

AGA KAN UNIVERSITY

Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations

**COMMUNICATIONS WITH ISLAMIC MATERIAL CULTURE
A CASE STUDY OF THE ROOM 34 IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM**

By

Mohamad Meqdad

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Abstract

Communication inside the museum comprises three active agents: curator, visitor, and material culture. The process of making meaning results from the interaction between these agents. Each one of them is independent and measuring the success of any exhibit depends on the degree of their engagement. Therefore, three meanings come up here, an organisational meaning, an interactional meaning, and a representational meaning. Each one of these meanings is tied to one agent, the organisational with the physicality of the exhibition, the interactional with the visitors, and the representational with the curators. The result of this triangular interaction is the communication or making meaning. This perspective is adopted by the New museology trend, which one of its branches is Museum as a text or reading the museum as a readable text. This new approach will be adopted to examine the Islamic Gallery in the British Museum (Room 34). It uses New-museological lenses and read this gallery attempting to understand the communications between its three agents. Although it looks an Old-museological gallery, its potentiality of a better communicating with its audience is high. Pioneering the museum studies, this study will uncover this potentiality and specify the gaps of making meaning in John Addis Gallery to bring, for the first time, as one of the most important examples of examining the readability of a museum internationally that exhibits Muslim material culture.

Contents

Chapter 1: introduction	8
1.1: introduction.....	8
1.2: An overview of the history of museum studies in Britain	9
1.3: Definitions and terms.....	10
1.4: The importance of this Study	12
1.5: Funding the BM.....	13
1.6: Research aim and objectives.....	14
1.7: Research questions.....	14
1.8: scope and limitations	14
1.9: An outline of the chapters.....	15
Chapter 2: The Literature Review	16
2.1: Introduction:	16
2.2: Communication as meaning-making: social semiotics view.....	18
2.3: Three frameworks of meaning inside the gallery:	19
2.3.1: Organisational meanings	19
2.3.2: Interactional meaning:.....	23
2.3.3: Representational meanings	27
2.4: Conclusion:.....	31
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	33
3.1: Introduction:	33
3.2: Research Design: Case study.....	34
3.3: Research methods and Data Collections:	35
3.3.1: Questionnaire:	35
3.3.2: Interview:	37
3.3.3: Observer-as-participant:	37
3.3.4: Textual analyses:	38
3.4: Sample selection strategies:	39
3.4.1: The Visitors:	39
3.4.2: The Curators:.....	39
3.4.3: Texts:.....	40
3.5: Research Ethics:	40
3.6: conclusion:	40

Chapter 4: Findings	41
4.1: Introduction:	41
4.2: The exhibition	41
4.3: The visitors:	53
4.3.1: Personal context:	53
4.3.2: Social context:	59
4.4: The Curators:	61
4.5: Conclusion:	65
Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion	66
5.1: Introduction	66
5.2: Organisational meaning and the exhibition	66
5.3: Interactional meaning and the visitors	69
5.3.1: Personal context:	70
5.3.2: Social context:	72
5.3.3: Physical context:	73
5.4: Representational meaning and curators	74
5.5: Conclusion	77
Bibliography	80
Appendixes:	85
(1) Cases and Hanged objects in the IG with their titles	85
(2) Quotations from the interviews and the studied texts:	87
(3) English and Arabic versions of the used questionnaire	91
(4) Informed Consent Sheet	98
(5) Interview with the curators of the Islamic	99
(6) An interview with one of the curators of the Islamic Gallery	100
(7) Funding the BM	110

Chapter 1: introduction

1.1: introduction

Nowadays museums face a crisis. They must justify their existence at a time when digital libraries, online visits to museums and online information about museum collections and objects are available and accessible to most people. Given this, museums must upgrade themselves such that it satisfies audiences and encourages them to actually visit the museum.

Funding issues exacerbate the crisis. Museums generally are not self-funding; they must rely financial support and donations. The situation is more critical for the British museums where entry is free. Such museums cannot be independent financially and yet they do not want to have donor agendas imposed on them in the name of economic support. In response to these issues, a new movement of museum studies has emerged to deal with and rescue one of the most important social and cultural institutions, the museum.

The new movement, called the New-museology, as opposed to the Old-museology, emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. New-museology is concerned with the museum as a societal communicational institution that facilitates a multi-dimensional process of communications (Mason 2006; Kaplan 1995). This approach to museums has opened the door for a new era in the history of museum: the post-museum. Fig. 1.1 shows some of the differences between Old and New-museology that will be explained later in this research.

Old Modernist museum	↔	New Post-Museum
Authority to Novice	Roles	Equal partners
Formal/Impersonal	Style	Informal/Personal
Neutral/ Objective	Stance	Opinionated/ Subjective

Fig 1.1 (Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Witcomb 2003; Ravelli 2006)

The government has participated in the multi-dimensionality of the post-museum age and is a major financial supporter of museums in England. Its aid is conditional on museums meeting a certain agenda. According to Hooper-Greenhill, the educational purposes of museums have been prioritised in England since 1997 and are considered by the government as central to the role of museums today (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 2). For continued government funding, Museums are required to meet the government educational agenda. That has been attempted in

the development of the The museums' educational role has been re-interpreted over the years asHooper-Greenhill comments:

‘In the past, “museum education” was understood to mean provision for school children. Nowadays “Museum education” includes services for a much broader range of audiences both in the museum and in the community.’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1994:1). Accordingly, museums have been expected to work on delivering educational services for all its visitors regardless of their ages.

At the core of these educational purposes lies the question of communication. Communication is essential in the process of transmitting knowledge and educating visitors about the displayed objects. Studying the communicational practices employed for providing educational services in museums has been the concern of current museum studies. The understanding of the process of communication in museums has moved beyond being performed through only the animate agents, curators and visitors, to include another equally important inanimate agent: the material culture. A brief overview of the history of museum studies in the context of Britain in the next section elaborates this process.

1.2: An overview of the history of museum studies in Britain

The first visitor survey was conducted, according to Hooper-Greenhill (1995), in 1960s and contained only demographic details such as age, sex, geographical location, etc. It revealed visitors of museum tend to be better educated and of a higher social class than the population in general.

After 10 years, Roger Miles in 1970s started two decades of work on visitors of the Natural History Museum in London. He and his colleagues concentrated on: ‘building an effective exhibition technology, using communication models from information technology, learning models from behaviourists psychology and sociological models from positivists American mass communication theory’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1995: 4-5). They assumed that by ‘perfecting the medium of communication (the exhibition), a successful transfer of messages would take place’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 11). In light of their model of communication, their audiences were considered as masses. After two decades, they admitted the need for paying attention to visitors’ reasons for visiting the museum and to their preferences and needs than simply focusing on the channels of transmission (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 11).This led to an increased

focus on the analysis of museum visitors in the 1980s (Hooper-Greenhill (1994: 10), using government social trends and tourist data to discern in more detail the types of visitors, patterns in visits and time spent there.

In the early 1990s, after Paulette McManus's study, more importance was given to the social context of museums visits acknowledging the fact that visitors brought with their prior experiences and their life-contexts to the museum (Hooper-Greenhill 1995: 5). Around the same time, marketing methods were introduced to museums (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 11). This coincided with an increase in the power of young staff within museums that held strong convictions that 'museums should be more open and more democratic' (ibid). That, in turn, also helped to focus more attention on the visitors and their needs. In adopting the marketing concept of 'target groups', museums were motivated to meet the needs of families, children, tourists, the elderly, schools, and people with a range of disabilities (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 12)

Since the early 1990s, museum studies had a new birth, especially visitor studies developments in which have been accelerated adopting new methods, such as media studies, which have flourished mainly in America. Simultaneously, some scholars have framed museum studies within cultural theory and that has opened created space for a significant shift in Museum studies since 2000.

1.3: Definitions and terms

This study aims to look at the communication process within the Islamic Gallery (IG) in Room 34 at the British Museum (BM). This section introduces the main terms which will be used in this study.

