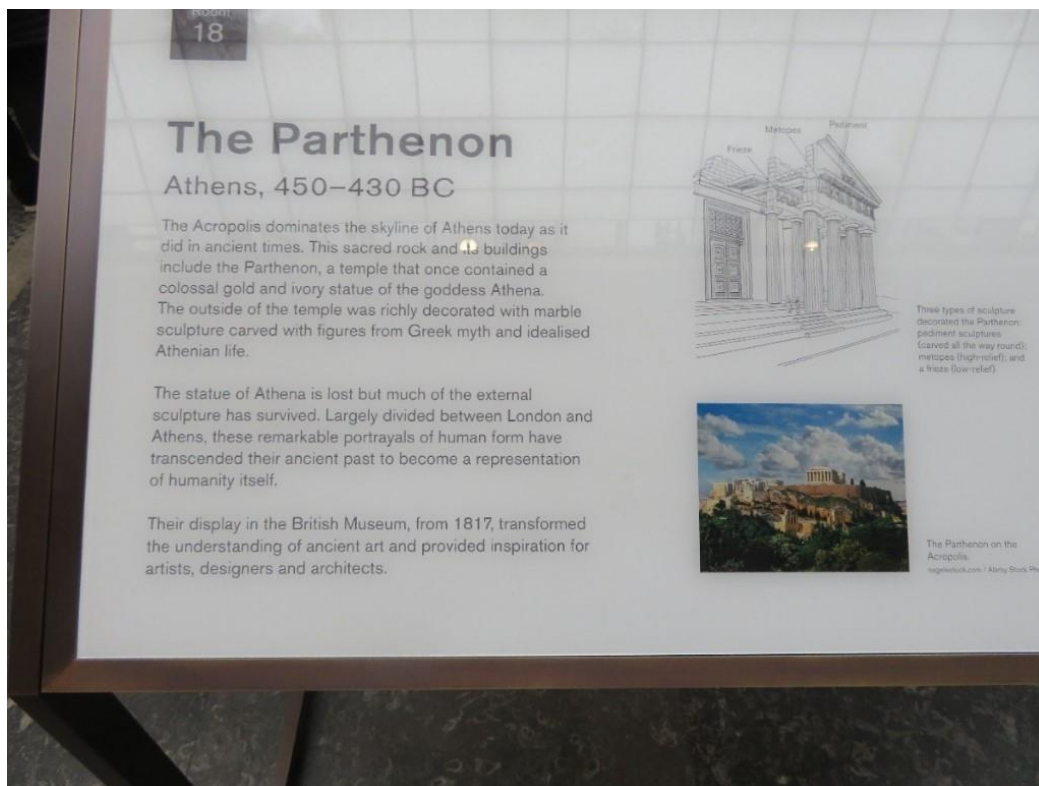
A1- Image of one side of Gallery 18, holding the Parthenon Marbles



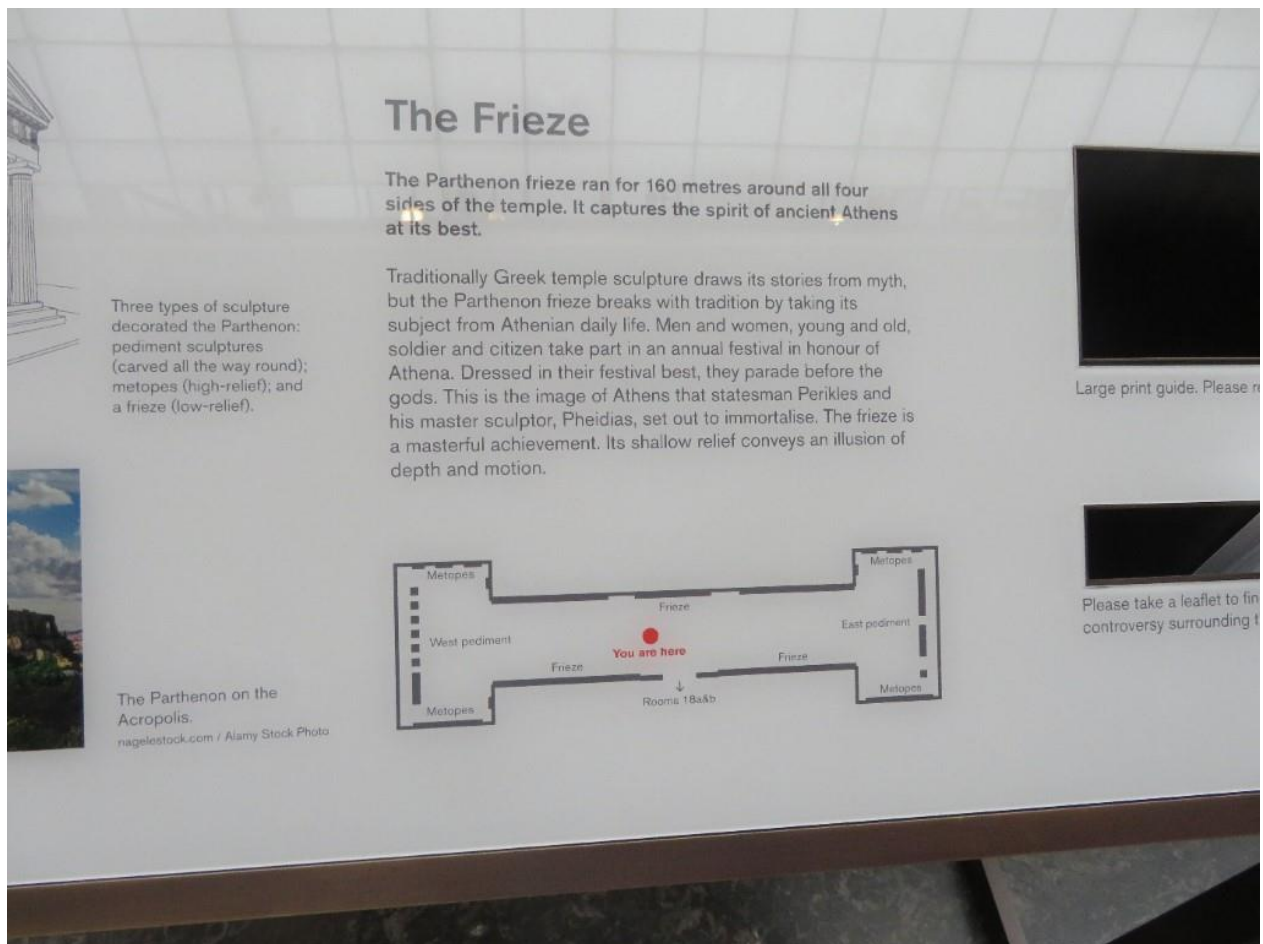
A2- Image of Gallery 18a.



A3- Image of Gallery 18b.



A4- Pt1 of Image of the main sign in Gallery 18, which holds the leaflets.



A5- Pt2 of Image of the main sign in Gallery 18, which holds the leaflets.

Lord Elgin and the Parthenon

In 1799 Thomas Bruce, Earl of Elgin, was appointed British Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire. Greece had been part of the empire for nearly 350 years, and would not become an independent nation until the uprising of 1821.

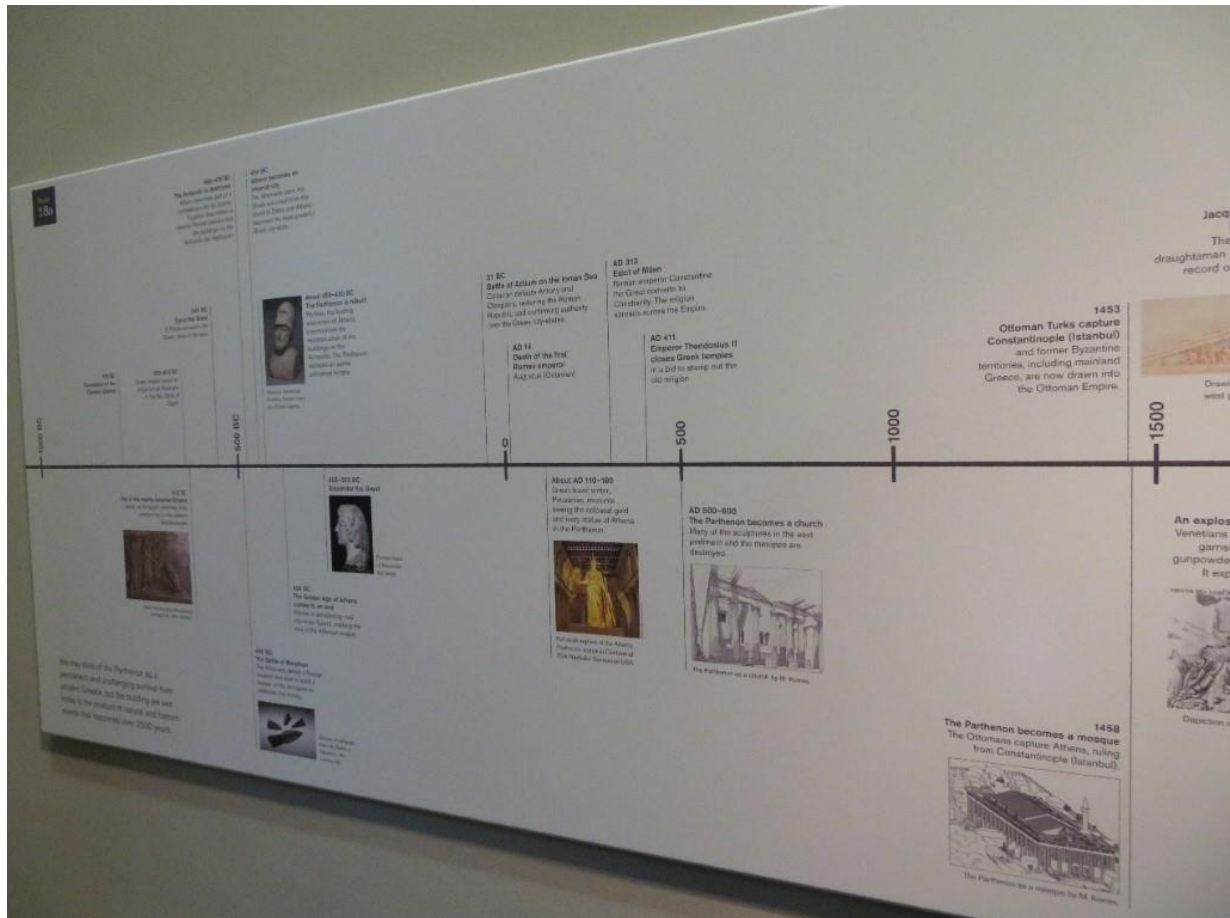
Elgin was especially interested in the remains of ancient Greece. He assembled a team of artists and antiquaries to study the buildings on the Acropolis of Athens. The Parthenon stood in ruins and was suffering further damage at an alarming rate. Elgin appealed to Ottoman officials and was granted written permission (*firmans*) to remove 'any pieces of stone with inscriptions, and figures'.

Realising the importance of the collection he had assembled, Elgin wrote to the British Museum proposing a special gallery. In 1807 the sculptures were brought to London and exhibited to the public for the first time. The British Parliament then voted, in 1816, special funds for the British Museum to purchase Lord Elgin's collection.

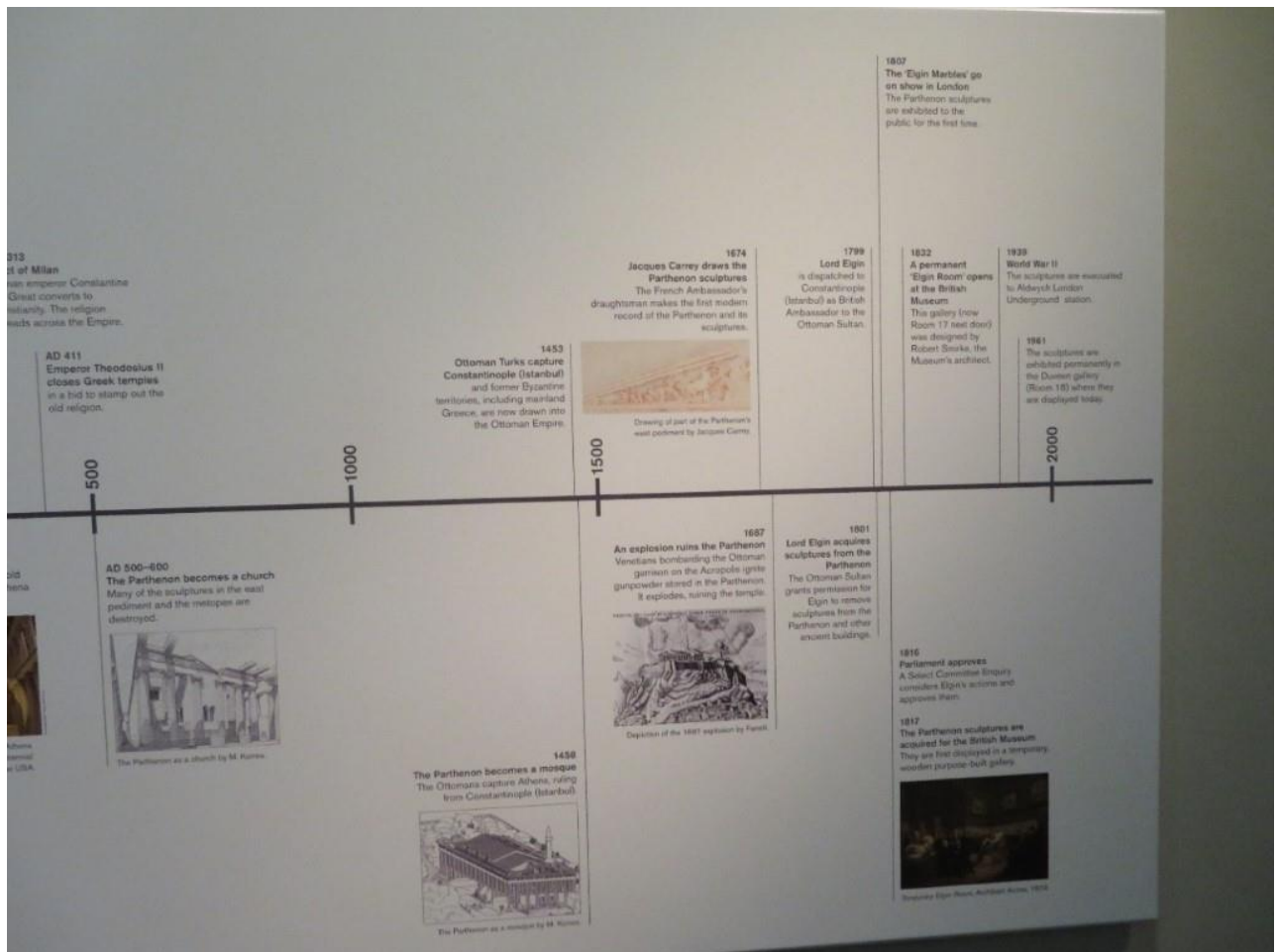


Thomas Bruce, seventh Earl of Elgin, aged 21. Elgin was British Ambassador in Constantinople (Istanbul) from 1799 to 1803. G.P. Harding, after Anton Graf.
© Trustees of the British Museum

A6- A display sign, located in Gallery 18a, titled 'Lord Elgin and the Parthenon'.



A7- Display sign, located in Gallery 18a, part 1.



A8- Display sign, located in Gallery 18a, part 2.

What is the Parthenon and how did the sculptures come to London?

