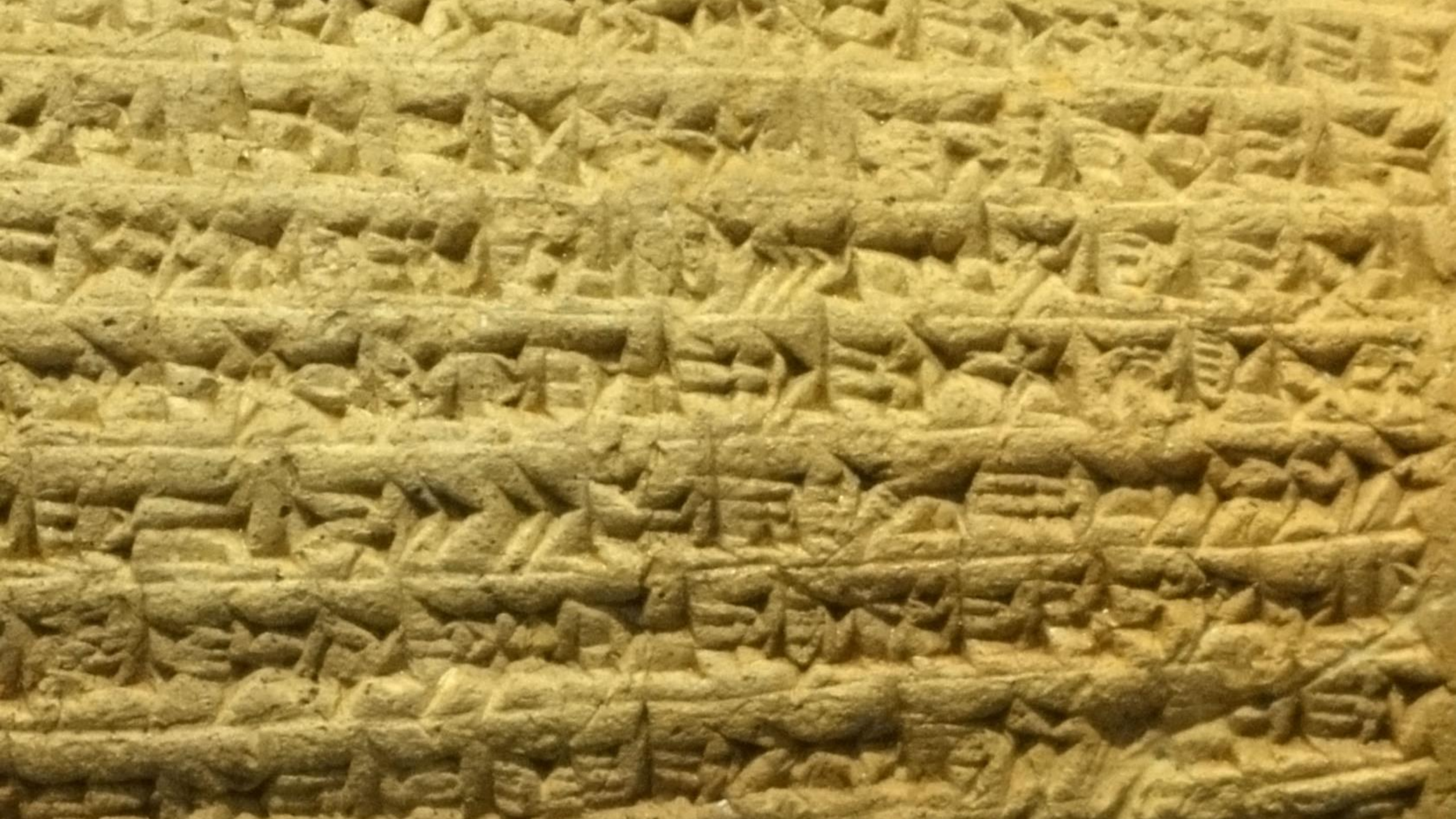


Iran and the British Museum

A History of Diplomacy and Display

Annelies Van de Ven
Norman MacGeorge Scholar Presentation







The Cyrus Cylinder

This dates from the reign of Cyrus the Great who ruled Iran between 550 and 530 BC. It describes this king's peaceful capture of Babylon in the year 539 BC and how he rebuilt the main temple there. The text, written in a script called cuneiform, claims that Cyrus restored temples in neighbouring cities and returned deported people to their homes. With reference to his just and peaceful rule, this object has been referred to as an early 'charter of human rights'.