Firstly, the definition of Museum adopted in this study is that of: 'an institution which collects, documents, preserves, exhibits and interprets material evidence and associated information for the public benefit' (Museums Association 1991:13).

Secondly, the materials contained in museum are the Material Culture which is taken to be 'that segment of man's physical environment which is purposely shaped by him according to a culturally dictated plan' (Deetz 1977:7).

Thirdly, this research uses the term collection to refer to the sum of material cultures in the museum that have one or more shared characteristics. They are seen as 'made up of objects ...

the objects within them come to us from the past; and they have been assembled with some degree of intention ... by an owner or curator who believed that the whole was somehow more than the sum of its parts' (Pearce 1992: 7).

This study is based in The British Museum (BM) which was established on 7 June 1753 by an Act of Parliament (BM, 2010). This museum was based on the collection of Sir Hans Sloan, a physician, naturalist and collector. He had 71,000 objects and he wanted them to be preserved after his death, according to the BM website: 'he bequeathed the whole collection to King George II for the nation in return for a payment of £20,000 to his heirs' (ibid). Later on this museum went through the processes of historical developments and was one of the most influential museums in Europe, particularly in pioneering the concept free admission to all 'studious and curious persons' (ibid). That led to an enormous increase in the number of visitors from 5,000 a year in the eighteenth century to nearly 6 million today (ibid).

The main focus of this research is the Islamic collection which is considered an important part of the Middle East collection at the BM. It was originally initiated from the collection of Sir Sloan (1660-1753) and was sealed by another collection owned by Sir William Hamilton (1730-1803). This collection was purchased by the British Museum in 1772(ibid). Following the rapid archaeological discoveries in the 19th century in the Middle Eastern region, the collection became one of the richest Middle Eastern collections of material culture in the world and has added a lot to human knowledge of the history of the Middle East. The distinctiveness of the Islamic collection is imbedded in its metalwork, Iznik glazed pottery from Turkey, Mughal miniatures from India, Palestinian costumes, and modern Islamic works on paper, etc. (ibid).

This Islamic collection is treasured in the Islamic Gallery, which was established in the early 1980s with the support of Sir John Addis after whom the gallery was named. This gallery has also other names: Islamic World Gallery, The Art of the Middle East, and Room 34. Institutionally, this gallery is part of the Middle East department at the museum which combines 'the holdings of the former Department of the Ancient Near East (previously Western Asiatic Antiquities), the Islamic collections of the Department of Asia (formerly Oriental Antiquities) and the Middle Eastern and Central Asian collections of the former Department of Ethnography (now Department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas)' (BM, 2010).

1.4: The importance of this Study

This study is the first detailed, evaluation study of the Islamic Gallery in the British Museum. It aims to explore the communication process with the Islamic material culture in the British Museum the curator and visitor perspectives. It will help to shed light on the cross-cultural dialogue that takes place in this communicational process.

This study will contribute to filling the academic gap in the previous researches in museum studies, which have not focused on this gallery. In fact, this study tries to present this gallery as one of the densest and most intensive spaces for the application of the New museology of the post-museum providing insight into the potential future of Islamic collections in Britain.

Ian Heath (2007), in BAR 1643, included this gallery as one of his cases that represent Islam in the British Museums. However, unlike Heath (2007), this research looks at the representation of Islamic material culture in the gallery as one example, but does not consider this gallery to be a representative of Islam or even Islamic material culture internationally, because, as Karp suggests:

‘Exhibitions represent identity, either directly, through assertion, or indirectly, by implication. When cultural “others” are implicated, exhibitions tell us who we are and, perhaps most significant, who we are not. Exhibitions are privileged arenas for presenting images of self and “other”.’ (Karp 1991:15)

Hence, the ‘Islamic World’ is a product of a ‘Non-Muslim’ institution that represents the ‘Islamic’ material culture. Therefore, for this study, the importance of the Islamic Gallery is in its communicational function that considers representational aspect as one of its aspects, but not all of them, Baxandall (1991) explains it as:

‘To select and put forward any item for display, as something worth looking at, as interesting, is a statement not only about the object but about the culture it comes from. To put three objects in a vitrine involves additional implications of relation. There is no exhibition without construction and therefore- in an extended sense- appropriation’ (Baxandall 1991:34).

Therefore, a museum might not be other-oriented as much as it is self-reflected. Greenblatt (1991) describes the produced knowledge of visiting museum as: ‘The knowledge that derives from this kind of looking [at the objects in museums] may not be very useful in the attempt to

understand another culture, but it is vitally important in the attempt to understand our own' (1991:53). In other words, the Islamic gallery clearly expresses the perspective of the British Museum and its messages to its visitors about these material cultures from Muslim cultures.

Another issue involved here is the name of the gallery, the Islamic World. The BM definition of the term Islamic is stated as follows: 'The term "Islamic" is used in this gallery to define the culture of peoples living in lands where the dominant religion is Islam' (introductory panel in the Islamic Gallery 2010). Although this term is used in this study for its academic affiliations and appropriateness, the researcher has his own reservations about this term, which is sometimes misleading. The research states clearly that 'Islamic Gallery' is used here, because of the academic impotency that has not been able yet to generate a more conventional term that might better characterise these objects. Therefore, in order not to confuse the reader, the gallery studied here, (Room 34 in the BM) will be called Islamic Gallery.

The term Islamic here does not refer to religious affiliation only, but to a cultural meaning. At the same time, this research does not accept the otherness meaning imbedded in 'the Islamic "World"', because there is no Christian, Jewish, Buddies, or Hindu World. The same applies to 'Islamic Culture'. This term will be used only to refer to the corresponding concepts and meanings inside the gallery. This research is highly cognisant of the diversity of Muslim cultures and sub-cultures. Although Muslims share, partly or completely, some religious beliefs, geographical locations and histories, their diversity and cultural richness make it impossible for them to form an Islamic World as opposed to the Judeo-Christian, Hindu, or Buddhist 'Worlds'.

1.5: Funding the BM

The BM receives funding from different sources (see appendix): the UK government, other organisations, and individual donations (BM 2009:17). The question of independence from economic and political interferences is important in evaluating any cultural aspect in this museum. However, such consideration is beyond the scope of this study which will restrict its activities inside the walls of the Islamic galleries and its curators and visitors only. It is mentioned here to indicate that the researcher's awareness of the issue.

1.6: Research aim and objectives

This research aims to investigate the process of communication in the Islamic gallery in the BM. It will attempt to explore the triangular communicational relationship between the curators, the visitors and the Islamic material cultures. These three agents of communication are seen as active in the process of meaning- making and independent in terms of the influence they have on each other.

The main objectives of this study are to understand the process of displaying Islamic material culture in the British Museum and to investigate the visitors' interactivity in the Islamic gallery. That is in addition to examining the affectivity of the triangular meaning-making process that takes place in the Islamic gallery.

1.7: Research questions

The following questions will guide the exploration of the issue of communication or meaning-making in the Islamic Gallery at the British Museum:

- 1- How is the Islamic material culture in the British Museum displayed? And why?
- 2- What kind of narratives do the curators of the IG give about the Islamic cultures through displaying the Islamic objects? And to what extent do the visitors get these narratives?
- 3- What other kind of narratives do the visitors of the Islamic Gallery receive from their visits?
- 4- How far could the visitor to this gallery be considered an active agent?
- 5- To what extent are the representation of Islamic material culture and the interactivity of the visitors compatible?
- 6- What does the triangular communicational process look like in the IG?

1.8: scope and limitations

This research is conducted in the Islamic Gallery (room 34) in the British Museum. It has an anthropological perspective that aims to explore the process of meaning-making between the three active agents in the Islamic Gallery: the curators, the visitors, and the Islamic material cultures. This gallery is looked at as a text whose meaning can be arrived at through exploring the organisational, the interactional and the representational meanings which are constructed by each of the agents. These different meanings will be elaborated on in the literature review.