The Parthenon in Athens has a long and complex history. Built nearly 2,500 years ago as a temple dedicated to the Greek goddess Athena, it was for a thousand years the church of the Virgin Mary of the Athenians, then a mosque, and finally an archaeological ruin. The building was altered and the sculptures much damaged over the course of the centuries. The first major loss occurred around AD 500 when the Parthenon was converted into a church. When the city was under siege by the Venetians in 1687, the Parthenon itself was used as a gunpowder store. A huge explosion blew the roof off and destroyed a large portion of the remaining sculptures. The building has been a ruin ever since. Archaeologists worldwide are agreed that the surviving sculptures could never be re-attached to the structure.

By 1800 only about half of the original sculptural decoration remained. Between 1801 and 1805 Lord Elgin, the British ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, acting with the full knowledge and permission of the Ottoman authorities, removed about half of the remaining sculptures from the fallen ruins and from the building itself. Lord Elgin was passionate about ancient Greek art and transported the sculptures to Britain. Their arrival in London was to make a profound impression upon western ideas of art and taste. It promoted the high regard that the European Enlightenment already had for ancient Greek civilisation. Before they went on show at the British Museum in 1817, they were first seen from 1807 in Lord Elgin's temporary museum. The public display of the sculptures from spring 1807 encouraged Hellenists in their love of ancient Greece while, at the same time, it inspired the Philhellenic movement in its sympathy for the inhabitants of modern Greece and their struggle for independence. Since then the sculptures have always been on display to the public in the British Museum, free of charge.

Further reading

The Parthenon Frieze
Ian Jenkins (British Museum Press, 1994)

Lord Elgin and the Marbles
William St Clair
(3rd ed. Oxford University Press, 1998)

The Parthenon
Mary Beard (Profile, 2002)

Greek Architecture and its sculpture in the British Museum
Ian Jenkins (British Museum Press, 2006)

The Parthenon Sculptures in the British Museum
Ian Jenkins (British Museum Press, 2007)

Explore the Parthenon – an ancient Greek temple and its sculptures
Ian Jenkins and Kate Morton
(British Museum Press, 2009)

Acropolis Restored
Charalambos Bouras, Maria Ioannidou and Ian Jenkins (British Museum Press, 2011)

Parthenon: Power and Politics on the Acropolis
David Stuttard (British Museum Press, 2013)

Defining beauty: the body in ancient Greek art
Ian Jenkins (British Museum Press, 2015)

These titles and others are available in the British Museum Book Shop.

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The Parthenon sculptures

The question of where the surviving sculptures from the Parthenon should be displayed has long been a subject of public discussion. This document provides key information for understanding the complex history of the Parthenon and its sculpture.

If you would like to know more, visit britishmuseum.org

You can find out about the Acropolis Museum's history at theacropolismuseum.gr

Further information about the Parthenon and its sculptures can be found at blog.britishmuseum.org

What has the Greek government asked for?

Since the early 1980s, Greek governments have argued for the permanent removal to Athens of all the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum. The Greek government has also disputed the British Museum Trustees' legal title to the sculptures.

What is the British Museum's position?

The British Museum tells the story of cultural achievement throughout the world, from prehistory until the present day. The Museum is a unique resource for the world: the breadth and depth of the collection allows the world's public to re-examine cultural identities and explore the connections between them.

Within the context of this unparalleled collection, the Parthenon sculptures are an important representation of the culture of ancient Athens. Millions of visitors from around the world admire the beauty of the sculptures each year – free of charge. They also gain insights into how ancient Greece influenced and was influenced by the other civilisations it encountered, especially Egypt, Persia and Rome.

The Acropolis Museum allows the Parthenon sculptures in Athens to be appreciated against the backdrop of ancient Greek and Athenian history,

This display does not alter the view of the Trustees of the British Museum that the sculptures are part of everyone's shared heritage and transcend cultural boundaries. The Trustees remain convinced that the current locations of the Parthenon sculptures allows different and complementary stories to be told about the surviving sculptures, highlighting their significance for world culture and affirming the universal legacy of ancient Greece.

More about the Parthenon and its history can be found at britishmuseum.org and theacropolismuseum.gr

Where can the surviving sculptures from the Parthenon be seen?

The majority of the sculptures are roughly equally divided between Athens and London. Important pieces are also held by other major European museums, including the Musée du Louvre in Paris, Vatican Museums, the National Museum in Copenhagen, the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, the University Museum in Würzburg, and the Glyptothek in Munich.

Parthenon sculptures in Athens

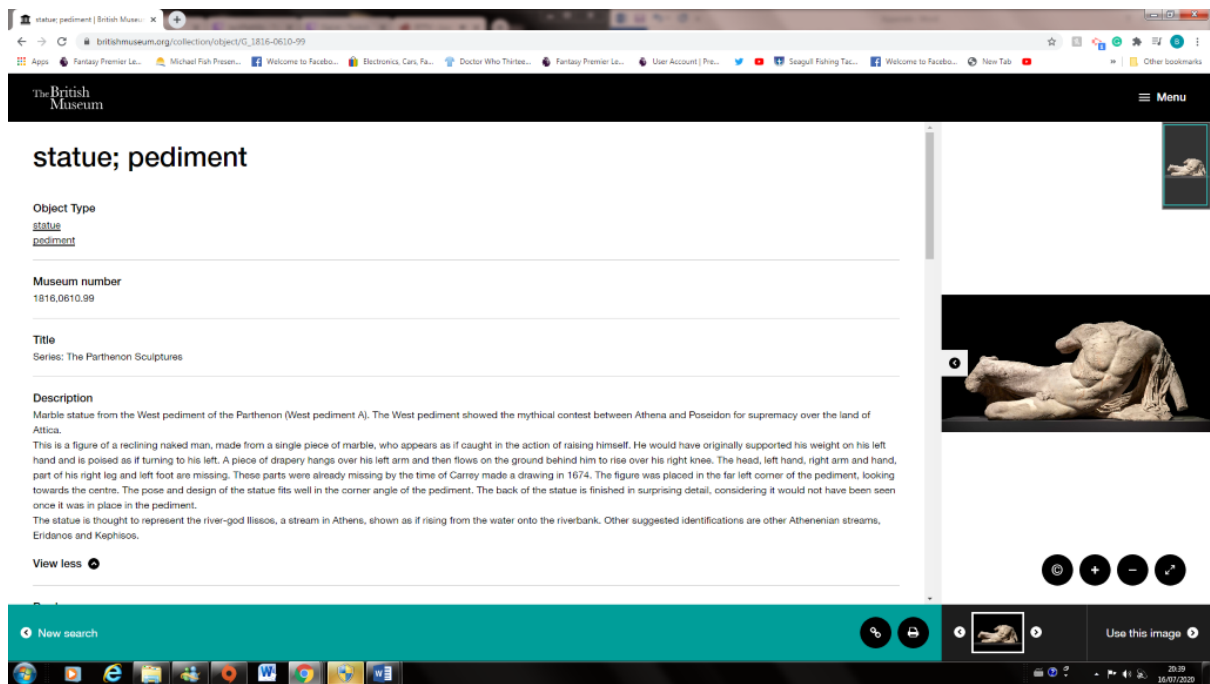
The programme of restoration of the Acropolis monuments, begun in the 1970s, is ongoing. As part of this work, the Greek authorities removed all the architectural sculptures from the Parthenon to the Acropolis Museum. They have thus completed a process begun by Lord Elgin 200 years ago, and all the Parthenon sculptures have now become museum objects.

Parthenon sculptures in London

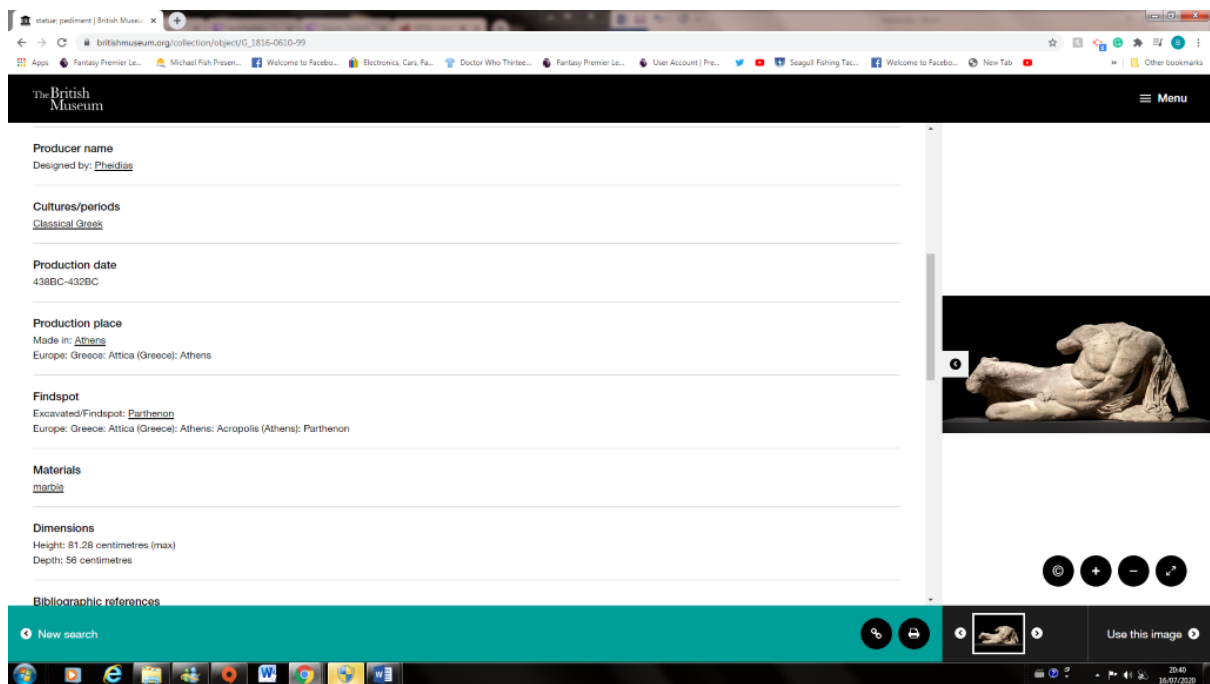
The sculptures in London, sometimes referred to as the 'Elgin Marbles', have been on permanent public display in the British Museum since 1817. Here they are seen by a world audience and are actively studied and researched by an international community of scholars, to promote understanding both of ancient Greek culture and its role in the cultures of the world. The Museum has published the results of its own research extensively. Recent discoveries of ancient applied colour on the sculptures have been made with the application of special imaging technology.

Parthenon sculptures in temporary exhibitions

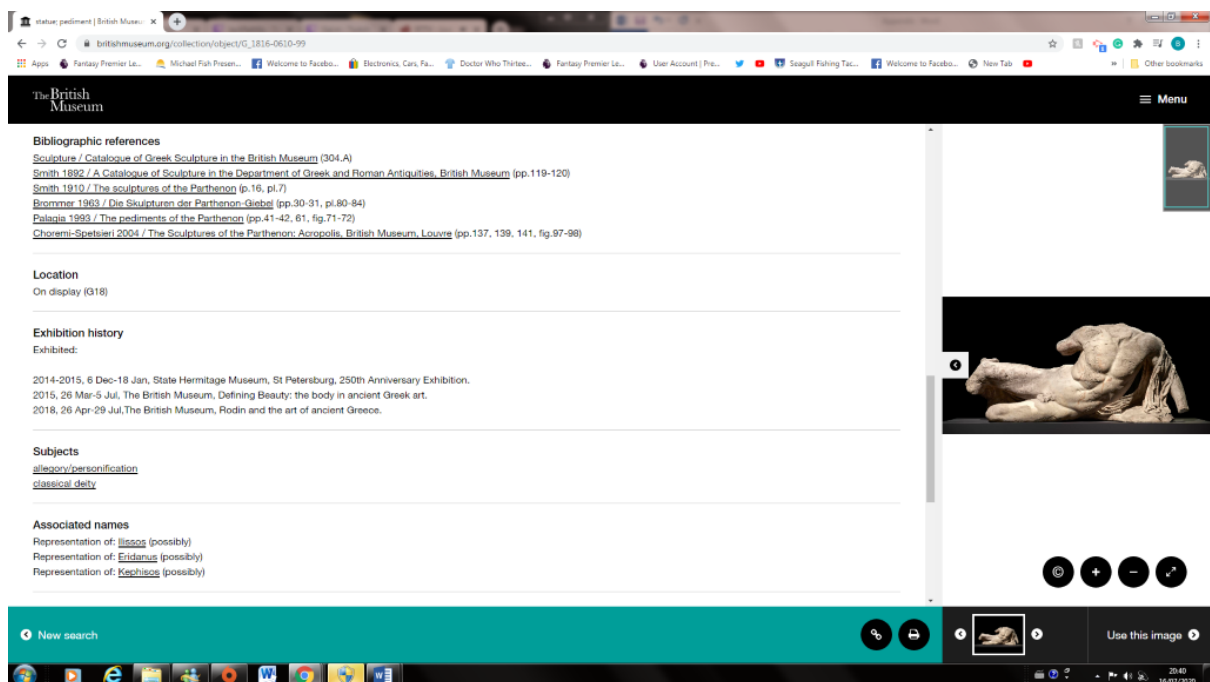
The British Museum continues to seek new ways to study and interpret the Parthenon sculptures, and to share them as widely as possible. In this spirit, the sculpture of the river-god Ilissos was exhibited in the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg, in 2014, to mark the 250th anniversary of that museum's foundation. In 2015 the Ilissos and other Parthenon sculptures were featured in the British Museum's special exhibition *Defining beauty: the body in ancient Greek art*. Here they were shown for the first time together with masterpieces borrowed from other museums. In 2018 some of the Parthenon sculptures were displayed alongside works by Auguste Rodin in a special exhibition, showing how the radical sculptor was influenced by these ancient masterpieces. Initiatives such as this aim to illuminate not only the classical Greek achievement, but also its impact on the world.



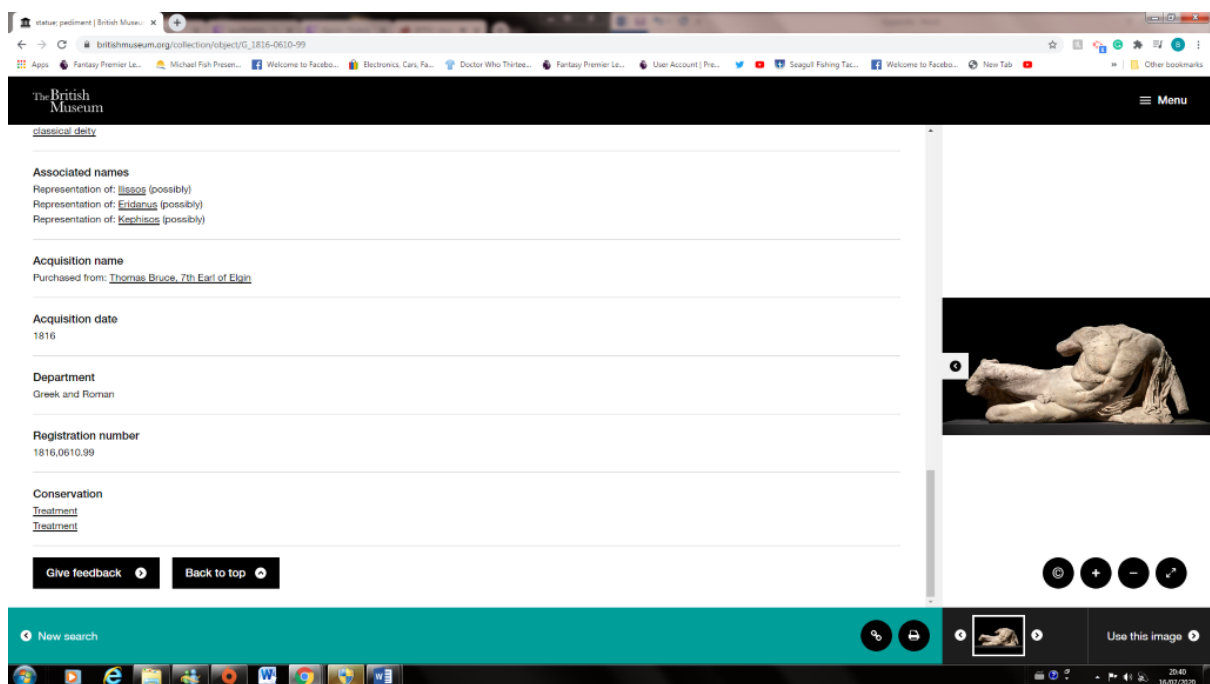
A11- Screen Shot of the object Website for object 1816,0610.99, Part 1 (The British Museum, 2020).



