

UNRESTRICTED

Acquisitions of Objects for the Collection

Preamble

This policy outlines the principles that the Trustees of the British Museum expect to be followed when objects are acquired for the British Museum collection. *The British Museum recognises its responsibilities to comply with the national and international laws, standards and codes of practice listed in Annex 1. This policy outlines the principles that the Trustees of the British Museum expect to be followed when objects are acquired for the Collection. In making acquisitions, the Museum will have due regard to the object's provenance and relevant national and international treaties and standards, including ethical codes and conventions relating to the movement of cultural heritage property and the combating of illicit trade. This policy should be read in conjunction with the **British Museum Acquisition Strategy**.*

Definition

"Material" and "objects" shall be taken to refer to both physical and digital items.

1. Purpose of Acquisitions

1.1 The British Museum holds a collection of material from across the world spanning all periods of human culture and history. For the benefit of the public now and in the future, the Trustees are committed to sustaining and improving the Museum's collection.

1.2 Acquisitions are made in order to:

- (i) maintain and improve the Museum's cultural and historical record of the world's cultures and civilisations, including new, recently discovered, unexplored or poorly understood fields of human history and experience;
- (ii) generate public interest and understanding of differing cultural perspectives;
- (iii) attract audiences;
- (iv) inform, entertain and inspire the public in new ways; and
- (v) support research and, in so doing, enhance understanding of the past and present.

2. Acquisition Principles

2.1 The Museum will only acquire objects for the Collection where it has

undertaken due diligence to satisfy itself that the objects are legally available for acquisition and made all reasonable enquiries in accordance with the Museum's Acquisition Approval Procedure. In making such decisions, the Museum will have due regard to the object's provenance and relevant national and international treaties and standards, including ethical codes and conventions relating to the movement of cultural heritage property and the combating of illicit trade.

- 2.2 Objects are not normally acquired that are made of, or including in their composition, parts or derivatives of wild fauna or flora included in any appendix to the CITES Convention, where that object has been traded in contravention of the Convention since 1973.
- 2.3 Treasure finds from England should normally be acquired by regional museums; and, in general, Treasure finds will be acquired either when those museums are unable to proceed with the acquisition or, in the case of finds of major significance, only with the support of the appropriate regional museum.
- 2.4 The Museum will not commit to the purchase of objects for the collection unless full funding has first been secured and the purchase price represents value for money.
- 2.5 Objects are normally acquired only after the costs of acquisition, conservation, storage and display have been taken into consideration. Objects in very poor condition (or in such condition that they are inherently liable to deteriorate and cannot be reliably stabilised by conservation treatments) are not normally acquired.
- 2.6 Objects acquired to be vested in the Collection will be given a collection registration number following transfer of title and must be entered on the Collection database soon thereafter.
- 2.7 Gifts into the Collection with conditions which are unreasonable or unduly onerous, such as restrictions on the loan of an object or its display, will not be accepted,
- 2.8 The transferor of an object acquired for the Collection will normally be expected to supply all records and other contextual information about it.
- 2.9 Priorities for acquisitions are to be set out in an acquisitions strategy which takes account of the published collecting policies and strategies of other museums and other UK-based organisations existing for public benefit and collecting in fields or areas the same as or related to those of the Museum. The strategy should, as appropriate, seek to define areas of specialism, in order to avoid unnecessary duplication in national collections.

- 2.10 The Acquisitions Strategy and decisions made pursuant to it are, as appropriate, to be subject to consultation with the above organisations in order to mitigate conflicts of collecting interest.
- 2.11 Acquisitions outside this policy will only be made in very exceptional circumstances, and then only after proper consideration by the Museum's Board of Trustees, having regard to the interests of other museums.

This Policy was approved by the Trustees of the British Museum on 1 May 2024 and will be reviewed no later than 2029.

Acquisition of Objects for the Collection: Annex 1

The British Museum will comply with, or follow:

UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Cultural Property (adopted by UNESCO General Conference 14th November 1970)

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, dated 3 March 1973 (CITES)

Return of Cultural Objects Regulations 1994

Treasure Act 1996

Treasure Act 1996 Code of Practice (Revised) England and Wales

Spoliation of Works of Art during the Holocaust and World War II period: Statement of Principles and Proposed Actions (NMDC 1998)

Dealing in Cultural Objects (Offences) Act 2003
Human Tissue Act 2004

Combating Illicit Trade: Due Diligence Guidelines for Museums, Libraries and Archives on Collecting and Borrowing Cultural Material (DCMS 2005)

Code of Ethics for Museums - International Council of Museums (ICOM 2001)

Code of Ethics for Museums - Museums Association (MA)