However, due to time and space limitations, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the whole gallery. That is because there are some aspects which could not be covered such as visitor tracking, analysing audio recorded explanations, including the interview of the eye-opener tour guide, and processing all the data collected from both the curators and the visitors. Therefore the study focuses only the collected and studied data and material in drawing its conclusions.

Moreover, the linguistic limitations impeded the expansion of the study limiting it to English and Arabic speaking visitors. This aspect could be covered in future studies through developing multi-lingual questionnaires. Studying visitors could have benefited from applying a qualitative approach as well as quantitative analysis, to understand some of the psychological aspects of their visiting experiences. But, as a first evaluation study of the gallery, employing a survey study was essential and sufficient at this stage.

1.9: An outline of the chapters

The first chapter introduces the area of the research: its aims, objectives and questions and issues. The second chapter covers the theories adopted to form the theoretical framework of this study: Museum as Text and Interactive Experience Model. The third chapter focuses on methodology including data collection methods in this study. The findings of the fieldwork are presented in the fourth chapter. Finally, the fifth chapter discusses the findings in light of the adopted theoretical framework and concludes with a summary of the results, recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review

2.1: Introduction:

By the end of the 1980s, a new movement of museum studies appeared, led by Peter Vergo and The New Museology. Vergo's work was framed against a background of: '[A] state of widespread dissatisfaction with the 'old' museology, both within and outside the museum profession... what is wrong with the 'old' museology is that it is 'too much about museum methods, and too little about the purposes of museums' (Vergo 1989: 3). He re-contextualised the museum and its role in society as a cultural and 'social institution' that conveys messages through the display and converts them to meanings by museum professionals and the audience who view and review them (Kaplan 1995:38). Mason considers this new approach as: 'the branch of museum studies [that is] concerned with those ideas central to cultural theory.' (Mason 2006: 23).

A significant theoretical shift followed the emergence of New Museology, drawing on some approaches from cultural theory, and the disciplines of media as well as literature studies. In fact, textualizing the museum is one recent and powerful approach currently applied to museum analysis. Mason observes that: 'In addition to the Foucauldian/power model of museums the other, most influential, cultural studies/museum studies approach of recent years is the textual approach. This involves reading the object of analysis like a text for its narrative structures and strategies. In museums, the textual approach can involve analysis of the spatial narratives set up by the relationship of one gallery or object to another, or it might focus on the narrative strategies and voices implicit in labelling, lighting, or sound.' (Mason 2006: 26).

Louise J. Ravelli (2006) in her communicational study of museums draws on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) theory elaborated by Halliday (1976). She considers museum as a: 'kind of 'texts': a space which makes meanings, and which can be 'read'. As texts, museums are a powerful, communicative resource; all their constitutive practices - the written and verbal texts that take place there, the choice of exhibits and method of their display, the activities that are made available to visitors, make meaning in multiple ways ... it is necessary to broaden the perspective, and to explore an expanded notion of 'texts', that is, of the museum itself as a kind of text.' (Ravelli 2006: 119).

Ravelli's approach has its advantages and weaknesses. It facilitates viewing museum components, (building, collections, individual staff, or organizational status), as concert that produces different readable meanings (Mason 2006: 26). It also 'raises the question of unintentional meanings, omissions, or contradictions present within displays... Finally it can shift emphasis away from the curator-as-author and his/her intentions toward the visitor-as-reader and his/her responses. The visitor is therefore understood to be a crucial participant in the process of meaning-making.' (Mason 2006: 26).

The weaknesses of this approach are, firstly, the position of the curator in this process of making meaning. Taking into account the 'Death of the Author' by (Barthes 1968) and 'What is an Author?' by (Foucault 1969), that means rejecting the notion that: 'that the author controls the meanings of texts, moving instead toward a notion of the text as product and producer of its own social, cultural, and historical discourses.' (Mason 2006: 28). Put simply, the 'birth of the reader/visitor', Mason (2006), might be: 'disempowering and threatening for curators who have been traditionally trained to think in terms of educating and "delivering" messages to visitors' (ibid).

This critique reads the empowerment inside the gallery as a power distribution. However the economic argument for change in the cultural and social roles of museums and the introduction of notions such as democratizing; commodifying; and reviewing the authority of the curator is necessary to attract visitors and secure museum funding. Empowering those visitors will guarantee the continuity of curatorship. Another weakness of this approach is that: '[This] model does not allow for the investigation of whether indeed there is such a neat fit between production, text and consumption. It supposes both too clear-cut a conscious manipulation by those involved in creating exhibitions and too passive and unitary a public; and it ignores the often competing agendas involved in exhibition making, the "messiness" of the process itself, and interpretative agency of visitors' (Macdonald 1996: 5). Okay can we just say this as 'weakness is, as ...observes it assumes that the visitor is passive and a too-neat fit between production, text and consumption and then quote from 'it ignores the messiness' (Macdonald 1996: 5).

The theoretical framework of new museology used in this research will be supported, in relation to visitors' aspect of the study by drawing on the concept of Interactive Experience Model (Falk & Dierking 1992). This concept acknowledges that: 'Whatever the visitor does attend to

is filtered through the personal context, mediated by the social context, and embedded within the physical context' (Falk & Dierking 1992: 4).

2.2: Communication as meaning-making: social semiotics view

Meaning-making inside the museum is constructed by three agents and through the process of communication between them, meanings are made. Baxandall clarifies those agents as: 'makers of objects, exhibitors of made objects, and viewers of exhibited made objects... the activity of each of the three is differently directed and discretely if not incompatibly structured. Each of the three is playing, so to speak, a different game in the field.' (Baxandall 1991: 36)

As Ravelli highlights, the process of communicating itself makes meanings. Therefore, communication transmits the meanings i.e. transmits the knowledge between the live components of this process. This knowledge is viewed in this research as social semiotic, because it is 'actively constructed in and through the use of communicative resources, such as language. In other words, communication is also a semiotic process, that is, a process of making meaning. A social-semiotic view of communication focuses on communication as a contextualised meaning-making resource.' (Ravelli 2006: 6; Halliday 1978)

Defined thus, communication is an active, social process, and this creates room for freedom of choice. Halliday explains this in his SFL theory as:

'Systematic theory is a theory of meaning as choice, by which a language, or any other semiotic system, is interpreted as a network of interlocking options: 'either this, or that, or the other', 'either more like the one or more like the other', and so on. Applied to the description of a language, it means starting with the most general features and proceeding step by step so as to become ever more specific: 'a message is either about doing, or about thinking, or about being; if it is about doing, this either creating or dealing with something already created', and so on; or 'a syllable is either open (ending in a vowel) or closed (ending in a consonant); if closed, the closure may be voiced or unvoiced'. Whatever is chosen in one system becomes the way in to a set of choices in another, and we go on as far as we need to, or as far as we can in the time available, or as far as we know now.' (Halliday 1985: xiv)

Such communication, then, depends on the agent as an active decision-maker who chooses the appropriate way of transmitting the meanings. Based on this freedom, different types of meanings are expressed. These meanings consist of functional components, Halliday (ibid)

suggests three types of meaning: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. These types will be appropriated to fit in museum studies' terms used by (Ravelli 2006: 160), ideational equates representational, interpersonal equates interactional, and textual equates organizational.

The three frameworks of meaning, organizational, interactional, and representational all exist inside the Islamic Gallery (IG) in the BM because: 'Exhibitions of social history are driven by interpretive ideas and are usually organised as narratives. As a result, objects are not made the primary focus of exhibits but retain significance as corroborative evidence. The attendant demystification of objects may in fact bring them closer to the lives of the visitors and release emotional and imaginative possibilities' (Lavine 1991: 152).

The long historical period and the vast geographical area covered in this gallery do not allow the objects to be more than implemented objects to tell certain stories. There are three cultural components inside the gallery that correspond to these frameworks of meaning. These cultural components are: 'there are the ideas, values, and purposes of the culture from which the object comes. Second, there are the ideas, values, and certainly, purposes of the arrangers of the exhibition...Third, there is the viewer himself, with all his own cultural baggage of unsystematic ideas, values and, yet again, highly specific purposes' (Baxandall 1991: 34). Hence the original culture of the objects, the culture of the curator, and the culture of the visitor, all intersect and communicates inside museum.