A12- Screen Shot of the object Website for object 1816,0610.99, Part 2 (The British Museum, 2020).



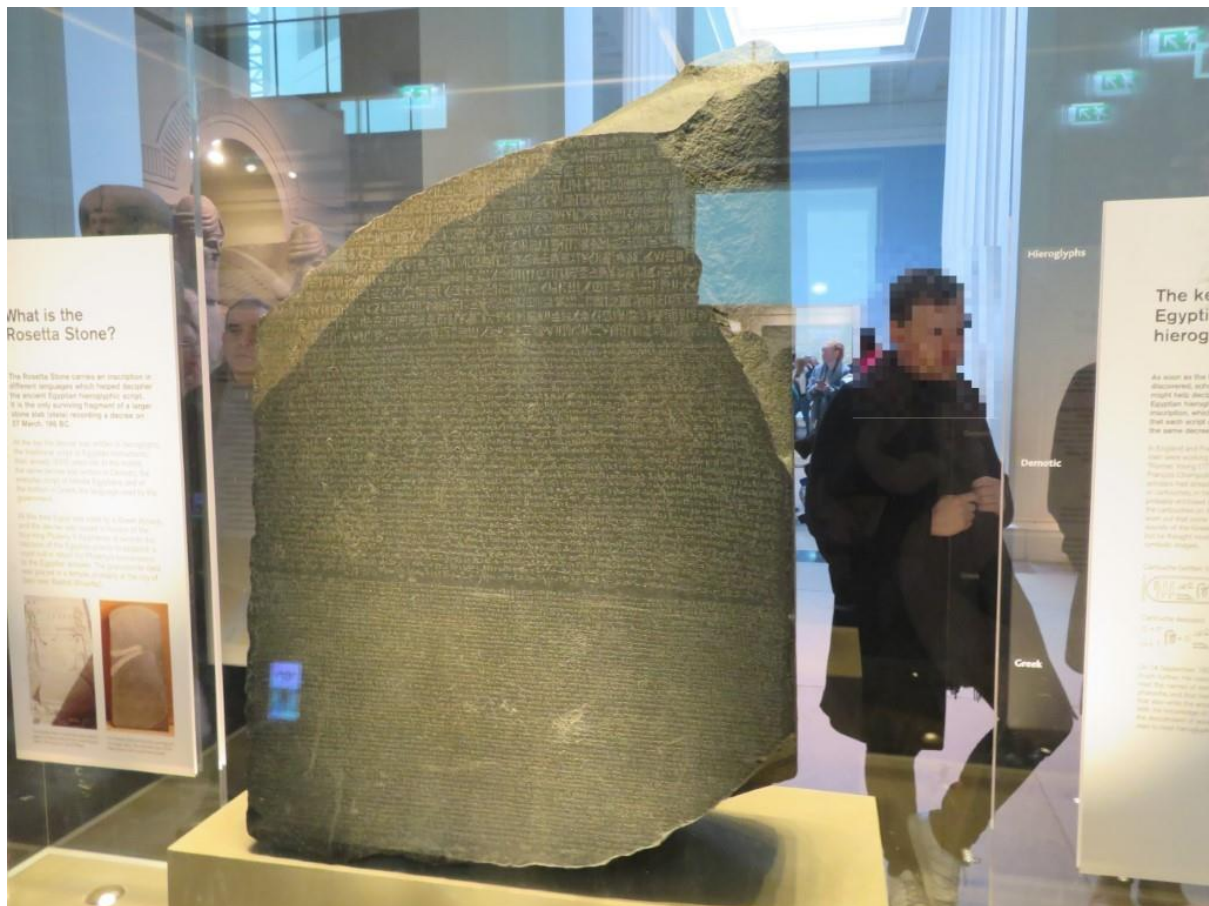
A13- Screen Shot of the object Website for object 1816,0610.99, Part 3 (The British Museum, 2020).



A14- Screen Shot of the object Website for object 1816,0610.99, Part 4 (The British Museum, 2020).



A15-Image of the Rosetta stone display case in Gallery 4.



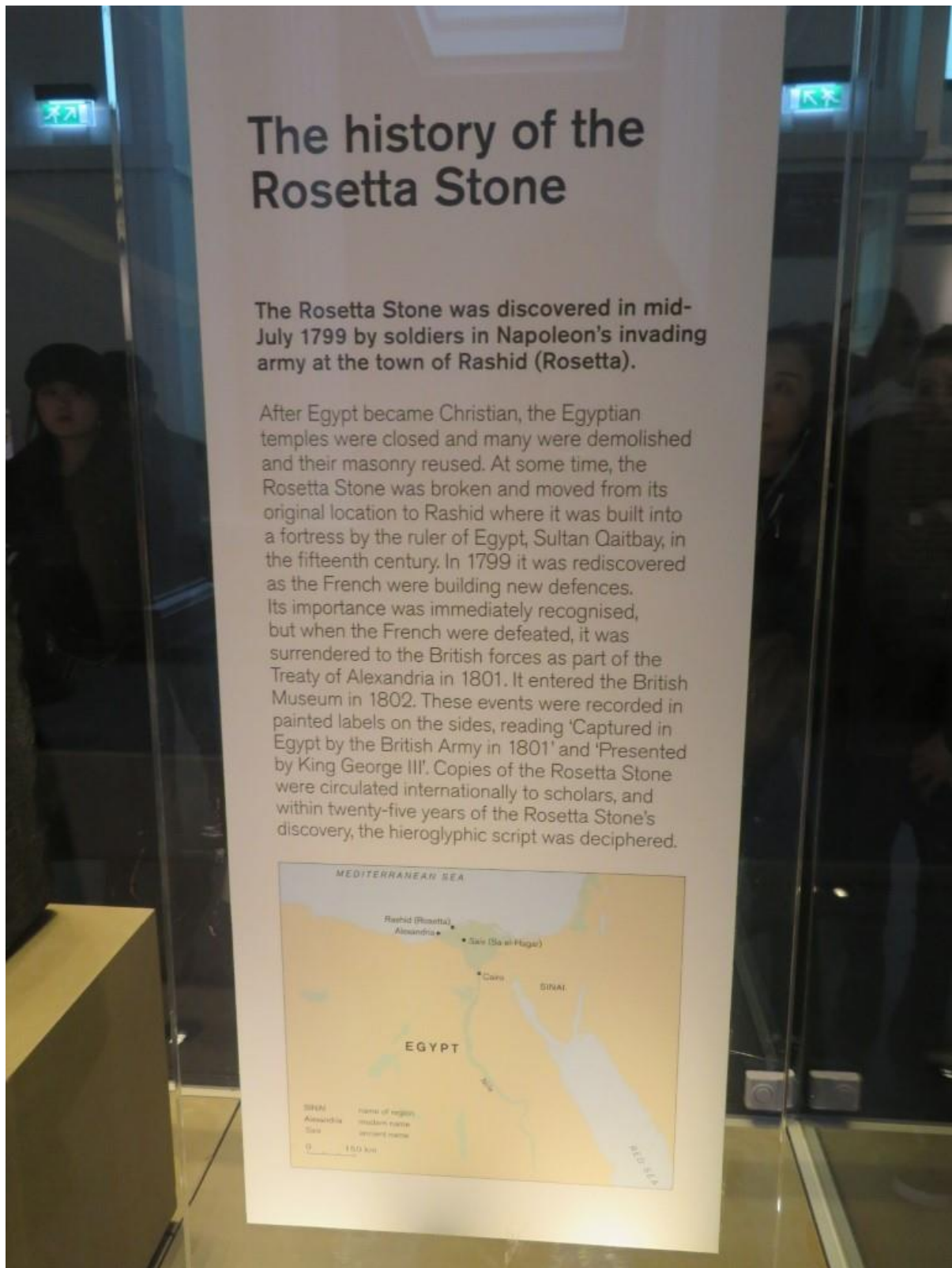
A16- Image of the Rosetta stone display case in Gallery 4.



A17- Image of the back of the Rosetta stone display case in Gallery 4.



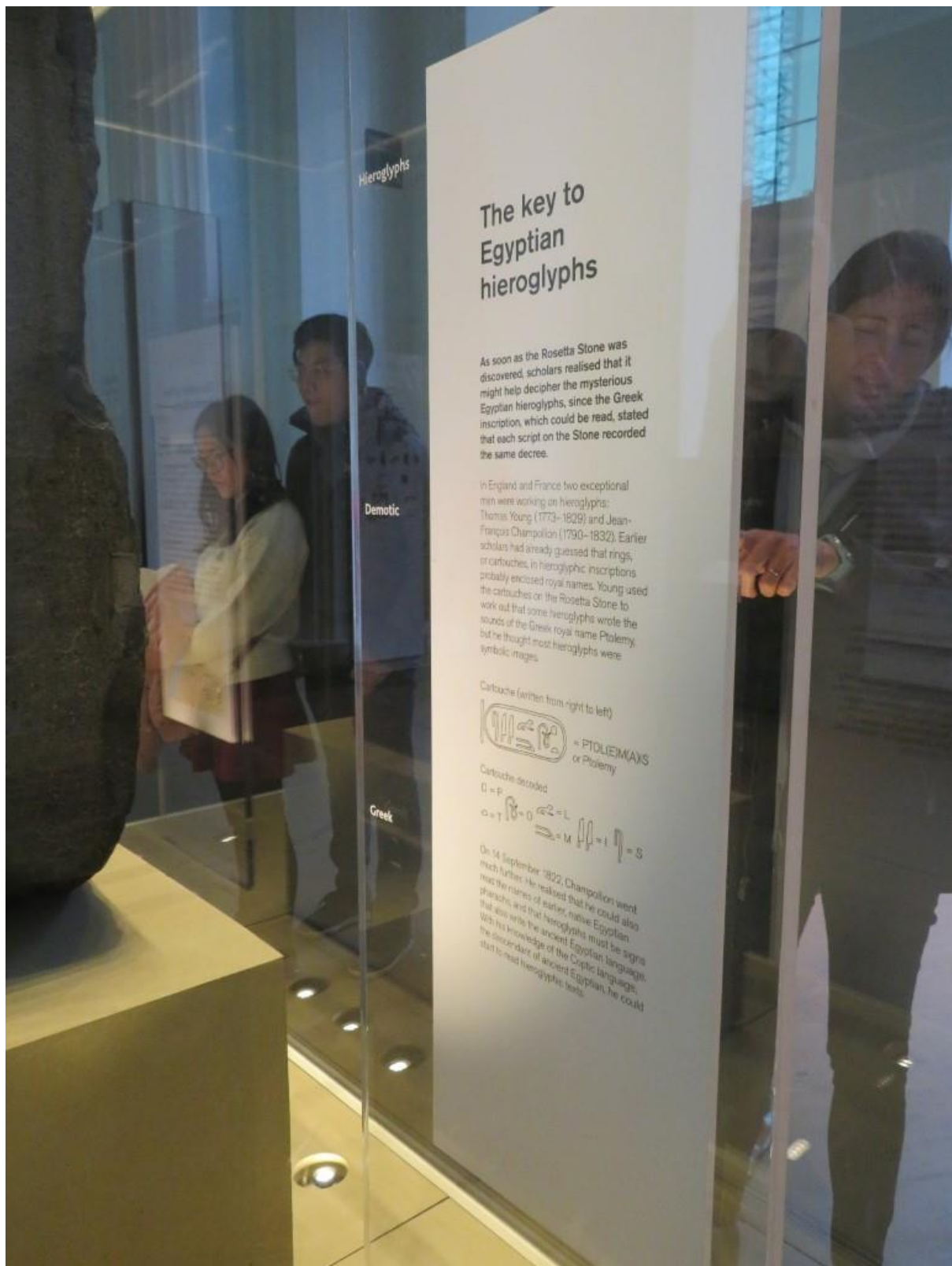
A18- Image of the display sign titled 'What is the Rosetta Stone?'



A19- Image of the display sign titled 'The History of the Rosetta Stone'.



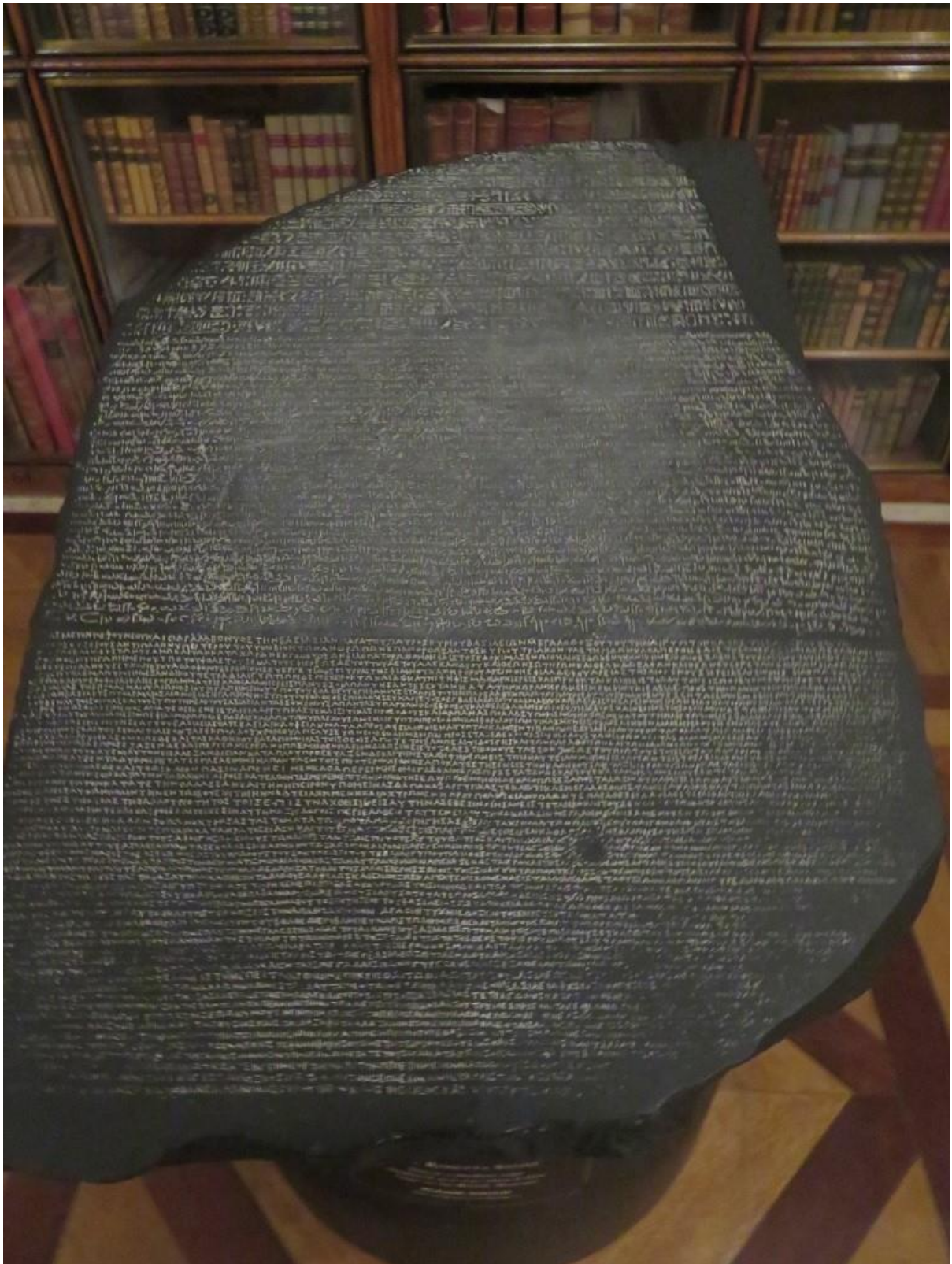
A20- Image of the display sign titled 'The writing of ancient Egypt'.