Mid 6th century BC, Babylon, Iraq

ME 1880.0617.1941

What does the Cyrus Cylinder say?

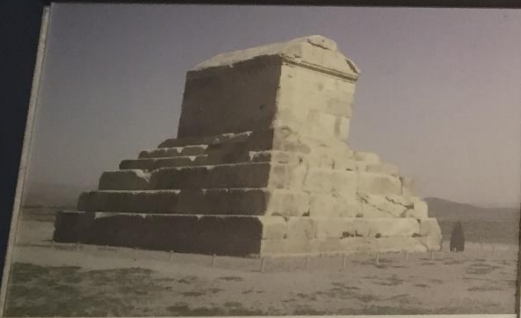
'I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four rims (of the earth), son of Cambyses, great king, king of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, great king, king of Anshan, of a family (which) always (exercised) kingship'.
(Extract from the Cyrus Cylinder)

The Cyrus Cylinder is one of the most famous historical documents of the Achaemenid Empire. It was written by a Babylonian scribe in cuneiform script, in the 6th century BC. The cylinder records Cyrus' peaceful capture of Babylon in 539 BC

and how he rebuilt the main temple of the city god Marduk. Cyrus claimed he had restored temples and cults in neighbouring cities and returned their deported people and gods. He strengthened Babylon's fortifications by completing the city moat and installing doors of cedar clad with bronze at the city gates. The cylinder was placed in the foundations of Babylon's city wall.

For a full translation of the text, visit www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk





Tomb of Cyrus at Pasargadae, Iran

The Cyrus Cylinder today

The Cyrus Cylinder was excavated at the ancient site of Babylon in 1879. In 1971 it became a centrepiece of the Shah of Iran's celebration of 2500 years of Iranian monarchy. In Iran, the cylinder has appeared on coins, banknotes and stamps. Despite being a Babylonian document it has become part of Iran's cultural identity.

The Cyrus Cylinder was loaned to the National Museum of Iran in Tehran for a special exhibition (Sept. 2010-April 2011), together with two newly identified fragments of a Babylonian clay tablet containing parts of the same text. These help to reconstruct some missing lines. The British Museum has since presented a replica of the Cyrus Cylinder for permanent display at the National Museum of Iran in recognition of its importance to Iranians today.