2.3: Three frameworks of meaning inside the gallery:

This section elaborates the three communication frameworks: the organisational, the interactional, and the representational.

2.3.1: Organisational meanings:

Considering the museum as a text means looking at each component inside the gallery separately and contextualizing it within the other elements to examine its cohesion as a unit, as a text. Ravelli attests that: 'the organizational framework is an intrinsic part of meaning-making. It is an 'enabling source'... bringing together both representational and interactional meanings into a coherent whole.' (Ravelli 2006: 17). It encompasses the other meanings that are created inside the gallery. The influence of this framework is embedded in: 'The mode of installation, the subtle messages communicated through design, arrangement and assemblage,

(that) can either aid or impede our appreciation and understanding of visual, cultural, social, and political interest of the objects and stories exhibited in the museums' (Karp 1991: 14).

Exhibitions are organized based on different considerations: attention to producing the objects, cultural characteristics of the audience, and the power of the curator's knowledge offered through the display. Karp points this approach out saying: 'All exhibitions are inevitably organised on the basis of assumptions about the intentions of the object's producers, the cultural skills and qualifications of the audience, the claims to authoritativeness made by the exhibition, and judgments of aesthetic merit or authenticity of the objects or settings exhibited'(ibid: 12). The decision about making this organized display reflects 'deeper judgments of power and authority' (ibid: 2). In other words, technically organising the display means: 'the art and science of arranging the visual, spatial, and material environment into a composition that visitors move through' (Ravelli 2006: 123). Organisation can have 'a significant impact on visitor behaviour' (Ravelli 2006: 123; Falk 1993). 'In museums, and especially in exhibitions, one of the major resources for achieving [integrating all elements into a whole] is through the direction and control of visitors' pathways.' (Ravelli 2006: 123).

Constructing a pathway is not a random act or a case of placing some cases next to each other. It: 'depends on the relative placement of objects and other spaces (such as doors and windows) within the exhibition and it is this which makes meaning.' (Ravelli 2006: 124). This organizational meaning added to the interactional one shapes: 'the exhibit space as a text, and positing the visitor's behaviour within that space.' (ibid: 124).

The importance of the organizational meaning-making, through deconstructing the pathways inside the gallery, starts from the personal relationship between the visitors and the displayed objects. In this regard, introducing the following two concepts, which were coined by Greenblatt 1991, will be helpful in understanding the organization of the Islamic gallery in the British museum. The first one is Resonance, which means: 'the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand' (Greenblatt 1991: 42). This leads the visitor to stop, have a look, and question the knowledge they have got in order to satisfy the curiosity generated from this experience. The second concept has a similar influence, it is called Wonder, which means: 'the power of the

displayed object to stop the viewer in his or her tracks, to convey an arresting sense of uniqueness, to evoke an exalted attention' (ibid).

Resonance and wonder are linked in the exhibition with the strategy of Saliency. Saliency means: 'prioritization of some elements of the exhibition over other' (Ravelli 2006: 129). The saliency of one object or display over another can be achieved in many ways; size is one way and works through the visual contrast: the larger objects usually attract visitors' attention first. Equally, the tiniest object can also be given priority. 'saliency needs to be supported by additional design features, such as lighting, contrast, separation from other exhibits, in order for its priority to be realised' as (Ravelli 2006: 130) highlights.

Resonance and Wonder is related to the object itself, but the quality of display is also influenced by how the object is displayed. Alpers explains this in detail: 'The way a picture or object is hung or placed- its frame or support, its position relative to the viewer (is it high, low, or on level? Can it be walked around or not? Can it be touched? Can one sit and view it or must one stand?), the light on it (does one want constant light? Focused or diffuse? Should one let natural light and dark play on it and let the light change throughout the day and with seasons?), and the other objects it is placed with and so compared to- all of these affect how we look and what we see' (Alpers 1991:31).

The way the object is presented affects the experience that visitors get during their visit to the exhibition. Ambiguity in display and ignoring the informative purpose of the display can, inadvertently, fail the exhibition and confuse the visitor. Black describes that as: 'An exhibit case with a total hodgepodge of objects with no obvious visual or informational relationship is unsettling. It will appear haphazard and chaotic to the visitors, while a display of row after row of seemingly identical objects, nearly laid out without variation, has a mind-numbing effect' (Black 2005: p.276).

It is how a display is organised that makes meaning from the collection and conveys systematic sub-messages to construct the big idea that the gallery reflects. It shows visitors the sequence of their movement inside the gallery. Ravelli elaborates on that saying: 'The relative placement of displays and pathways between them might function to draw visitors towards an object, or encourage some sequential reading of different displays, or allow for more open relations between them. These are not just formal devices, but create meanings about what is important, what story is being told, and visitors' roles within that space' (Ravelli 2006: 123).

It is the character of organising modern and post-museum to push the visitors to complete their visit and gain the experience that satisfies their curiosity. This understanding of organisational meaning differentiates from that one in the Renaissance period. Renaissance museums relied on maximizing visitors' sense of wonder as the object was the centre of the context. Greenblatt describes the wonder-cabinets of the Renaissance as: '[They] were at least as much about possession as display. The wonder derived not only from what could be seen but from the sense that the shelves and cases were filled with unseen wonders, all the prestigious property of the collector.' (Greenblatt 1991: 50)

Therefore, the importance of the pathways is correlated with the development of communication and making-meaning in the modern museums and Post-museums. However, Ravelli (2006) cautions that the patterns used are relatively limited, for example arterial, comb, chain, star or fan, and block patterns, she highlights the importance of their directions or regulations and: 'the extent to which it is open or random.' (Ravelli 2006: 124).

Each kind of pathway reflects a certain organizational perspective that is related to positioning the visitors and restricting or facilitating their ability to construct their personal knowledge, for instance with the arterial path: 'the main path is continuous and no options exist for visitors... [and the block pattern is] relatively unconstructed' (Ravelli 2006: 124; citing Royal Ontario Museum 1999). It expresses the degree of practiced authority upon the visitors. It shows different approaches of organising the movement inside the gallery whether it is 'directed' or 'unstructured' (Royal Ontario Museum 1999) or 'freedom of choice' or 'minimal opportunities' Ravelli (2006).

Another arrangement of display and pathway is the Centre structured exhibition. In this system the Centre: 'functions as a nucleus, and the items placed at the Margins are equal in value to each other, but (literally) marginal in value compared to the Centre' (Ravelli 2006: 126). An exhibition that is not Centre structured: 'gives the objects the same information value, making them equal in status' (ibid). The nature of the collection, the uniqueness of its objects, the curators' perceptions of their visitors, all contribute to the decision to adopt the Center structured system or not.

To sum up the organizational meaning within the exhibition involves looking at the strategies of organising the gallery on two levels: the first is the individual level of each case and its content that create a unit that carry a sub-message. This sub-message is expressed from the

level of one piece to the level of all objects include within one case. The second strategy is organizing the cases to form a bigger unit that has a specific message to tell to the visitor. It is necessary to consider this framework while studying the Islamic Gallery in the British Museum to get an insight about the messages conveyed through its order.

2.3.2: Interactional meaning:

The Interactional aspect of this study concentrates mainly on the empowerment or disempowerment of visitors. This involves studying the element of power inside the gallery and deconstructing the pedagogy of this practice. There are four recent models of studying visitors. (Witcomb 2006:356) defines them as: 1) the Didactic expository model that maintains the museum as an authoritative source of knowledge and sees learning as a simple communicative process – from the museum to the visitor – in which interactive virtually control what visitors do, learn, and even feel; 2) the Stimulus–response model, where the issue of control is taken to the extreme and it is used to ‘achieve a desired ideological outcome’ (ibid); 3) Constructivism and interactivity, which is characterised by dialogically interactive, direct contact is established with each visitor through an appeal to their own human experiences, and it allows visitors to make their own meanings and then encourages them to document those for others (ibid: 359).