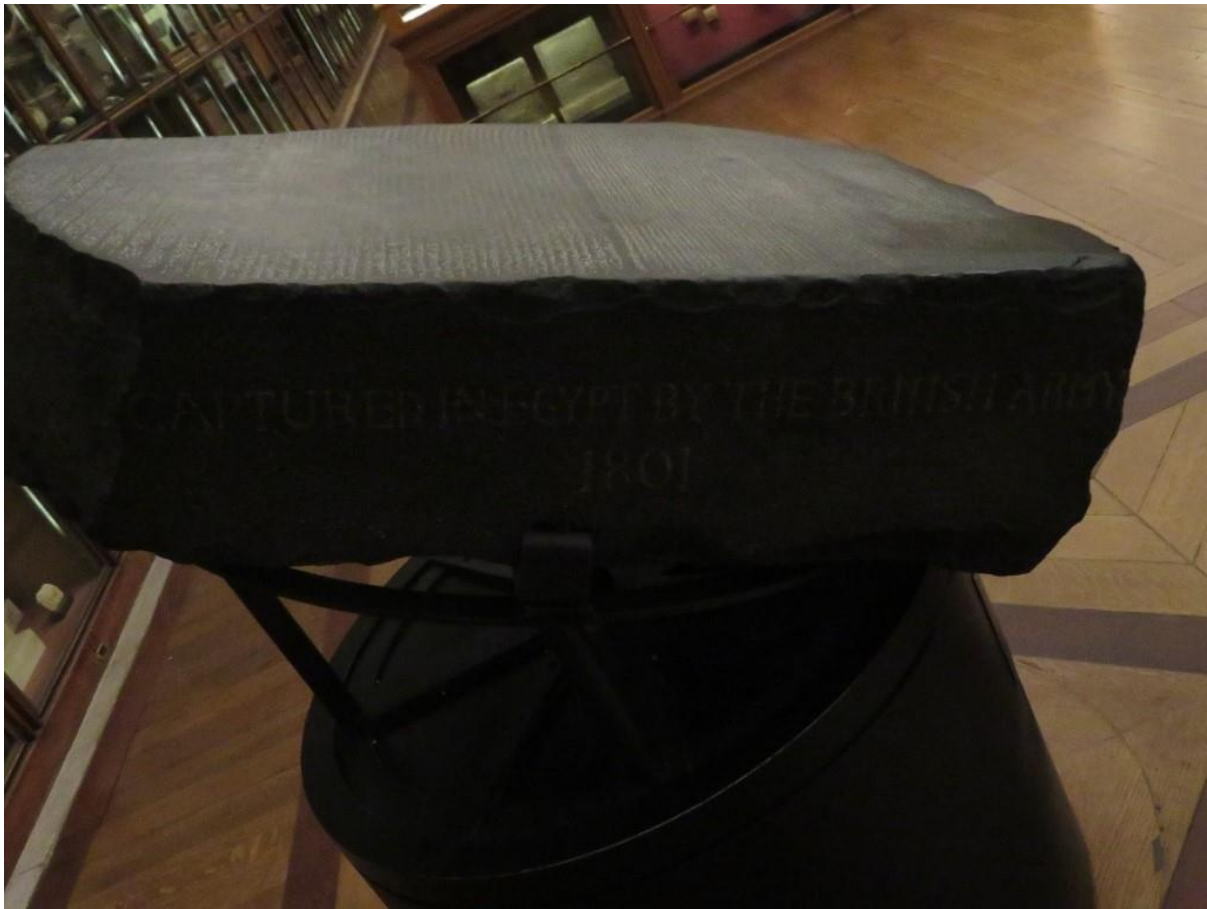
A21- Image of the display sign titled 'The key to Egyptian hieroglyphs'



A22- Image of the crowd surrounding the front side of the Rosetta Stone display case.



A23- Image of the replica Rosetta Stone, located in the Enlightenment Gallery.



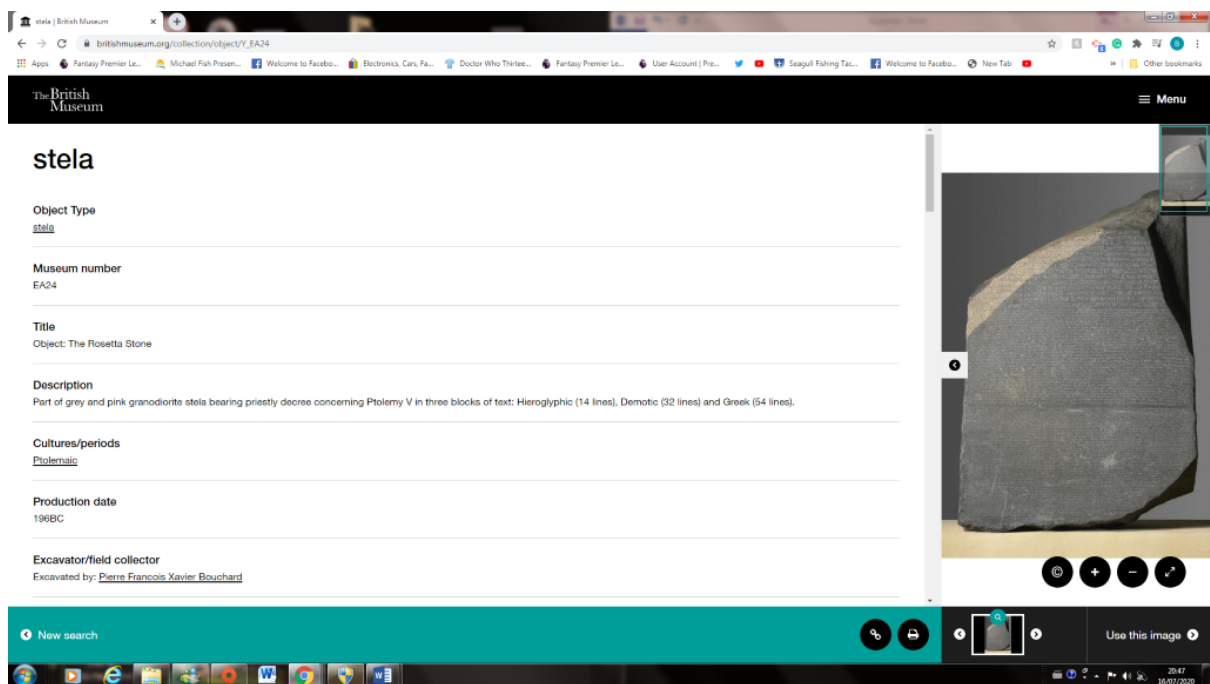
A24- Image of the left side of the replica Rosetta Stone, with the words 'Captured in Egypt by the British Army in 1801'.



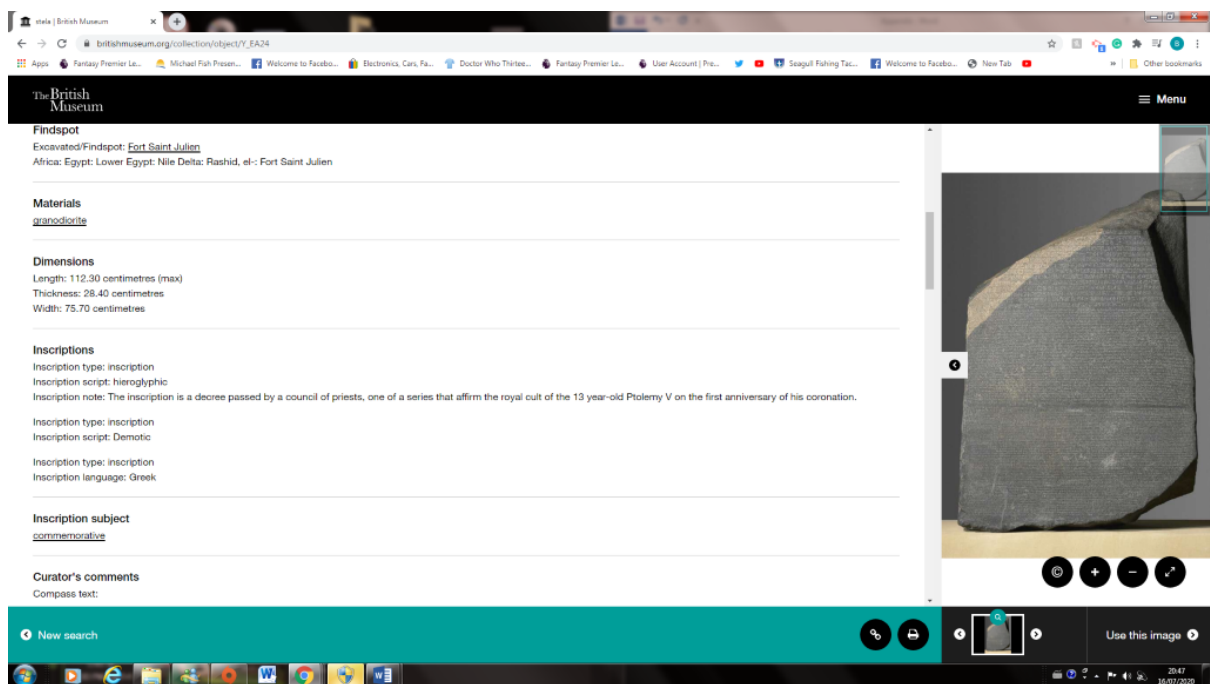
A25- Image of the right side of the replica Rosetta Stone, with the words 'Presented by King George III'.



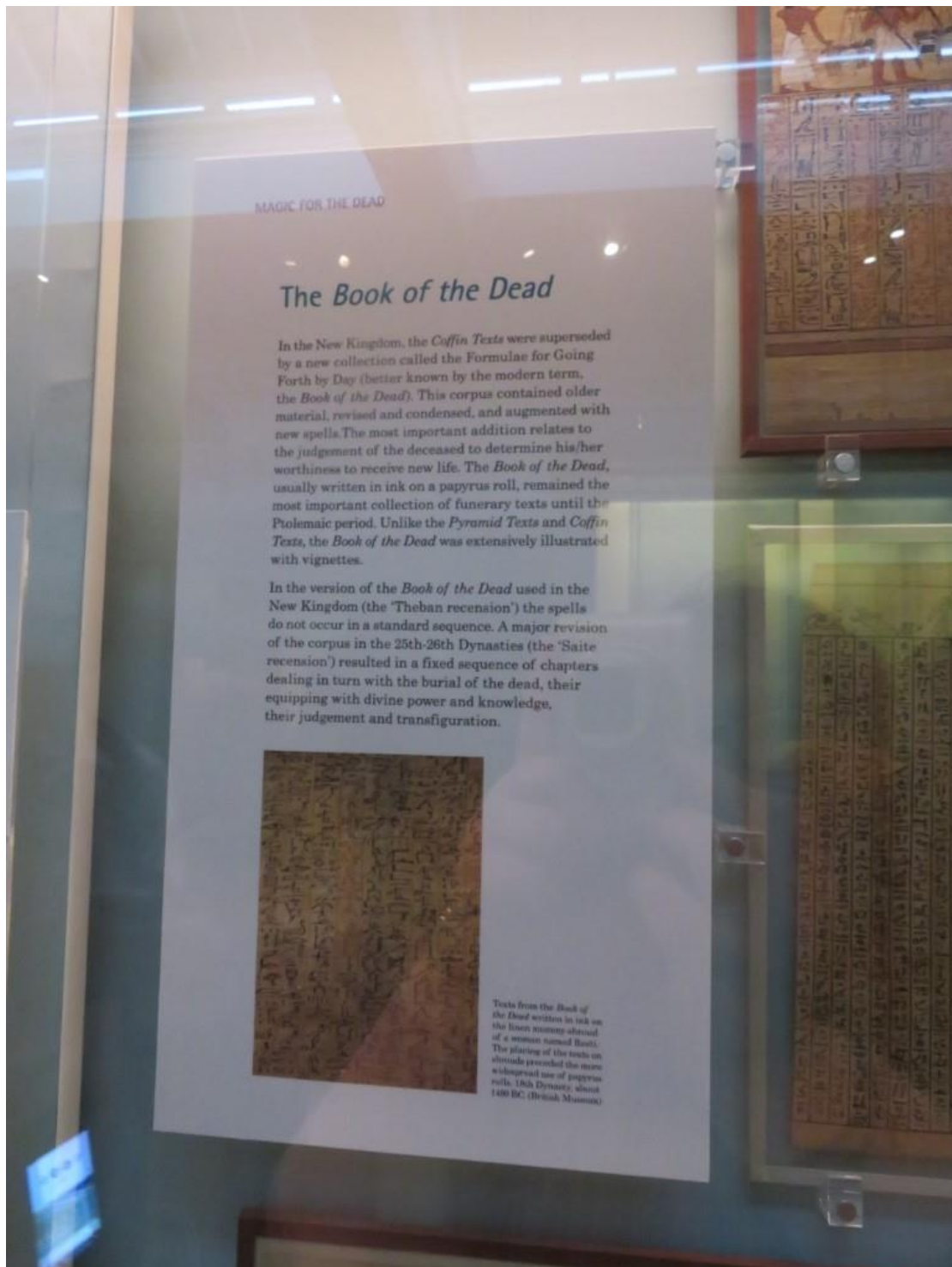
A26- Image of the display sign for the replica copy of the Rosetta Stone.



A27- Screen Shot of the Rosetta Stone website, part 1 (The British Museum, 2020).



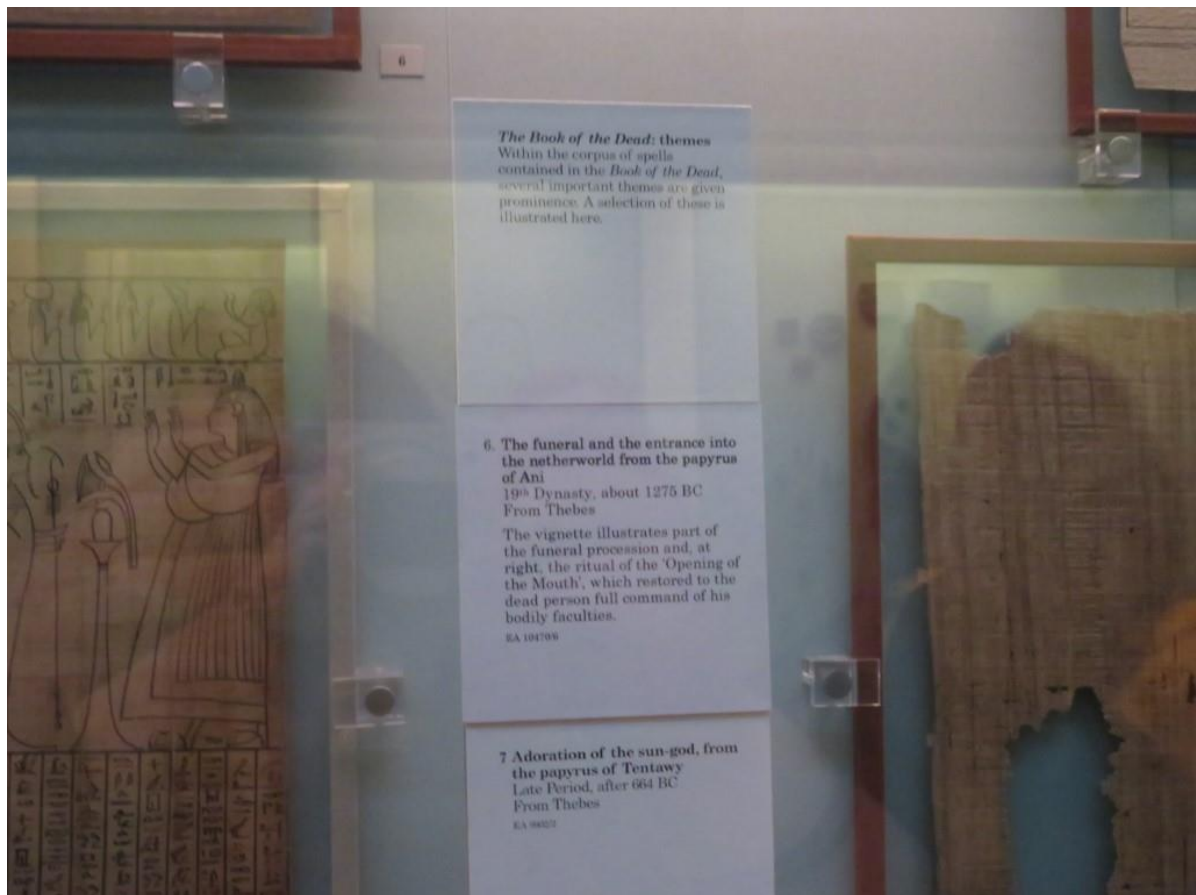
A28- Screen Shot of the Rosetta Stone website, part 2 (The British Museum, 2020).