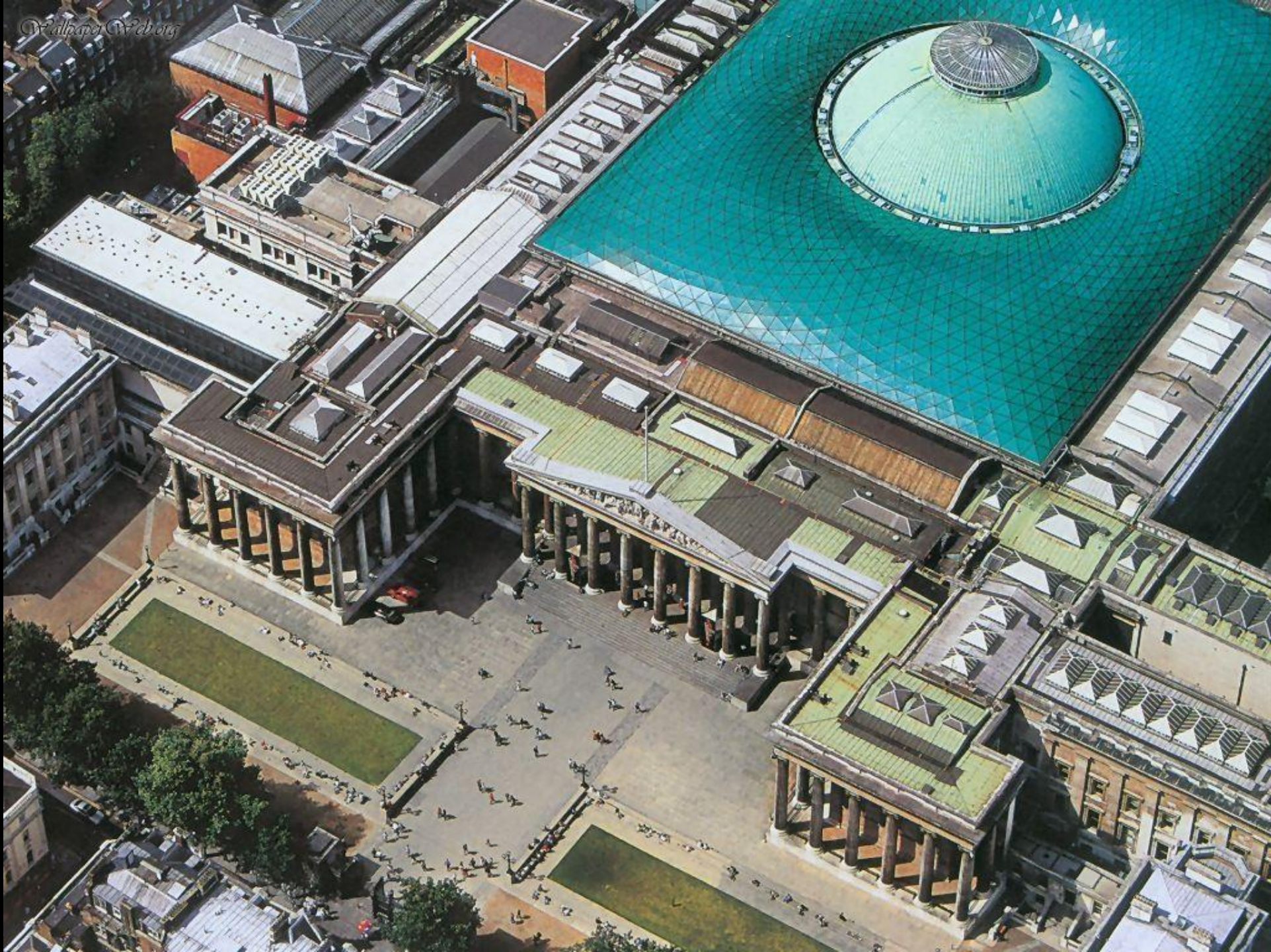


Cyrus Cylinder exhibition memorial plaque with modern re
National Museum of Iran, Tehran 2011