The last one, adopted in this research, is the discovery model. This model holds that: ‘the production of knowledge is embedded in the process of communication and there is an awareness that this is two-way’, because it is based on a realist epistemology and a constructivist learning theory (ibid: 357). This model focuses: ‘on incorporating multi-sensorial experiences in ways that explore the social context, subject matter and emotional content . . . the materials and tools of the artist and basic tools of art production such as colour, texture, line etc.’ (ibid: 358; Simpson 2002: 8).

Although the interactional meaning of this theoretical framework aims to demonstrate the communications produced by visitors’ interactions with the Islamic material culture and the curators of John Addis Gallery in the BM, it does not adopt Ravelli’s definition of interactional meaning that: ‘In exhibitions, the interactional framework functions to position visitors to behave or respond in certain ways, and can create particular emotive appeals, and an overall air of authority or informality’ (Ravelli 2006: 130). It is closer to Macdonald’s (2006) position that sees visitors’ interaction from constructivist perspective which emphasizes: ‘the input of

the learner in the meaning- making process and, as such, recognize the variable ways in which it may take a place' (Macdonald 2006: 321). It believes in the democratization of museum. This process removes the curatorial manipulation of power and places it in the process of communication, since it argues that: 'it has become clear that audiences are very far from 'passive'' (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 4).

Before talking about the model adopted in this research, the interactive experience model by Falk & Dierking (1992), the pedagogical aspect of museums will be highlighted. In this regard Hooper-Greenhill (1994) states that: 'All museums and galleries have an educational role, which can be defined as the development of responsive relationships with visitors and other users such that increased enjoyment, motivation, and knowledge result' (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 1).

The importance of education makes it necessary to illustrate the components of this process. Barbara Birney differentiates between learning and educating as: 'The public tends to restrict the definition of learning to that which occurs in school. Birney found evidence that visitors do come to learn, if we broaden the definition of learning to include the results of curiosity and the urge to explore' (cited in Falk & Dierking 1992: 15).

Hence there is no direct curator/teacher and student visitor educational relationship, but a reciprocal learning process between them that is mediated by material culture themselves. This understanding was not only scholarly; it was applied in British museums widely as Hooper-Greenhill points out: 'In Britain, there has been a major shift from the expression 'museum education' to the expression 'museum learning'... The use of the word 'learning' indicates an increased focus on the learning process and outcomes of users, and a shift away from thinking about the museum and its educational delivery.' (Hooper –Greenhill 2007: 4). This extract from the Annual Report of Natural history Museum in London, corroborates Hooper –Greenhill's (2007) statement that: 'We aim to engage, enthuse and educate, so that more people than ever before gain an appreciation of science and the world about them' (Annual Report, 2002/2003, Natural history Museum, London)

This research will try to examine the reflection of these changes in understanding education and learning in the Islamic World Gallery in the British Museum. This pedagogical shift of museum learning has been theorized in the field of visitor studies. This shift is reflected through the concept of interactivity, for example Witcomb differentiates: 'the conventional sense of

technical interactivity, from that of spatial and dialogic interactivity, the latter enabling meanings to be genuinely negotiated, rather than passively transmitted' (Ravelli 2006: 70).

Hence interactivity does not comprise just the technical act of interaction but involves other aspects in the exhibition. Visitors' interactivity should be looked at from different angles. And that makes the Interactive Experience Model, which is coined by Falk & Dierking 1992, one of the most influential approaches in visitor studies. This model explains the visitor's experience in light of the intersection between three contexts: the personal context, the social context, and the physical context. The main idea is that visitor experience passes through a filter of their personality, negotiated by the social context, and rooted in the physical one Falk & Dierking (1992: 4). The personal context means that:

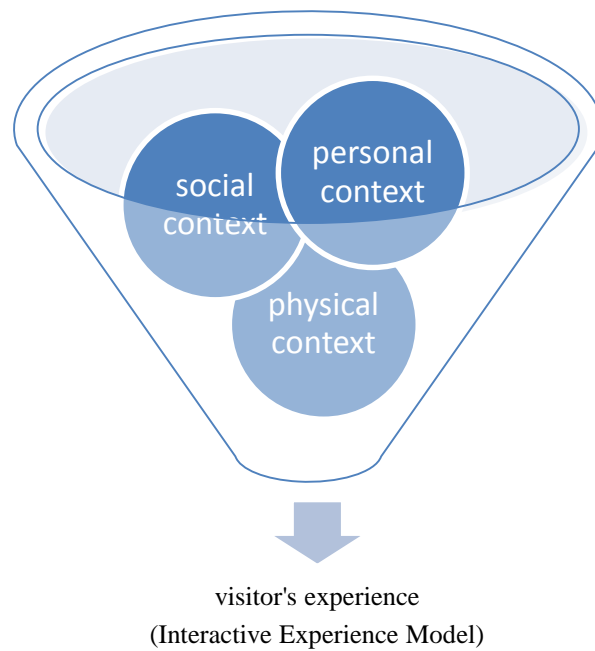
'[E]ach person arrives at the museum with a personal agenda- a set of expectations and anticipated outcome for the visit. Differences in personal context, for example, should help predict many of the differences in visitor behaviour and learning that exist, for example, between the first- time and frequent visitors, or between novices and experts in a given subject matter' (Falk & Dierking 1992: 2).

And:

'Understanding the social context of the visit allows us to make sense of the variations in behaviour between, for example, adults in family groups and adults in adult groups, or children on school field trips and children visiting their families' (ibid: 3).

Finally, the physical context includes:

'[T]he architecture and "feel" of the building, as well as the objects and artefacts contained within... Many of the distinctions between, for example, an art museum, or a historic home and an aquarium, derive from elements of the physical context-the architecture, the objects on display, the ambience- elements that exert significant influence on the visitor' (ibid:3).



This model's strength is that it considers the visitor as an active and independent agent, regardless of the curator's influence or power inside the gallery. As Falk & Dierking point out: 'Visitors may be seeking information which is different from what curators might think is important (Falk & Dierking 1992: 76). In other words visitor can make his/her meaning with significant degree of consciousness of his/her freedom of choice and the will and ability to discover and construct their own learning experience from visiting the exhibition. Alpers suggests that this point could be one indicator of a museum's success: 'One measure of museum's success would seem to be the freedom and interest with which people wander through and look without the intimidating mediation between viewer and object that something such as the ubiquitous earphones provide' (Alpers 1991:30). Sharon Macdonald (2002) points this understanding of interactives out in Post-museum as:

'Interactives are typically understood by staff not only as providing "fun" (something that the visitor is understood to be seeking in modern museum visits), but as allowing visitors to be "active" and to exercise choice. As such in employing interactives, curators in Macdonald's study felt that they were empowering the visitor and thus being more democratic in their museological practice, while also meeting the managerial demand for a product that would increase the museum's share of the market. What was involved here was a broader process in

which inter-activity, choice and democracy came to be thought of as going together- and as even being interchangeable' (Witcomb 2006: 354-354)

This corroborates this study's approach, which looks at the visitor as an active agent in the process of meaning-making in the Islamic Gallery at the BM and to what extent they are invited to: 'engage all [their] senses as [they] try to "know" and "understand" the objects displayed' according to (Serrell, 1996, p. Vii).

2.3.3: Representational meanings

Museums have a unique mode of constructing stories. It has the ability of representing ideas, values, cultures, contexts, to its visitors. As Pearce attests: 'the other side of the unique museum mode, the ability to display, to demonstrate, to show the nature of the world and of man within it by arranging the collected material in particular patterns which reflect, confirm and project the contemporary world view' (Pearce 1992: 4).