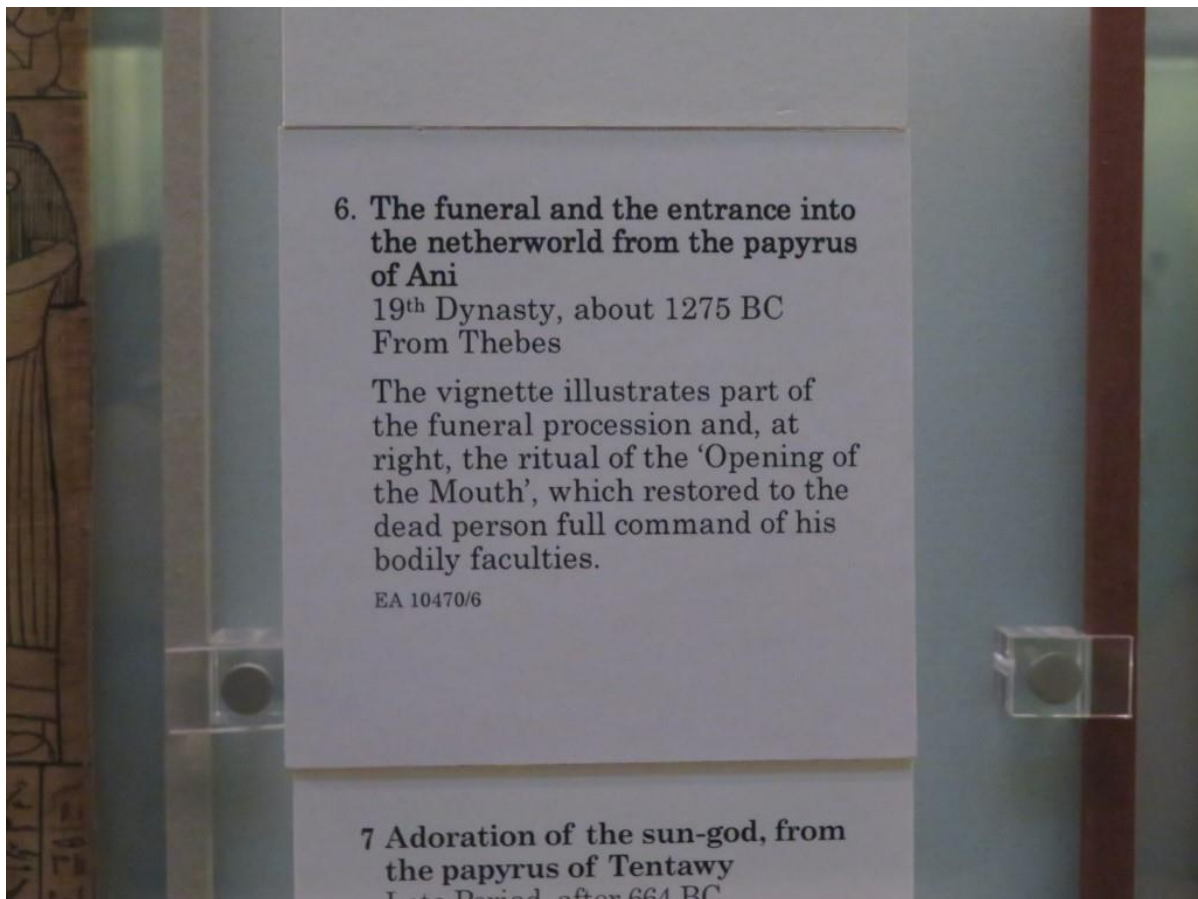
A29- Display sign on the Book of the Dead located with the Papyrus of Ani.



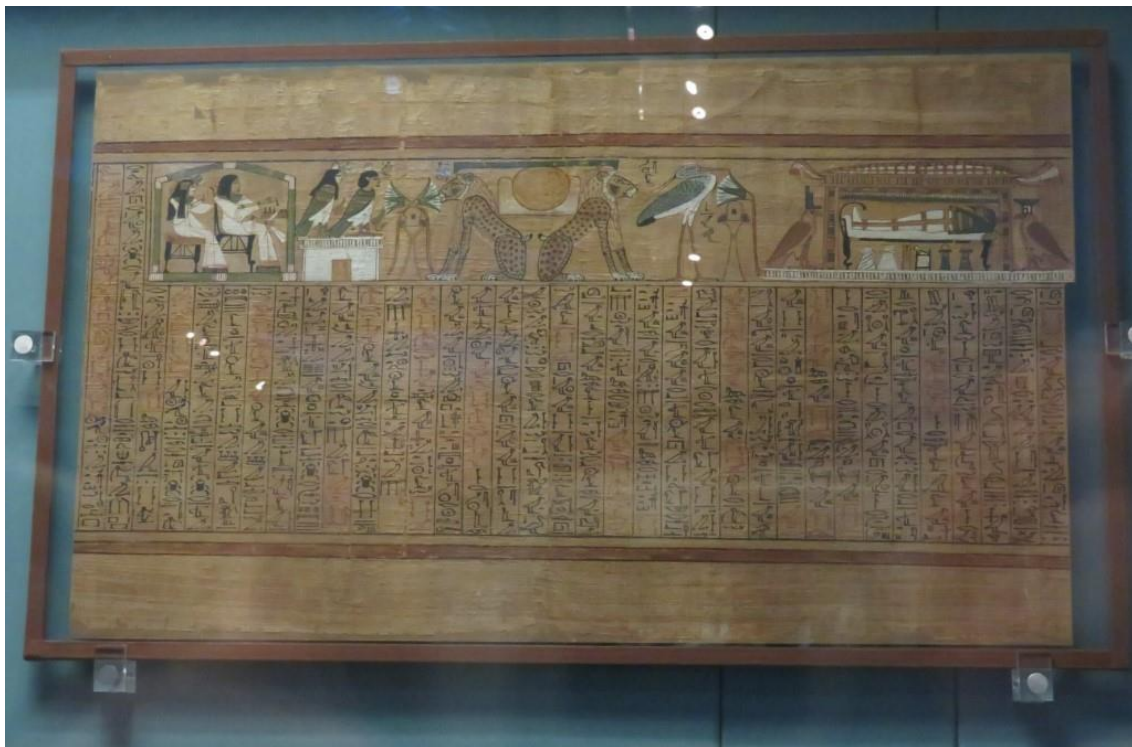
A30 – Image of Papyrus of Ani section EA 10470/6 on display.



A31- Image of display signs identifying the papyruses, including EA 10470/6.



A32- Close up image of the display sign on EA 10470/6.



A33- Image of the Papyrus of Ani section EA 10470/7 on display.

Book of the Dead of the scribe Any,
showing the *ba*-spirits of Any and his
wife

19th Dynasty, about 1270 BC
From Thebes

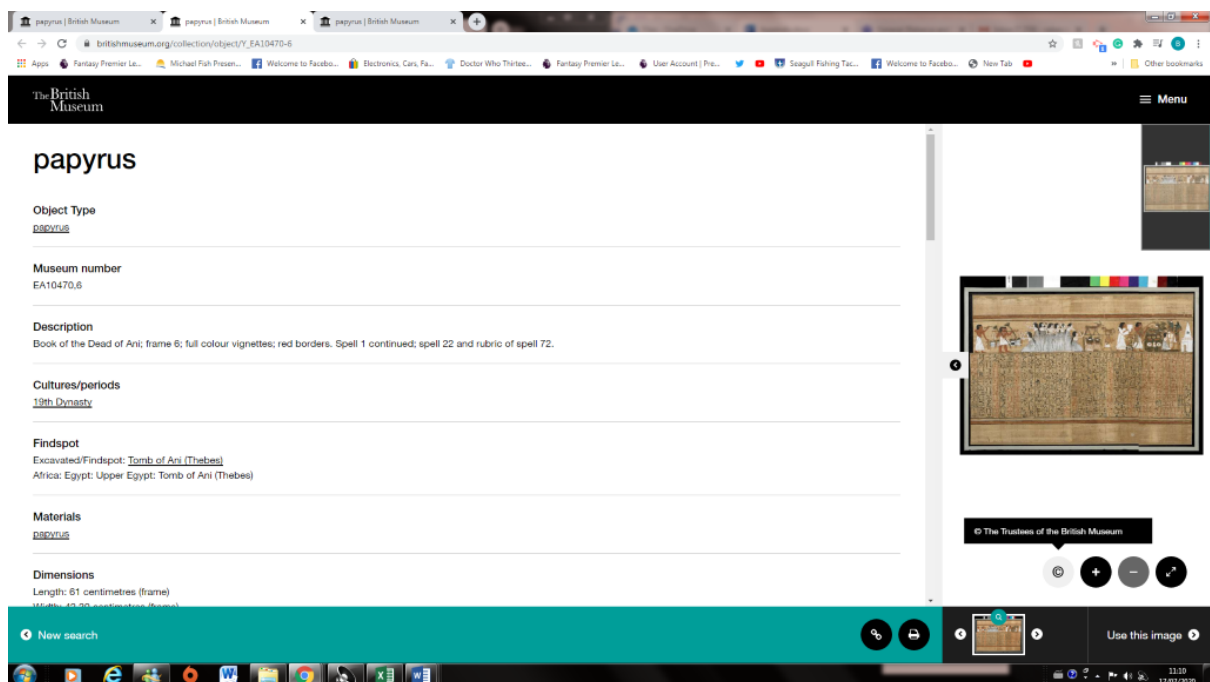
The scenes show (left to right): Any and his wife Tutu playing the board-game senet in the afterlife; the *ba*-spirits of the couple perched on the façade of the tomb; the rising sun on the horizon between two lions symbolising 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow'; the *benu*-bird (heron), a manifestation of the sun-god; the mummy of Any on a bier, flanked by the goddesses Isis and Nephthys in the form of kites.

EA 10470/7

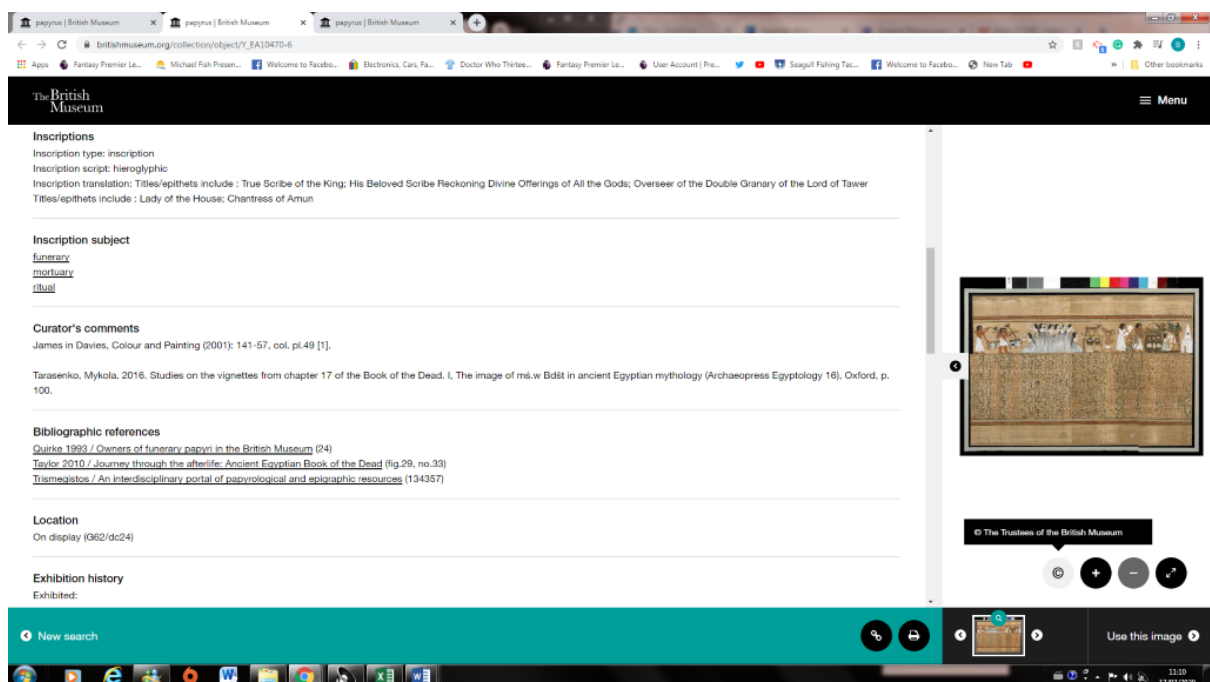
A34- Image of the display sign with details on the Papyrus of Ani section EA 10470/7.



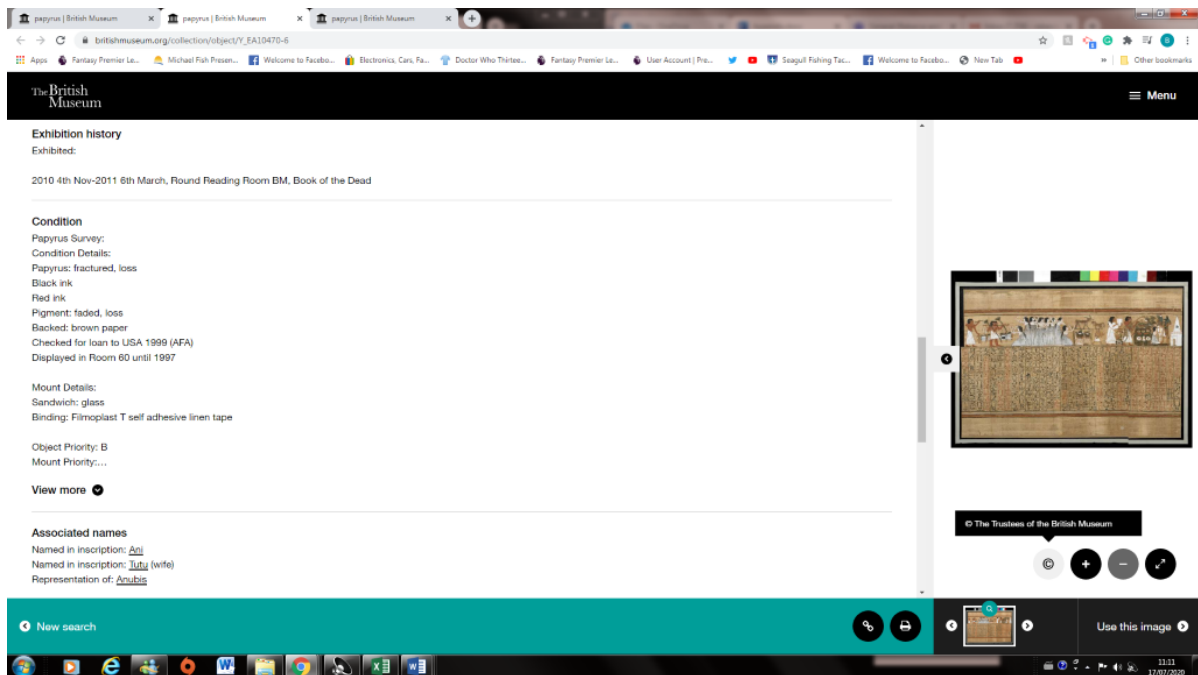
A35- Image of the papyrus of Ani section EA 10470/33.