4 Key Points

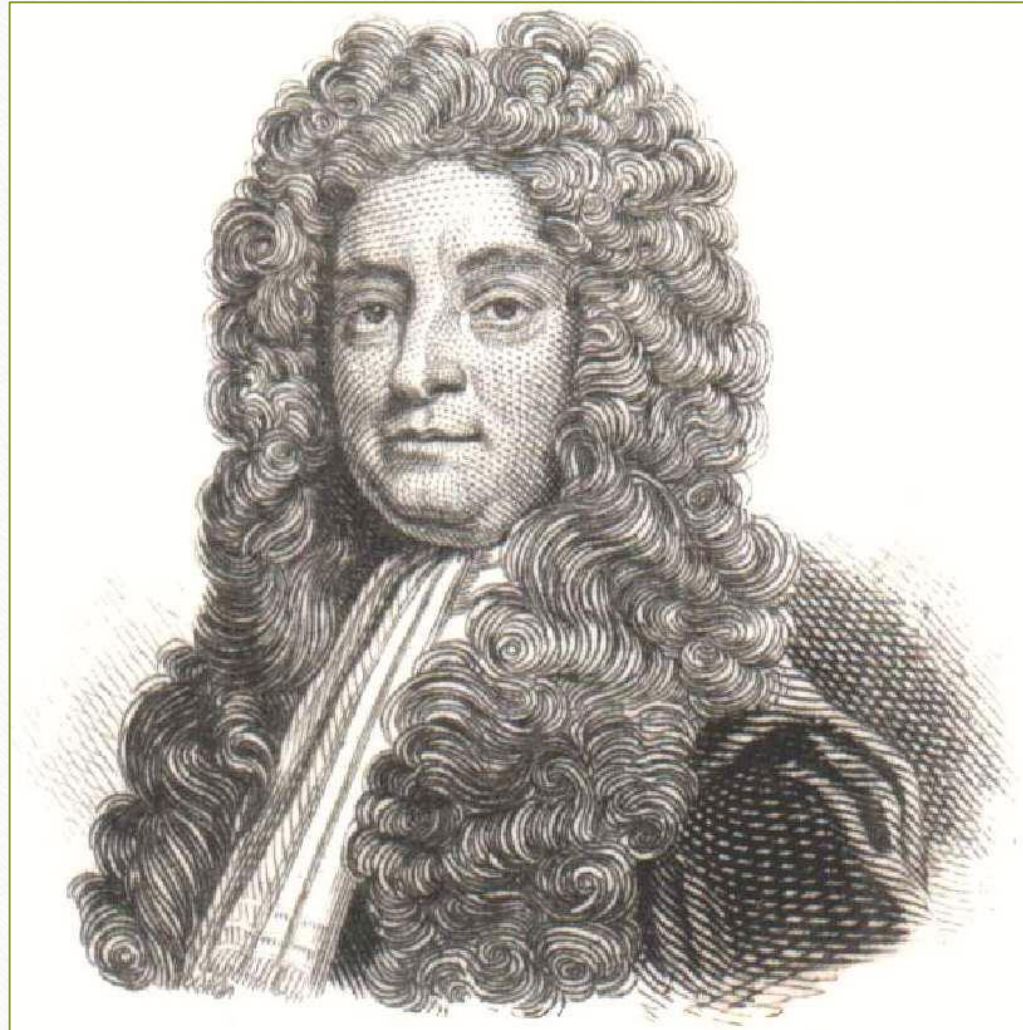
- The British Museum
- Excavating 'the Orient'
- Developing an Iran Gallery
- Objects as Ambassadors

The British Museum



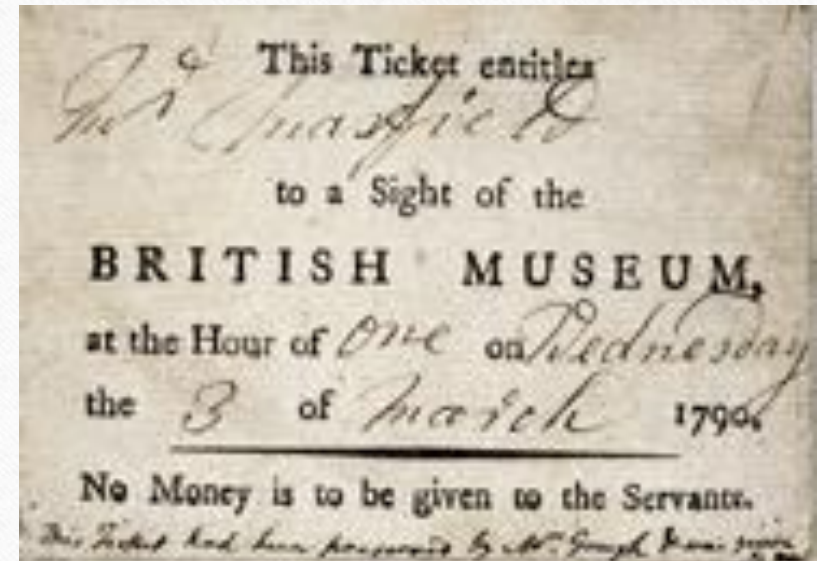
Sir Hans Sloane

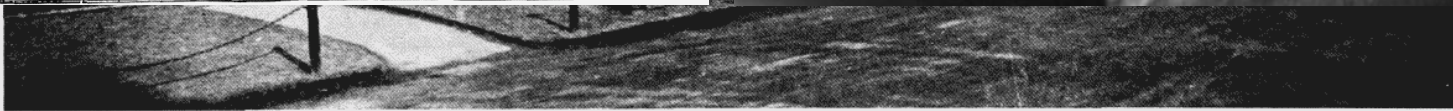
1660-1753



Founding

- Founding act in 1753 creates a novel national museum
- Collections of Sirs Sloane, Harley and Cotton donated in 1753
- Old Royal Library donated in 1757
- Open to the public 15 Jan 1759