Museums can bring the world to its visitors and construct it according to certain interpretations. These representational meanings are: 'the ones most likely to be open to contestation, and to connect with material disputes, and with different experiences of history' (Ravelli 2006: 117). This uniqueness comes from the nature of telling historical stories and depends on the perspective of the story teller/curator. Ravelli suggests: 'attention must be paid to meanings conveyed through the representational framework. Not to produce a neutral view, an unbiased [display], because that is not possible, but ensure that the representational meanings are aligned with museum and community objectives, and are sensitive to various stakeholders' (ibid). This might cause that: '[T]he cultural artifact (to) become emblematic of a much wider political debate about whose version of history is recorded as the official one and whose is marginalized' (Mason 2006:20).

Furthermore, the importance of these visual and textual narratives is that they shape the public knowledge about the represented culture through displaying the material culture. Hooper-Greenhill observes: 'Museums are active in shaping knowledge; using their collection, they put together visual culture narratives which produce views of the past and thus of the present.

In displays and exhibitions, museums' condense, dislocate, reorder (fictionalise) and mythologise' (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 2). Therefore, museums: 'make statements about how

the world and its people, histories and cultures are conceptualised' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 48).

These narratives are based on selection process that includes choosing the most appropriate pieces to convey the message. In this regard Ravelli states: '[The selection process] is significant not only in terms of the literal representation of content ... but in terms of the approach to knowledge which is conveyed by the selection. All collections embody assumptions about 'knowledge and value'' (Ravelli 2006: 134; Pearce 1991: 137).

Hence, by visiting Islamic World Gallery in the British Museum, the visitors get exposed to British Museum's interpretation of Muslim cultures. However, displaying the objects is framed within the set, available options and depends on what the museum has in its collection. The history of collecting the objects heavily influences display options, as Hooper-Greenhill describes: 'The beliefs, attitudes and values which underpin the processes of acquisition become embodied in the collections... collections may have been acquired over long periods of time, but their intended trajectories will have been established from the first. Founding structures, with their ideological underpinnings, shape the displays that we see today' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000: 23). Therefore, any message inside the gallery should be also contextualized in terms of its collecting history and not only the subjectivity of curators.

In order to deconstruct the representational meaning in the Islamic Gallery this research asks: 'What is the exhibition 'about'? What view does it present of the subjects matter? What does the exhibition 'say'? Such representational meanings are conveyed primarily by what is 'in' the exhibition –the nature of the displays' (Ravelli 2006: 134). To uncover some representational meanings at the IG, this research will examine the approaches to displays and the function of the labels within it.

To start with the display, museums usually have two approaches: Old-style and New-style. Each has special characteristics, and according to Ravelli these are: "Old'-style approaches to content are curatorially driven, guided by strong distinctions between subjects and disciplines... Such distinctions are likely to be marked by clear separation of the displays, in terms of both their visual and linguistic content. This is the characteristic approach of the nineteenth-century, modernist museums. 'New'-style approaches are driven more by the emergence of 'value' or themes, in which a range of 'conventional' subject areas are brought together in the service of that value or theme... as these multiple perspectives brought together, the 'new' style is pushed

even further in the post-museum, to accommodate polysemous meanings, and to be critical and reflexive of the knowledge being constructed and conveyed' (Ravelli 2006: 135; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Witcomb 2003).

The development of various approaches to display was a consequence of the emergence of the New Museology and its application in the Post-museum. The main feature of Post-museum display is the Polysemia or semiotic excess, which means constructing the message: 'to contain a range of meanings that are designed to appeal to the known different audience segments. The balance appeal is carefully reviewed, in the knowledge that some people will see one thing and focus on one aspect, while others will pick up other messages' (Hooper-Greenhill 1995: 9).

In the representational meaning, tiny elements might construct it, such as repetition or variation of the same design element that implies continuity of the topic or moving on to a new idea: 'Simple elements of design, such as the repetition or variation of colour and materials to show continuity or separation of content, may be used to show connections and distinctions between knowledge areas' (Ravelli 2006: 135). These repetitions or variations in terms of the small units, creates the pathways inside the exhibition, organizational meaning and it could be used to represent for example chronological order, as Ravelli suggests: 'A reasonably clearly defined pathway types, giving rise to a linear sequence, will support chronological or linear relations between elements, and so will support such genres as historical recounts, or causal explanations' (ibid: 137). Therefore, for example all Iznik pottery in the Islamic Gallery is indicated as belonging to the same culture, the Ottomans.

There are relationships between the representational, interactional and organizational frameworks. The choices that are made in the organizational and interactional levels are reflected in the representational one. Ravelli elaborates on that saying:

'It is very interesting to note that some of the choices made in the interactional and organisational frameworks have important ramifications for meanings in the representational framework. For instance, the interactional meanings construed through the different types of display, positioning visitors to respond with varying degrees of activity or passivity, have an interesting potential correlation with the approach to knowledge which an exhibit represents. The more static displays suggest a correlation with knowledge as a form of ordering and classification, associated with relational process in the representational framework..., and thus corresponding to a more traditional, taxonomic approach to knowledge. In contrast, the more

active displays suggest a correlation with knowledge as a process and activity, associated with material processes which include the visitor, and thus presenting a different view of the way in which knowledge can be presented' (Ravelli 2006: 13).

And here the linkages between the three frameworks seem to work together to produce the meaning of an exhibition.

The final point about the representational meaning is the written word. These forms of meanings are constructed by the labels in the gallery, with respect to their different types and functions. It is the 'role' of curator to read, interpret the object and contextualize the collection for visitors, as Ravelli suggests: 'An intrinsic part of this communicative process is the museums' role to interpret these collections: to explain what it is the objects are meant to 'say'- why they have been chosen, what they reveal, what they relate to. Objects are 'always contextualised by words'; they do not speak for themselves' (Ravelli 2006: 59; Hooper-Greenhill 1994).

Sometimes labels become the only method that visitors can use to access knowledge about the object and it is the regulation of museums that does not give visitor more freedom, Serrell complains: 'We rarely hear anything and are usually forbidden to touch. Smelling anything is out of question. And that is why the words that are used to tell us about the objects displayed are of such critical importance. They must carry the burden of making us feel, hear, smell-yes, and even see- what we are looking at' (Serrell 1996: Vii). Baxandall does not agree that labels are 'descriptive': he considers they have an 'explanatory relation' and he explains that as: 'The interpretation offered by the label, therefore, is explanatory of the object in terms of cause... The label offers the name of the object ... [it] does signify that it is an object that plays a defined or established cultural role... The label also informs the viewer about the material used... The label also invokes an ancestor cult and the rule of such figures as this as protectors of ancestral remains' (Baxandall 1991: 35). It is not only an educational piece of information that is written about the objects, it reflects a deeper meaning of the object itself and the culture that it represents.

However, the label is also representative of curator's understanding of an object, and by exhibiting the label, again, the issue of controlling the meaning returns as Baxandall describes: 'exhibitor can accommodate [viewer as an agent] by seeking to control or direct viewer's mind in this space than by, as it were, enlarging the space' (Baxandall 1991: 40).Hooper-Greenhill

shares Baxandall's concern: 'The meaning of an exhibition and its artefacts are defined by the curator according to his or her agenda, without paying attention to the interests, desires, needs of visitors, or indeed non-visitors' (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 24). And this goes back to Ravelli's point about Old and New style of display.

In fact, as Baxandall (1991: 38) points out, there is an intellectual space between the label and the object. Apart from numerical statement of the objects' dimensions, the label: 'describes the exhibitor's thinking about the object or the part of his thinking he feels it to be his purpose to communicate to the viewer' (ibid).

Hence this information is merely the curatorial interpretation of an object and the produced representational meaning is not necessary applicable for all visitors. To escape this dilemma Baxandall suggests: 'one thing the exhibitor might do is to acknowledge in a practical way that he is only one of three agents in the field, and to acknowledge in a practical way that between the exhibitor's own label and the artifact is a space in which the viewer will act by his own lights to his own ends' (Baxandall 1991: 39).