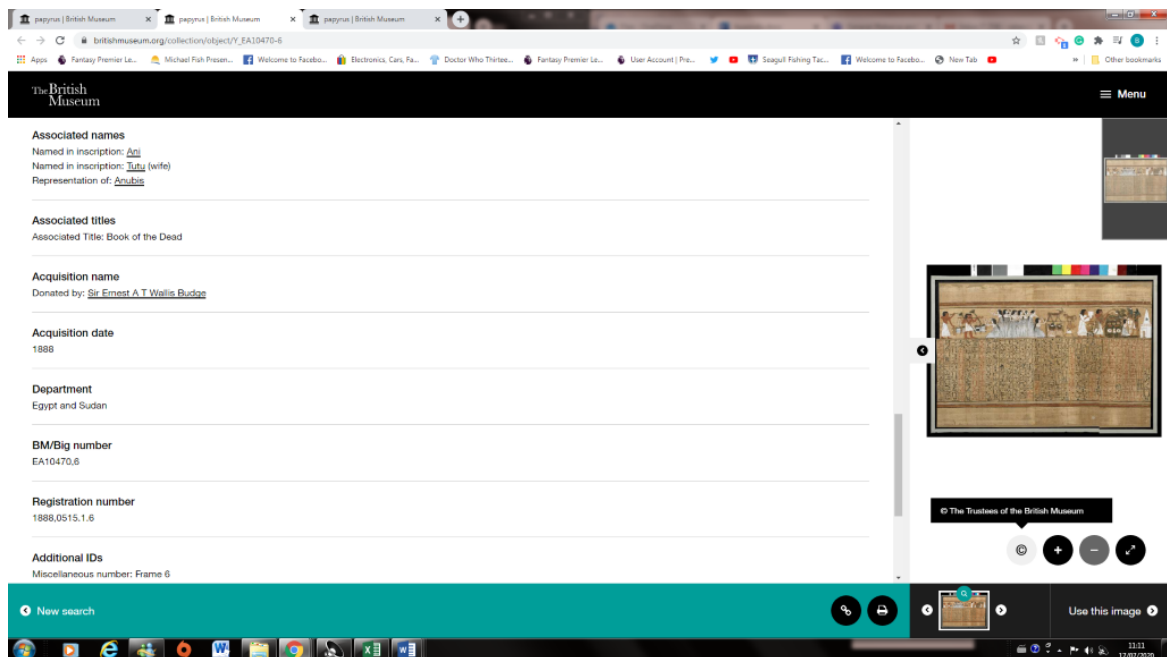
A36- Screen shot of the Papyrus of Ani website section EA 10470/6, Part 1 (The British Museum, 2020).



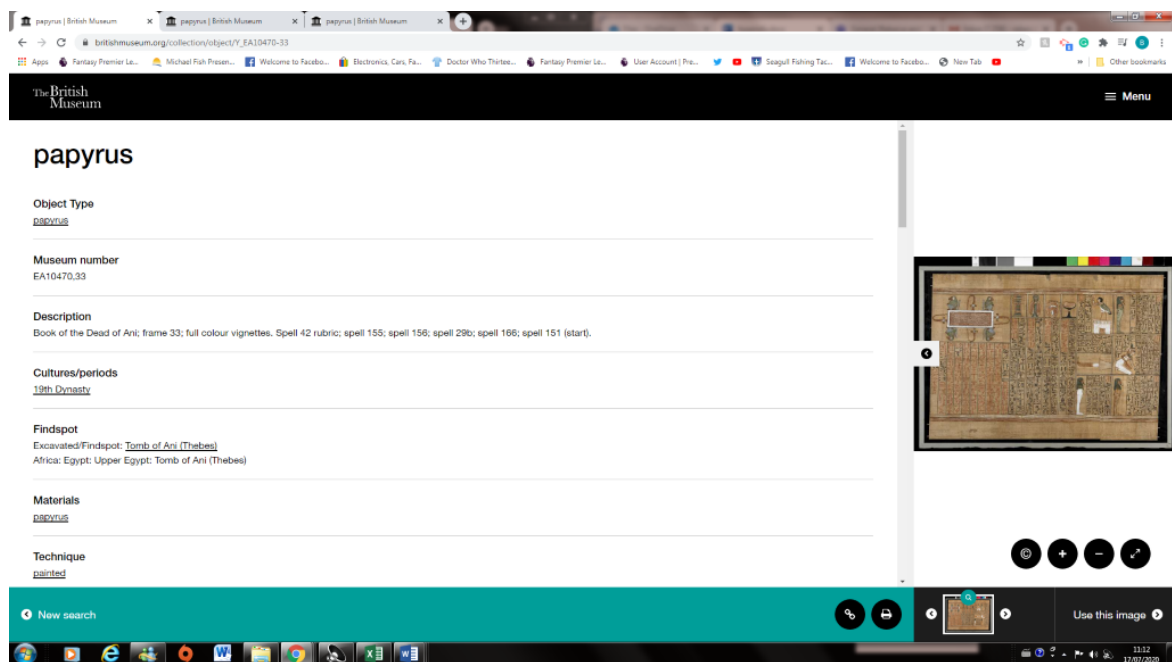
A37- Screen shot of the Papyrus of Ani website section EA 10470/6, Part 2 (The British Museum, 2020).



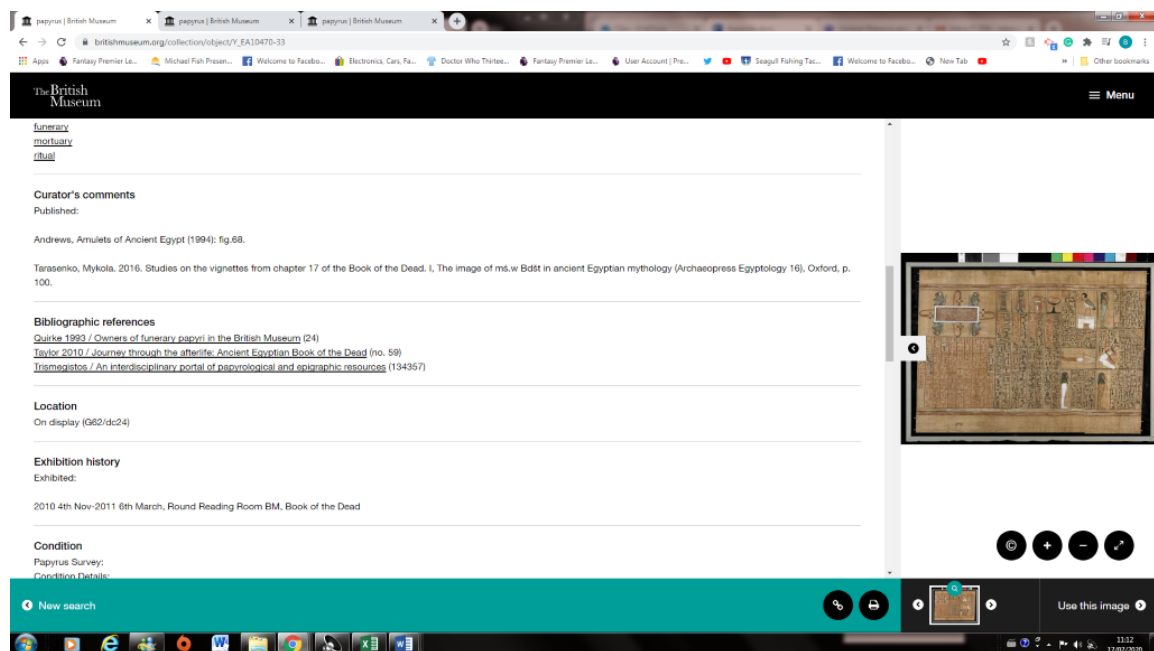
A38- Screen shot of the Papyrus of Ani website section EA 10470/6, Part 3 (The British Museum, 2020).



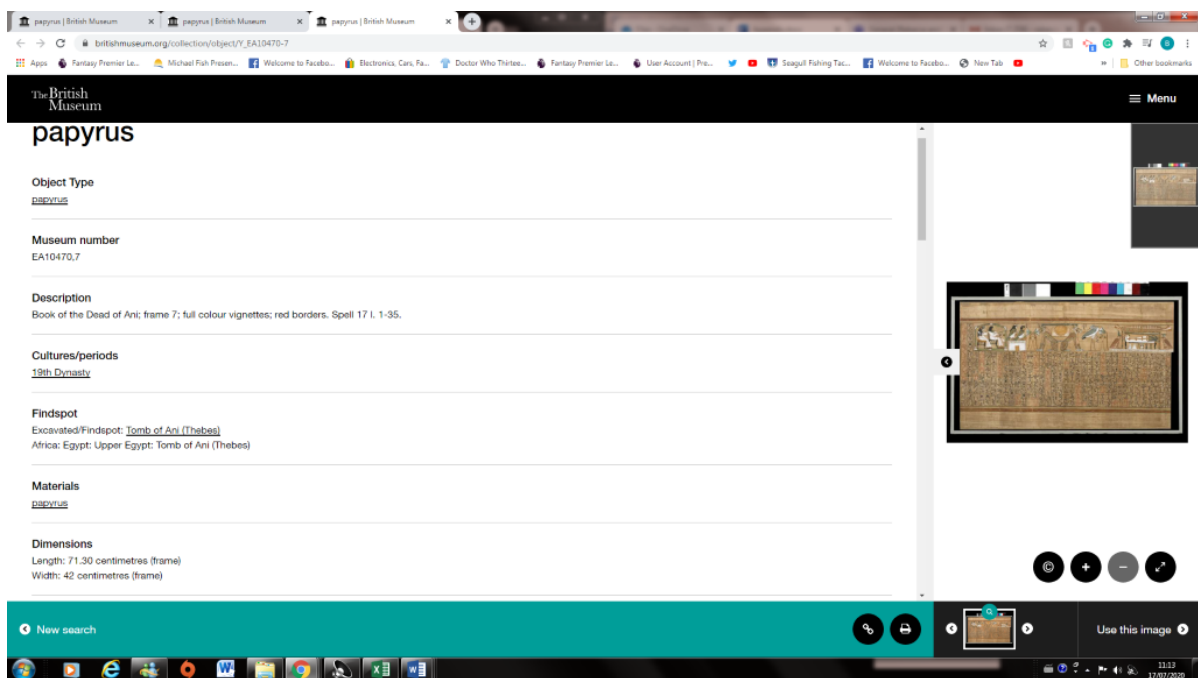
A39- Screen shot of the Papyrus of Ani website section EA 10470/6, Part 4 (The British Museum, 2020).



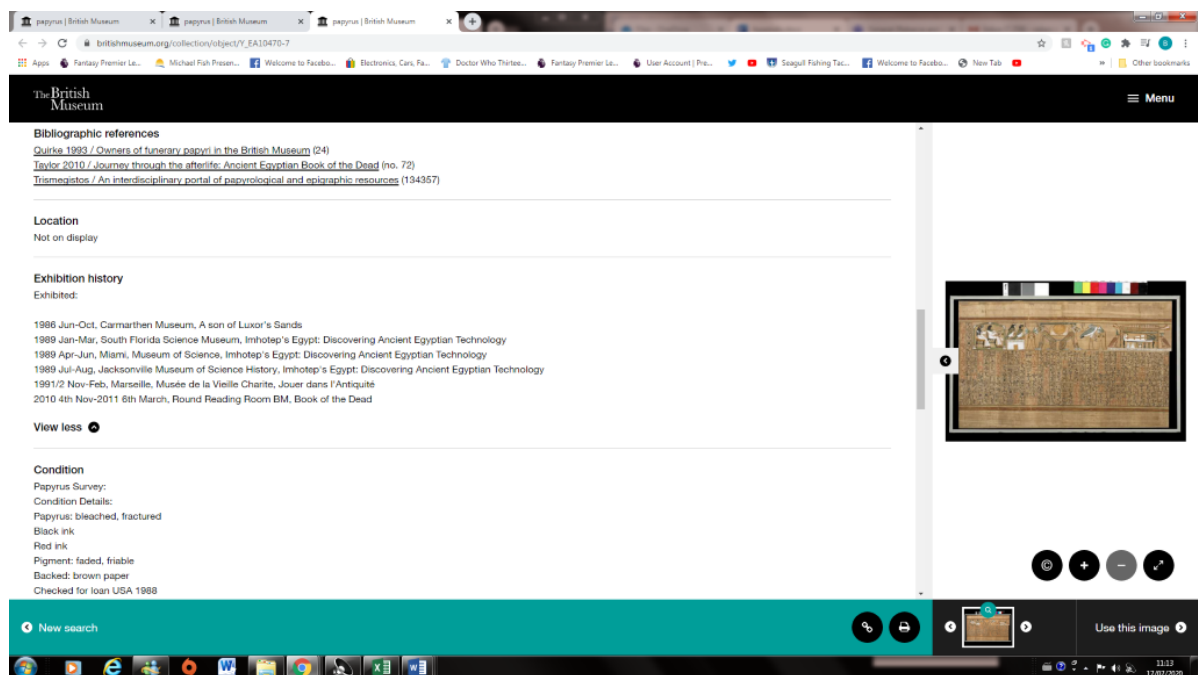
A40- Screen shot of the Papyrus of Ani website section EA 10470/33, Part 1 (The British Museum, 2020).



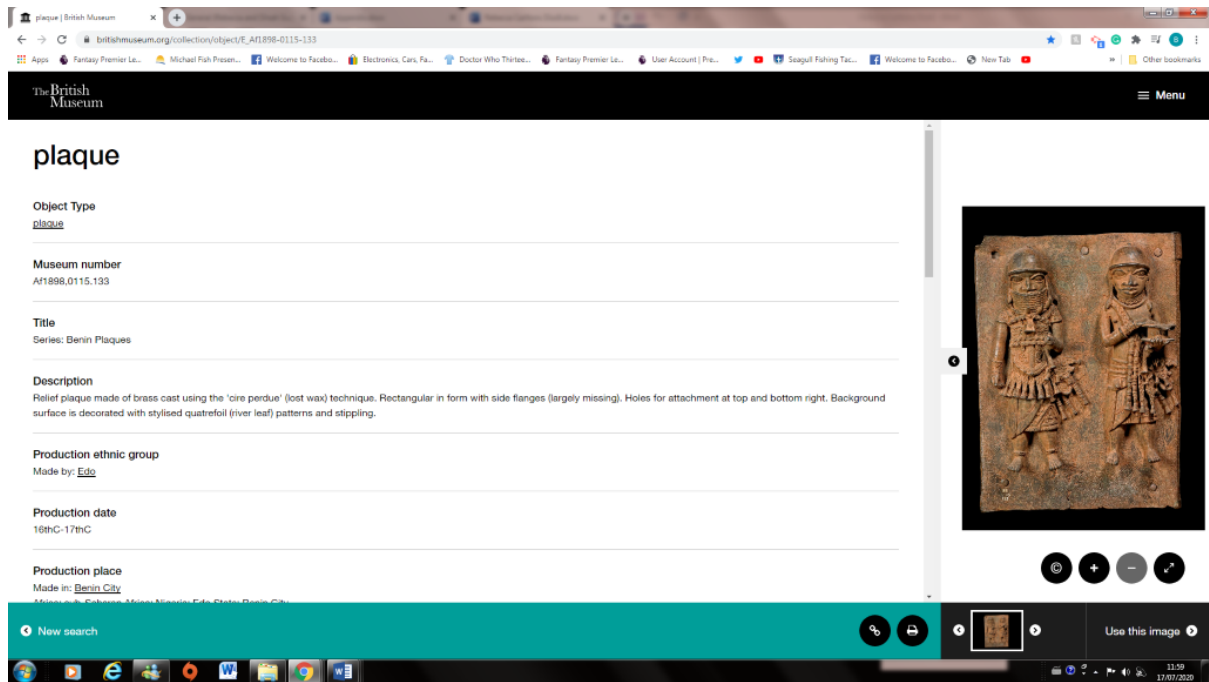
A41- Screen shot of the Papyrus of Ani website section EA 10470/33, Part 2 (The British Museum, 2020).