Facts

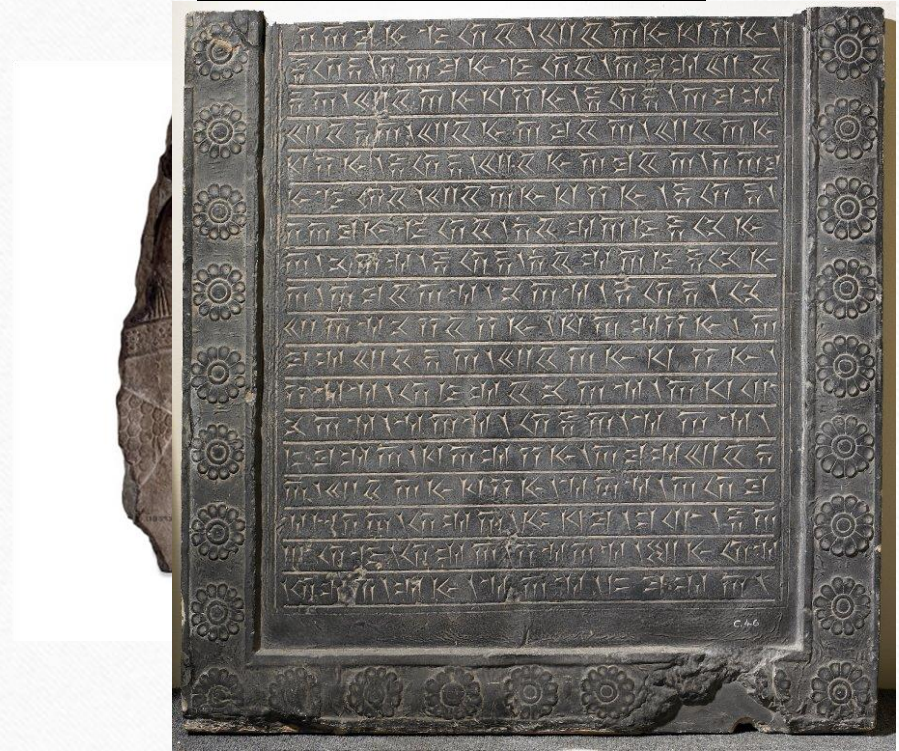
- 2 million years of human history
- Over 8 million objects
- Around 6 million visitors a year
- British Museum Act 1963: the Trustees of the British Museum are the corporate body with the legal duty to hold the Museum's collection and make it available to our world audience

Excavating 'The Orient'



19th Century Exploration

- Robert Gordon 1811 *
- Ephraim Stannus 1825 *
- John Macdonald Kinneir 1826
- Robert Ker Porter 1817-29 *
- Henry Rawlinson 1835-47
- Auguste Henry Layard 1840
- William Kennett Loftus 1850-52 *
- Herbert Weld-Blundell 1891-92 *



French Domination

- 1885 Franco-Persian agreement
- 1900 French concessions
- 1927 End of concession
- 1929-1937 Creation of Iran Bastan Museum (Andre Godard)
- 1930 Conservation of Antiquities Act
- Marcel Dieulafoy 1884-1886
- Jacques de Morgan 1897-1912
- Roland de Mecquenem 1912-1946 *



Post-Concessions

- Ernst Herzfeld (OI) 1928, 1931-34 *
- Erich Schmidt (OI) 1934-39
- Frederick R. Wulsin (Upenn) 1931-32
- Roman Ghirshman (Louvre) 1931-34
- T. J. Arne (Royal Swedish Academy) 1933
- Joseph Upton & Charles Wilkinson (MET) 1931-37
- George Salles (Louvre) 1934-36