This suggestion might reduce the influence of curatorial subjectivity and motivates active attitude of visitors toward their experience inside the museum, empowering them as an active agents in this process of communication.

2.4: Conclusion:

To sum up this research will apply the New Museology in its analysis of the Islamic Gallery in the British Museum. It considers it as a text, deriving the theoretical framework from the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by M.A.K Halliday (1978) as interpreted by Louise J. Ravelli 2006 in museum studies (Museum Text). This theory is viewed from social semiotic perspective of communication. It consists of three frameworks of meanings: the organizational meaning, which considers two levels, individual level of each case and the holistic level that looks at the exhibition as one unit. Also, it examines the pathways inside the gallery to check the process of conveying messages to the visitors while they move. The second framework is interactional one, which takes the Interactive Experience Model by Falk & Dierking 1992 and considers a discovery approach of it. This framework consists of three contexts: personal, social, and physical one. The third framework is the representational, which differentiates between two styles of representing cultures in museums, Old and New one. Additionally, and

pays attention to the labels as a medium of communication between curators, objects and visitors. The diagram below sets out the theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The chapter starts with stating the research approach and justifying its appropriateness of this process. It will then discuss the adopted methods, which were applied in collecting the data. The methods section is followed by a discussion of sampling the informants. Finally, this chapter will conclude with the ethical considerations of this research and a summary of the content of this chapter.

3.1: Introduction:

There are two main paradigms in social science: the quantitative and the qualitative research. In other words, the differences between them can be summarised as follows: ‘Quantitative research aims to show you what is happening. Qualitative research, on the other hand, sets out to tell you why it is happening. It is all about developing a detailed understanding of individuals’ views, attitudes and behaviours.’ (Moor 2006:141 emphasizes in the original). Quantitative research is associated with the normative or positivist paradigm that considers reality objective, unambiguous, and knowable. Consequently, human behaviour is measurable and it is a subject to theories, hypotheses that have to do with cause and effect and the methods for that are questionnaire, survey experiments. In contrast, qualitative or interpretive paradigm understands reality in relative terms, which is socially constructed and a subject to change or expansion. Therefore, it pays more attention to people’s contexts and how people see, experience and understand their world. (Creswell 2007; Denzin and Lincoln 2005)

Increasingly, researchers argue that the two paradigms are not mutually exclusive. Bryan argues that they are similar in data reduction, answering research questions, relating data analysis to the research literature and in their variation (Bryman 2008: 395). Other similarities lie in their treatment of frequency as a springboard for analysis, in their attempt to ensure that deliberate distortion does not occur, in their argument for the importance of transparency’ and they must address the question of error, and research methods should be appropriate to the research question (ibid). As a result, Walliman points out: ‘you are not forced, however, to make a choice between the two approaches in your research project. When appropriate, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research is possible’ (Walliman 2005:271). It is the research questions that determine the appropriateness of the paradigm.

This study will use a mixed methods approach. It is a research that combines: ‘research methods that cross the two research strategies’ (Bryman 2008:603). Combining both methods

ensures that the research comes closer to what is termed ‘Completeness’ defined as: ‘a more complete answer to a research question or set of questions can be achieved by including both quantitative and qualitative methods. It implies that the gaps left by one method ... could be filled by another’ (Bryman 2008:612).

A mixed methods approach is necessary to interrogate the three intersecting ‘actors’ in this research. The first is the curators who design and implement the process of communication inside the museum. In order to understand their design and its application, and hence it is important to interview them. The second ‘actors’ are the visitors, the ones who receive these messages. With respect to the variety of their receptions, from active to passive one, it is necessary to ask a considerable number of visitors to clarify some trends among them. A questionnaire (quantitative method) best fits this need and is less time-consuming for the visitors than interviewing. Finally the ‘actor’ who connects and mediates the interaction between the first two is the Islamic material cultures themselves and their display. This is approached qualitatively, through personal observation and textual analyses. Although a mixed methods paradigm will be applied, the researcher prefers to adopt, as far as possible the constructivist-interpretivist position. Constructivist assumes: ‘assumes a relative ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (knower and respondent cocreate understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures’ (Denzin & Lincoln 2008:32). And interpretivist means: ‘It is predicated upon the view if that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action’ (Bryman 2008:16).

3.2: Research Design: Case study

A case study design was chosen for this study. Case studies are used when the researcher wishes to examine a phenomenon in depth, in a ‘bounded system’ (Stake 2000) in which constitutes a complete ‘whole’ unit. It uses ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) to examine a phenomenon in its naturally occurring context, using multiple data collection tools. The case study can be unique or representative, and the researcher has no control over the events s/he is examining. Moor (2006) observes that:

‘Case studies are used when it is necessary to develop a detailed understanding of what is happening in complex circumstances. Often a large scale survey will not provide the depth of

understanding required. It then becomes necessary to look in detail at what is happening in a smaller number of instances or cases. This provides greater depth at the expense of breadth.’ (Moor 2006:xiii)

The single case study is the Islamic Gallery (Room 34) in the British Museum. The aim is not only to understand in detail the making meaning process that takes place in this gallery, but also to relate this understanding with the relevant literature and to contextualise the gallery within the body of museum studies, which concerns with material culture and their curators and visitors, specifically the Islamic material culture.

Case study design raises a concern over external validity or generalizability. Bryman argues: ‘How can a single case possibly be representative so that it might yield findings that can be applied more generally to other cases?’ (Bryman 2008:55). However, this study does not claim that the Islamic collection in the British Museum is representative of the Islamic material culture. It suggests that there might be some commonalities between this collection and others in terms of making meaning. Thus, although this research focuses only on one, unique case study: the limitations of time and research scope would have resulted in a less focused, more superficial study had another case been included.

3.3: Research methods and Data Collections:

This section will discuss the methods adopted in this research. These methods are questionnaire, interview, observer-as-participant, and text analysis. The language, used, was mainly English although Arabic was used where appropriate. The researcher was a volunteer during the fieldwork with the BM and that allowed him space to conduct his work inside the gallery. The researcher’s legitimate presence in the BM facilitated the process of distributing the questionnaire, but at the same time it did not include any other commitments which preserved the independence of the researcher and research.

The next section looks at the data collection tools. The order followed in listing and discussing the methods echoes the chronological order of their application in the field.

3.3.1: Questionnaire:

The method of a self-completion questionnaire with a personal delivery was used for collecting the data from the visitors of the Islamic Gallery in the BM. Two considerations guided the use of questionnaire. Firstly, it enabled a greater coverage of responses so as to assist in deriving

some general trends of visitors' experiences during their visits to the gallery (Moore 2006:120). Secondly is to give the visitors a voice in this research and to reduce the influence of the researcher. Clough & Nutbrown comment on that: 'Questionnaires allow researchers to survey a population of subjects, with little or no personal interaction and with the aim of establishing a broad picture of their experiences or views' (Clough & Nutbrown 2007:144). Accordingly, adopting this method is seen as informative and suitable for collecting the data from the visitors.

Two questionnaires were used. The first was designed by the researcher drawing on the literature survey and three pilot studies of three visitors of the researcher's acquaintances. And the second was the general questionnaire that is used by the BM for all their visitors and which was adapted to include the research questions. Both questionnaires were piloted as Walliman's suggestion (2005:282).

The down side of using questionnaires lies in the inability to probe responses in-depth. Unlikely to be According to Moore: 'People tend to fill [the questionnaires] in quickly, giving an immediate rather than a considered response. So use them for building up a broad picture rather than exploring issues in depth' (Moore 2006:120). Therefore, visitors were given options to choose instead of writing them, which did not take more than 12 minutes.