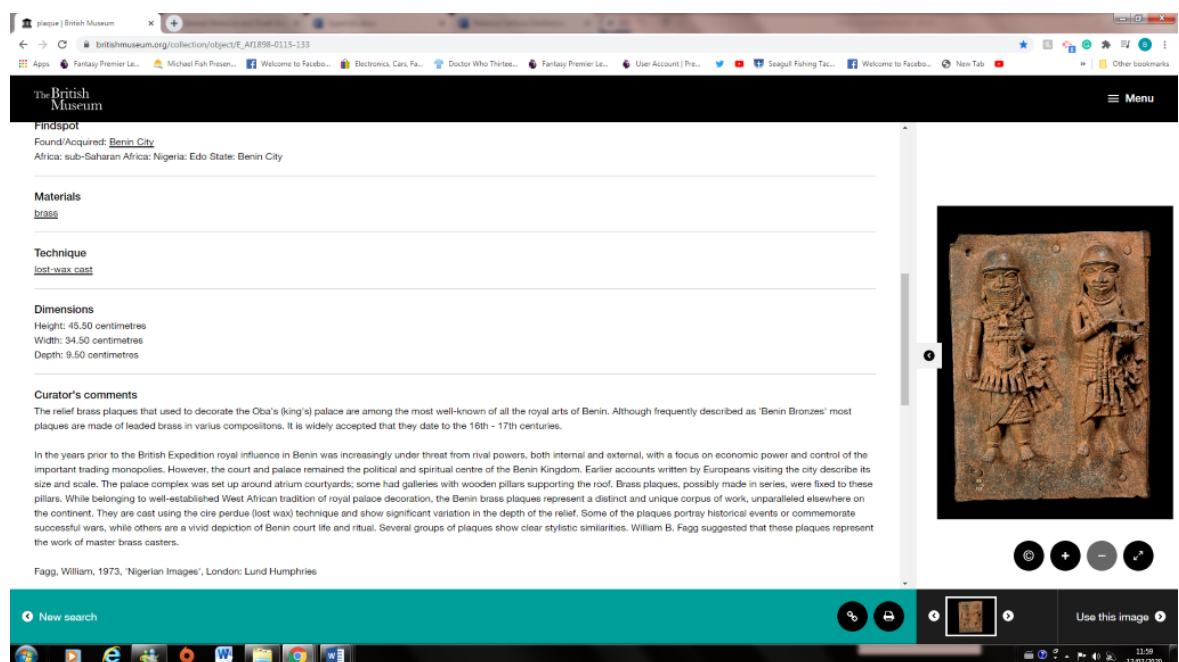
A42- Screen shot of the Papyrus of Ani website section EA 10470/7, Part 1 (The British Museum, 2020).



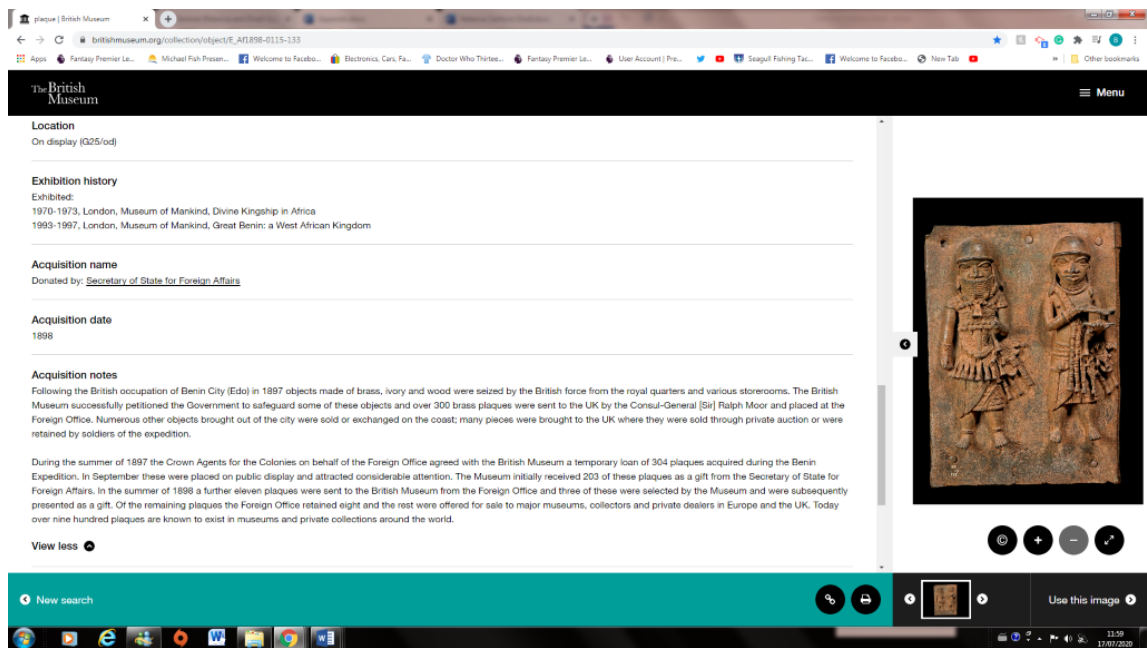
A43- Screen shot of the Papyrus of Ani website section EA 10470/7, Part 2 (The British Museum, 2020).



A44- Screen shot of the Benin Plaque object website Af1898,0115.133. Part 1 (The British Museum, 2020).



A45- Screen shot of the Benin Plaque object website Af1898,0115.133. Part 2 (The British Museum, 2020).



A46- Screen shot of the Benin Plaque object website Af1898,0115.133. Part 3 (The British Museum, 2020).



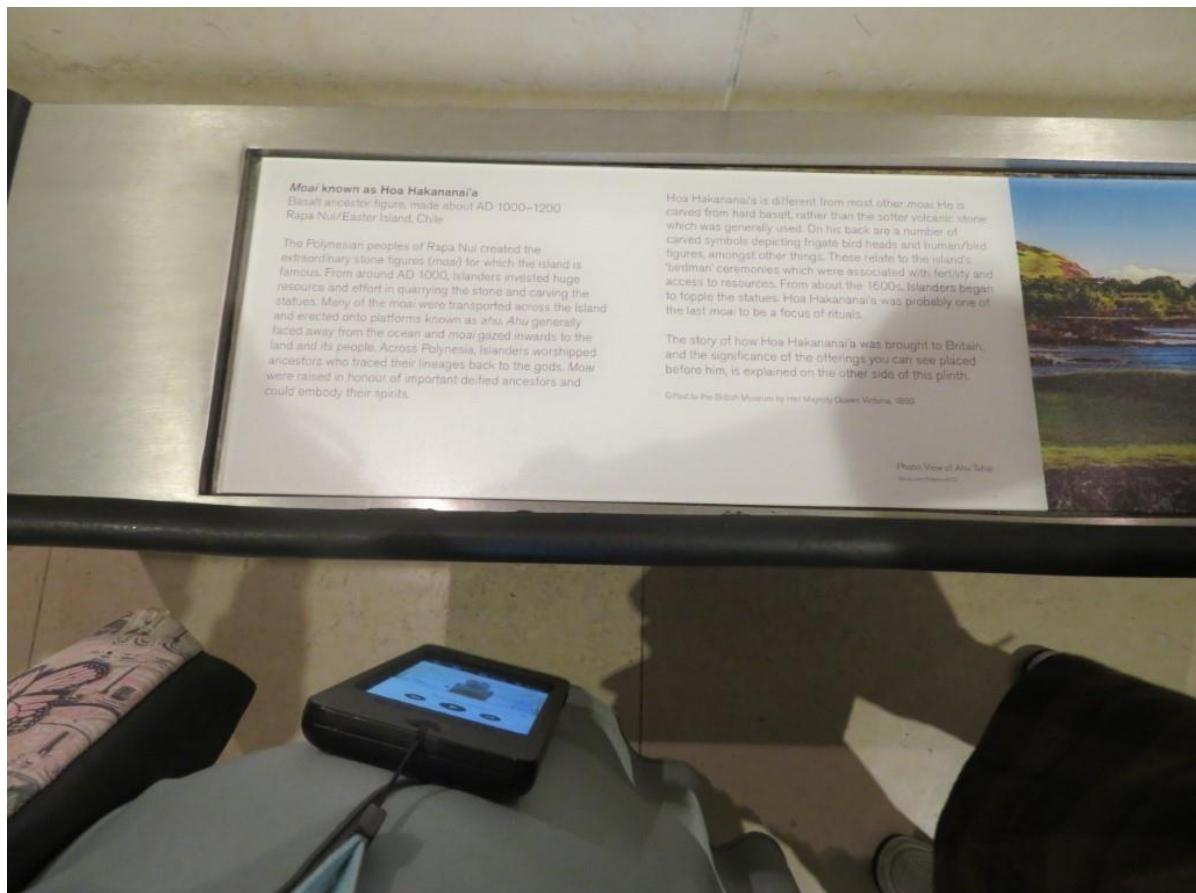
A47 – Front view of the Hoa Hakananai'a statue in the Living and Dying Gallery.



A48 –Side view of the Hoa Hakananai'a statue in the Living and Dying Gallery.



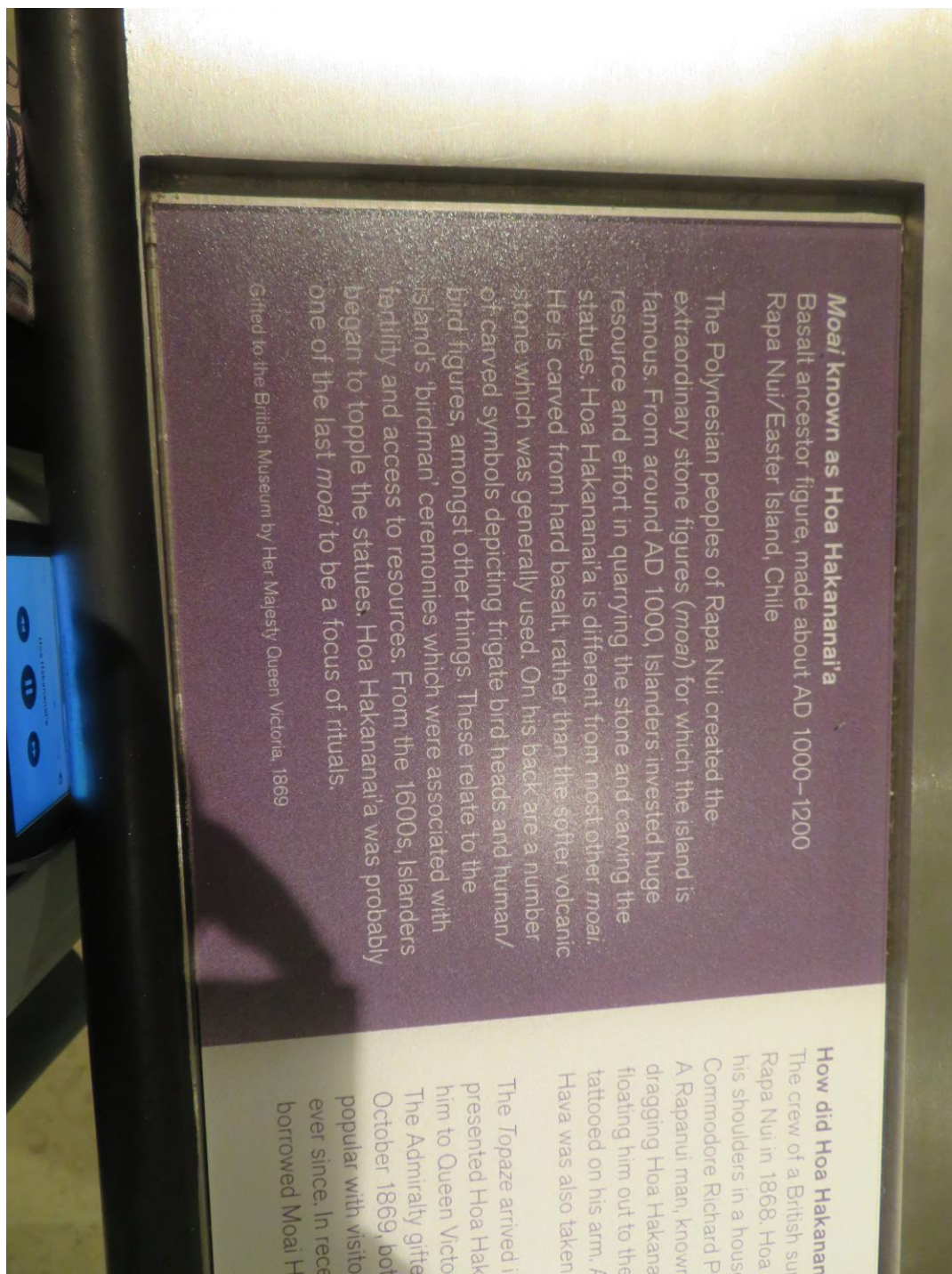
A49- Back view of the Hoa Hakananai'a in the Living and Dying Gallery.