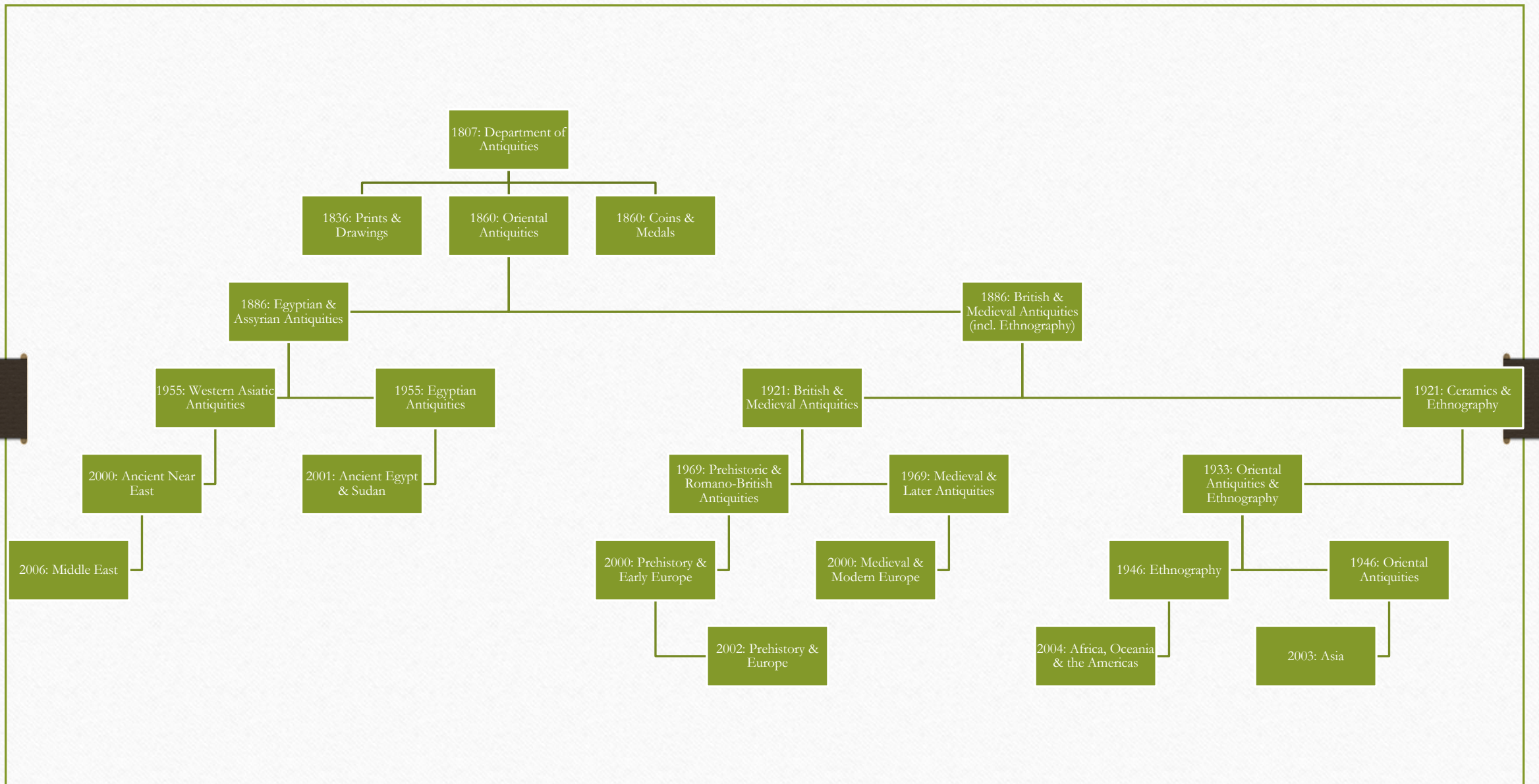


British Institute of Persian Studies

- Founded 1961 in Tehran
- Pasargadae, Sirāf, Tepe Nush-i Jan (Nuš-e Jān) and Shahr-i Qumis (Šahr-e Qumes)
- Palaeolithic, Bronze-Iron Age and Islamic highland sites
- David Stronach 1960s-70s
- David Whitehouse 1966-73
- John Hansman 1967-78
- Research & Publication since 1980



Developing an Iran Gallery



Categorisation

- Assyrian & Babylonian collections and Gold Ornament Room
 - Ordering according to materials and opulence rather than culture
 - Source: published museum guides
-
- Iranian collections
 - Ordering according to dynasties & function
 - Source: archived museum plans

Permanent Display and Temporary Exhibition

- 1931 Persian Art Exhibition, Royal Academy in London
- 1930s Development of a Persian Room
- Post WWII development of an Iranian Room and Persian Landing
- 1971 Royal Persia Exhibition
- 1970s Development of a new Iranian Room
- 1980s Achaemenid Workshops in Groningen
- 1990s Development of a new Iranian Gallery
- 2005-6 Forgotten Empire
- 2009 Shah 'Abbas: the remaking of Iran
- 2010-2014 Cyrus Cylinder

Room 52: Ancient Iran

Rahim Irvani Gallery

3000 BCE – 651 CE





Objects as *Ambassadors*

1931 Persian Art

- Burlington Art Gallery & Royal Academy
- Private & public Collections
- 300 private owners in 37 countries
- Augment desirability of objects
- Vessels, carpets, precious metal, ...
- Described as 'Colourful Treasures'... 'that awe more than they arouse admiration'... as they are 'alien and puzzling'
- Sydney Morning Herald 14/02/1931



1971 Royal Persia

- 2500 years of Persian Empire enacted on the great terrace at Persepolis
- Cyrus the Great as founder
- Monarchic theme
- Draw on all departments
- Unified tribute from the museum as a whole
- Illustrate Persian history and the achievements of her most illustrious rulers
- Cyrus Cylinder as 'tribute' is discussed



2005-2007 Forgotten Empire

- Truly forgotten or a catalyst for altering public discourse on Iran – Bosanquet
- The exhibition explores:
 - their rule
 - the magnificence of the royal palaces at Persepolis
 - the wealth of the Empire's art and architecture
 - the legacy of the Great Kings after the conquest of their empire by Alexander of Macedon
- 321 objects
- 154,000 visitors.