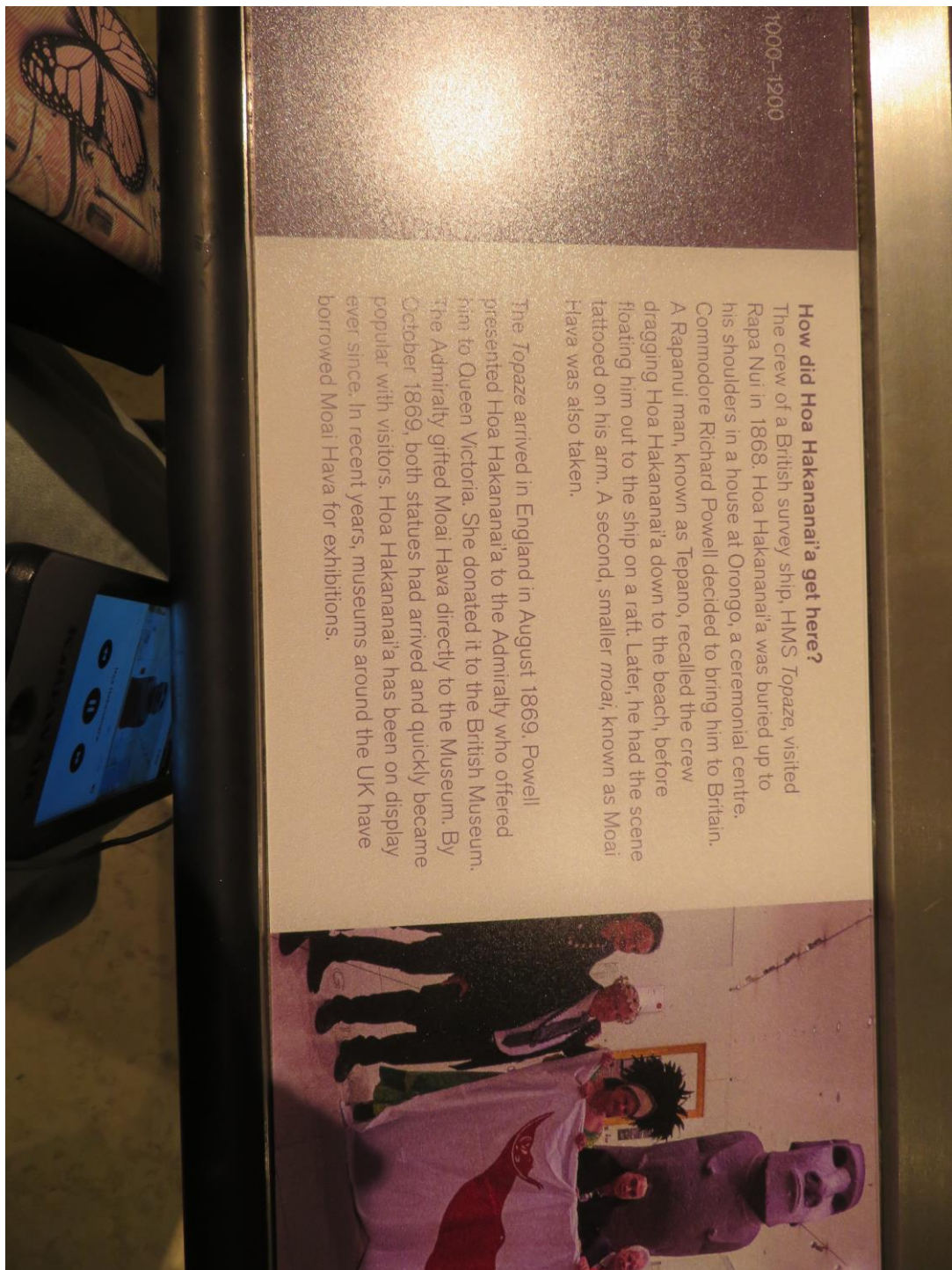
A50- Front-side display sign that accompanies the Hoa Hakananai'a statue.



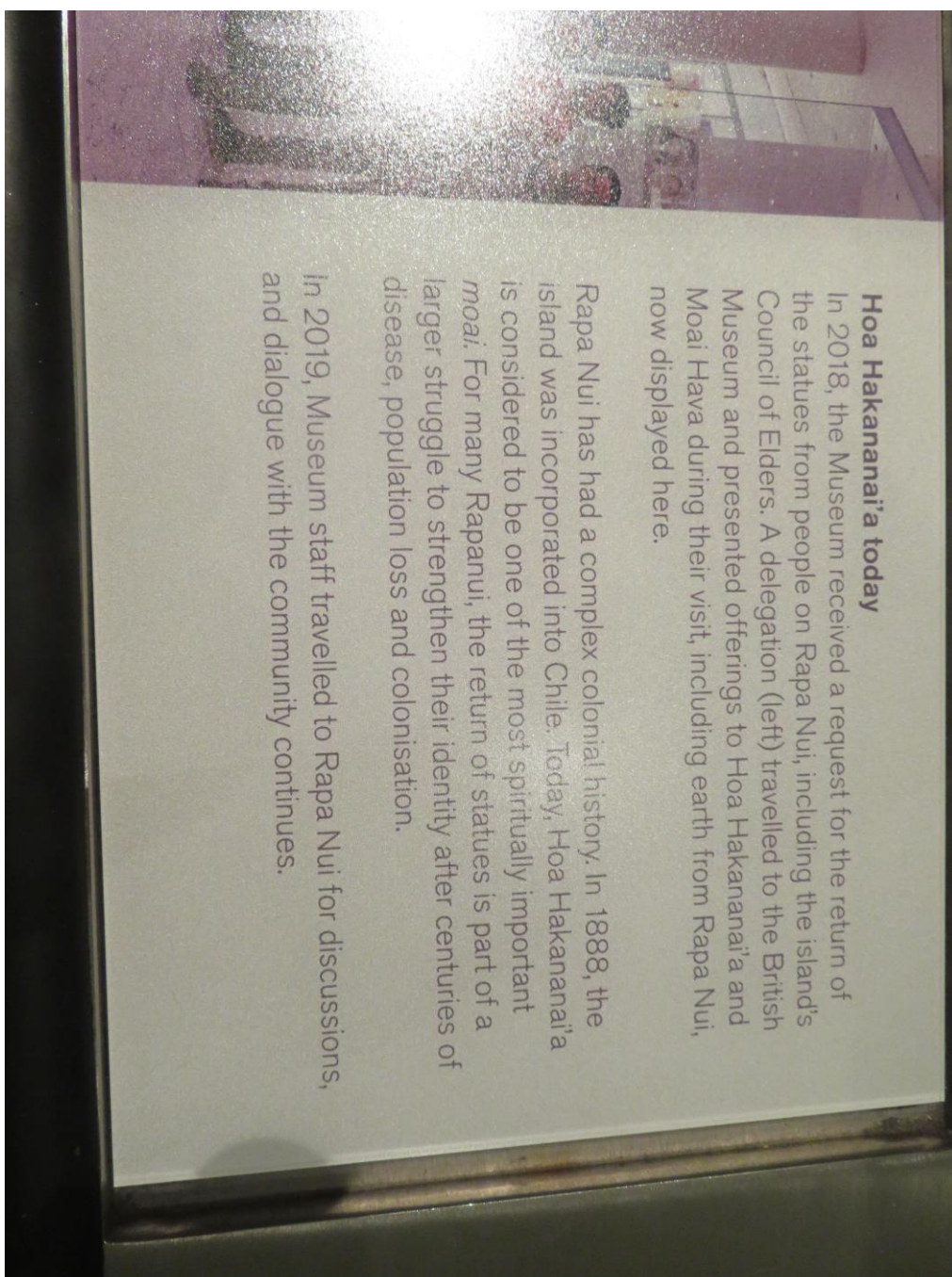
A51- Back-side display sign that accompanies the Hoa Hakananai'a statue.



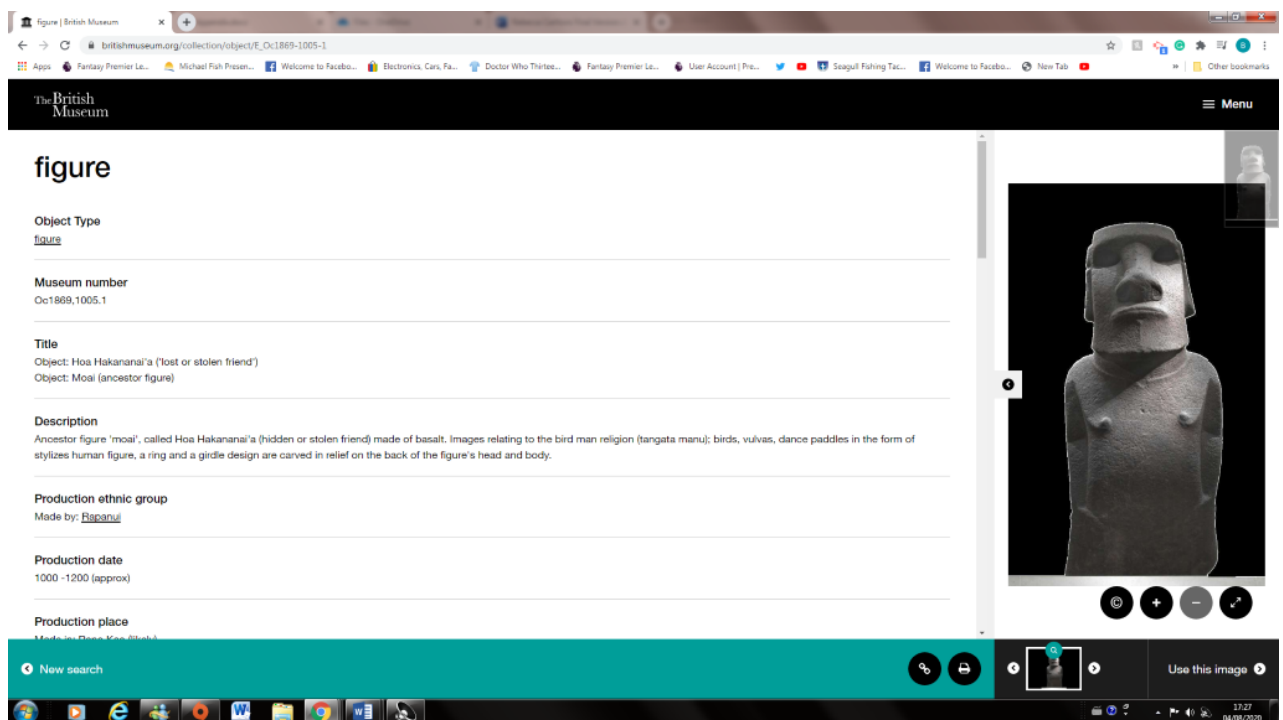
A52- Zoomed in image of the back-side display sign that is with the Hoa Hakananai'a, Part 1.



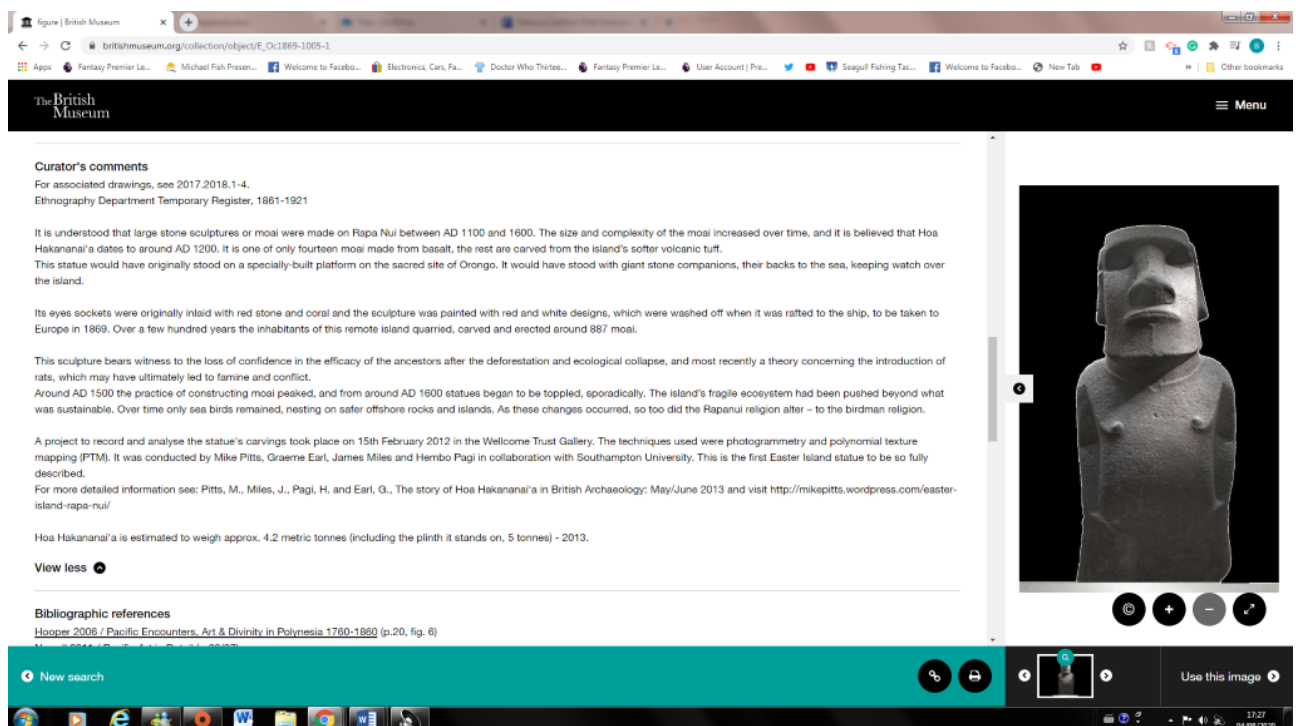
A53- Zoomed in image of the back-side display sign that is with the Hoa Hakananai'a, Part 2.



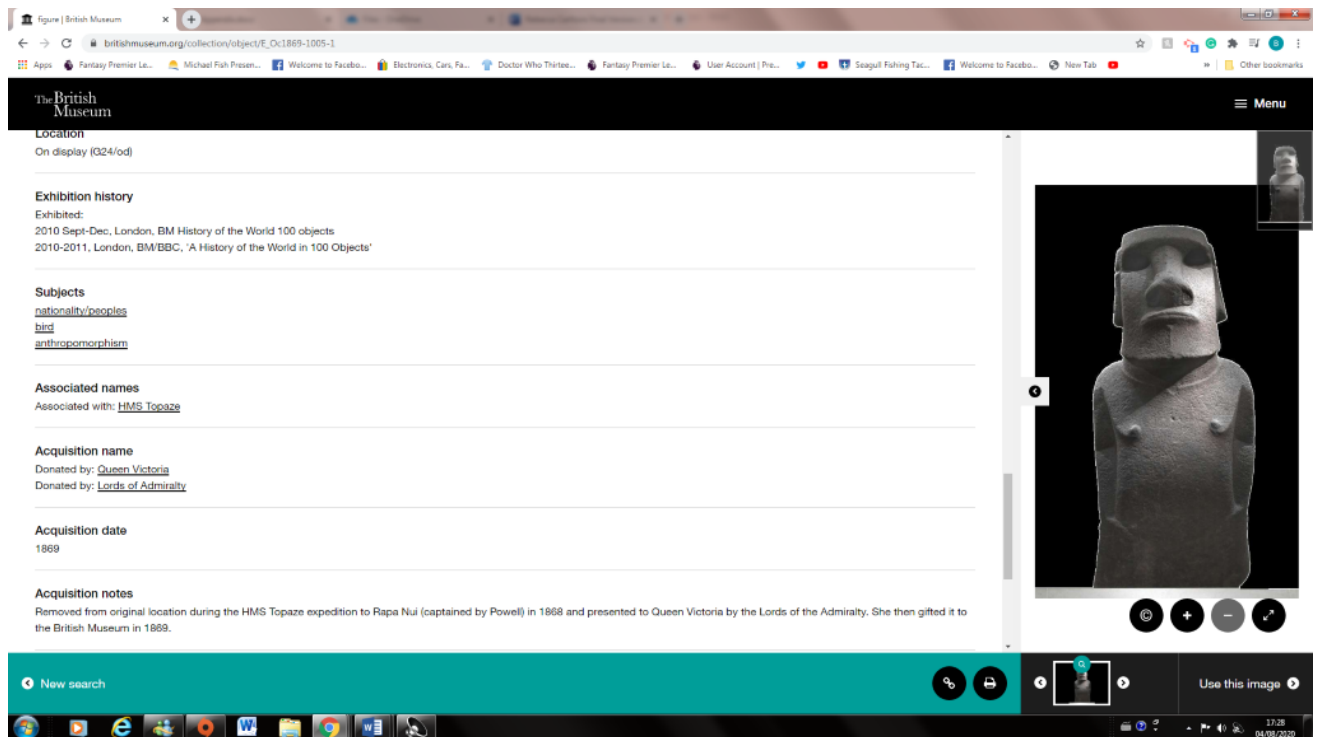
A54- Zoomed in image of the back-side display sign that is with the Hoa Hakananai'a, Part 3.



A55- Screen shot of the Hoa Hakananai'a object website, Part 1 (The British Museum, 2020).



A56- Screen shot of the Hoa Hakananai'a object website, Part 2 (The British Museum, 2020).



A57- Screen shot of the Hoa Hakananai'a object website, Part 3 (The British Museum, 2020).