FORGOTTEN EMPIRE

the world of Ancient Persia

ENTER



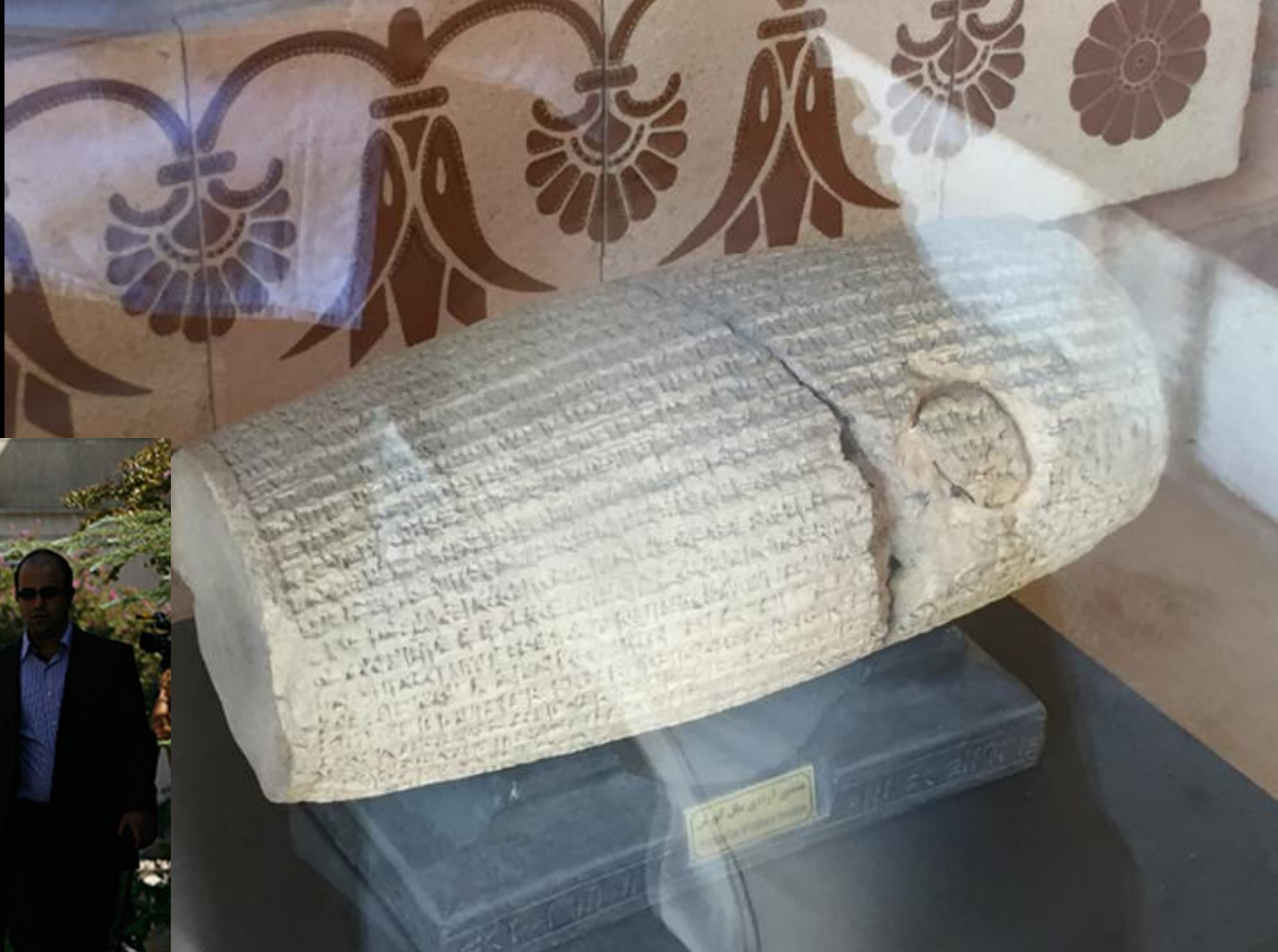
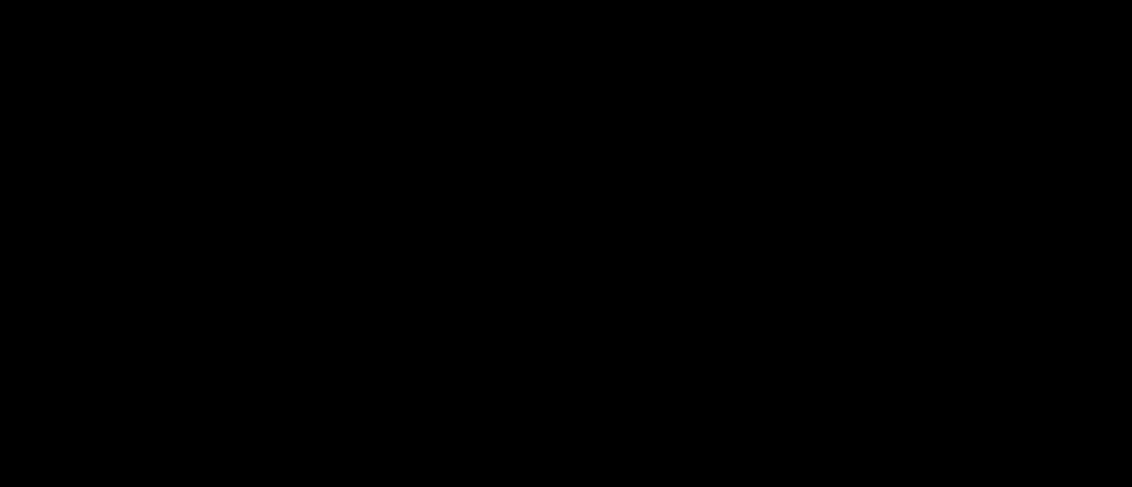
2010-2014 Cyrus Cylinder

- Single object focus but other objects
- Loan to Tehran in reciprocation for Shah Abbas & Forgotten Empire
- Dialogue of Civilizations – Khatami
- Universal Museum - MacGregor
- Subsequent tours to 5 museums in the US and Mumbai
- ‘At a time of political tension, it is essential to keep as many doors of communication open as possible’
Karen Armstrong





MEHR



ISNA

ISNA/PHOTO:HEMMAT KHAHI



Funding

- Norman MacGeorge Scholarship Committee
- University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts
- School of Historical and Philosophical Studies