The previous weakness of using the questionnaire raises another important issue, which is the way of delivering the questionnaire personally or by post. In this study, the questionnaire was delivered personally to get most of the advantages that Walliman mentions as: 'respondents can be helped to overcome difficulties with the questions, and that personal persuasion and reminders by the researcher can ensure a high response rate. The reason why some people refuse to answer the questionnaire can also be established. And there is a possibility of checking on responses if they seem odd or incomplete. The personal involvement of the researcher enables more complicated questionnaire to be devised.' (Walliman 2005:282). Concerning the number of people who refused to answer the questionnaire, they were 41 out of 156 visitors approached. This was for reasons related to language limitation (19 of them were unable to communicate effectively in English or in Arabic) or for time limitation (22 of them did not have the time to fill the questionnaire in). The questionnaire consists of three parts: quantitative data, qualitative data, and demographics (see appendix 3).

3.3.2: Interview:

The second method of collecting the data in this research was the use of semi-structured interviews, which was applied with the curators. This area represents the authoritative part of the communication process in the museum. Therefore, it had to be discovered in depth to get to know what Mason refers to as: '[curators'] knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions [that] are meaningful property of social reality which the research questions are designed to explore' (Mason 2002:63). This method of interview was helpful in the sense that it allowed the researcher to have an access to the source of power in the making meaning process in the museum, the curators. Moreover, it enabled the researcher to: 'judge the quality of the responses of the subjects, to notice if a question has not been properly understood, and to assure and encourage the respondent to be full in his/her answers' (Walliman 2005:284). Accordingly, conducting interviews was a suitable tool for collecting data from the curators.

The conducted interviews were all Semi-structured, meaning that: '[The researcher has] some predetermined topics and questions, but [he] also leave[s] some space for following up interesting topics when they arise' (Rugg & Petre 2007:138). The conducted interviews were neither very strict and controlled nor very fluid nor uncontrolled (Moore 2006:141). All these characteristics of the semi-structured interview motivated the researcher to choose it rather than other types of interviews.

Although, the semi-structured interview is a straightforward method to answering the research questions, it also has, as a qualitative method, some disadvantages. Some of these disadvantages, as explained by Mason, were that the qualitative interview is: 'difficult intellectually, practically, socially, and ethically' (Mason 2002:82). Moreover, this kind of interview is: 'greedy of resources: it is heavily consuming of skills, time and effort, both in the planning and conducting of the interviews themselves, and in the analysis of the products'(ibid). On the basis of these demands of the qualitative interview, the number of conducted interviews was relatively small. They were only two interviews with the curators of the Islamic Gallery in the BM. (for interview's content see appendix 5)

3.3.3: Observer-as-participant:

This method was adopted to give fresh data and live observations of what is happening in the gallery. It was actually dedicated for collecting data about the display itself since this research

is concerned with the quality of the display of the Islamic material culture as well. It was also employed for observing the visitors closely, their interaction with the objects, their sense of enjoyment, and their behaviour in the time when the fieldwork was conducted. The method of observation was useful in the sense that it can show whether people act in accordance with what they say or intend or not as (Walliman 2005:287). For example, this method helped the researcher to compare what the visitor mentioned in the questionnaire with his/her actual behaviour in the museum in terms of the estimation of the time of their visit and their relation with the surrounding. Thus this method supported the other used methods in this research.

This type of observation, observer-as-participant, indicates that the researcher is: ‘mainly an interviewer. There is some observation but very little of it involves any participation.’ (Bryman 2008:410). It was necessary to have the internal perspective of the visitors’ visit to the museum in addition to the external one. However, this method has its own weakness reflected in the certainty of the collected data. It gives a significant amount of data, which needs to be verified (Rugg & Petre 2007:110-111) and very time consuming (Walliman 2005:288). Therefore, the researcher’s use of this method of observation was limited to the display, display coherence, and some certain aspects of the visitors’ experiences in the gallery.

3.3.4: Textual analyses:

The labels are considered the tangible channel between curators and visitors of museums. They are important, because they offer instructions or information to the visitors before and during their visit to the gallery. Thus, they are an important means of communication and are worthy of study. This study is interested in the processes by which these texts are produced and consumed (Mason 2002:106). They are seen by the researcher as a ‘form of expression or representation of relevant elements of the social world, [so he] can trace or read aspects of the social world through them.’ (ibid)

Although textual analysis is necessary for this study, its weaknesses should not be ignored. According to McKee, it lies in the fact that: ‘there is no single correct representation of any part of the world and, in the same way, there is no single correct interpretation of any text’ (McKee 2009:63). Hence any textual analysis is subjective. The researcher does not claim that his work is totally objective. No social research can make such a claim or ignore the researcher’s subjectivity. However, he used this method for triangulating his findings with other methods in this research.

3.4: Sample selection strategies:

3.4.1: The Visitors:

The selection of the visitors was based on Random Cluster Sampling. This type of sampling could be understood as: ‘cases in the population form clusters by sharing one or some characteristics but are otherwise as heterogeneous as possible, e.g. travellers using main railway station. They are all train travellers, with each cluster experiencing a distinct station, but individuals vary as to age, sex, nationality, wealthy, social status.’ (Walliman 2005:277). They consisted of 156 persons. 41 did not accept to fill in the questionnaire (19 persons because of language limitation, 22 persons because of time limitation). Those who accepted to take part in the research were 115 persons. 105 used English for filling in the questionnaire while only 10 used Arabic. The number of the considered questionnaires for this study was 100 who were fully completed. They were filled in by 53 females and 47 males from different places of the world. 12 of the total number were above 60 years old, 26 of them were between 35-60 years old, 56 persons were between 18-35 years old, and 6 of them were under 18 years old. Moreover, three of the visitors were in organised groups, 31 were alone, 6 were with both adults and children, 2 were only with children, and 58 with adults only. There was no sampling based on the sex, age, race, language, or other pre-defined factors as the researcher approached people. However, there was a tendency to approach the people who moved slowly in the galley and avoiding as if they had run out of time. This part of fieldwork took place the 15th, 16th, 18th, 19th and the 20th of July 2010. It took 2-4 hours per day and was conducted at a different time of the day each time. One day during the week-end was also factored in to observe any difference in the size of the crowd or pattern of behaviour amongst the visitors.

3.4.2: The Curators:

The interviews were sampled theoretically; the interviewees were with the curators of the Islamic Gallery. The theoretical type of sampling is concerned with: ‘constructing a sample ... which is meaningful theoretically and empirically, because it builds in certain characteristics or criteria which help to develop and test [the researcher’s] theory or ... argument’ (Mason 2002:124). They were conducted in the British Museum. The first was held in the Islamic Gallery on the 3rd of August 2010 at 16:00 PM and it lasted for 37 minutes. The second took place in the study room of the Middle East department on the 10th of August 2010 at 15:00 PM and it lasted for 79 minutes. Both of them were conducted based on one to one interview. They were recorded after getting the consent of the interviewees.

3.4.3: Texts:

The chosen texts were sampled as Quota Samples, these are defined as: ‘different from random probability samples. In a quota sample [texts] do not have an equal probability of being selected. Instead, you decide in advance which types of [texts] you want to survey and how many of each type, and you then set about finding them.’ (Moore 2006:118). The chosen texts for this study were the ones used in the gallery itself. The first kind is the introductory panels that include information about Islam and Muslim material culture in general and about their Muslim history, two texts. The second kind is three short labels that offer detailed information about three objects in the collection such as their date, source, technique, interpretation, etc.

3.5: Research Ethics:

This research is committed to follow the approved Research Ethics Checklist at AKU-ISMC in the 19th of April 2010 that is housed in the Student Affairs Office. All the participants in this research were given an idea about the nature and the aim of this research beforehand. They also signed the Consent Form attached to the questionnaire (see appendix 1). In the cases where the participants were under 18, the consent of their parents was taken. Moreover, the name of the researcher and his supervisor with their emails were written on the consent form in case the informants had any concerns or they decide to withdraw their participations from this research later. In addition to, all the informants were informed about how their participations will be handled and who would have the access to their contributions. The visitors were not asked for their names in the questionnaires. Moreover, the visitors’ given contributions were mentioned anonymously in the research. Finally, all the research data will be stored confidentially.

3.6: conclusion:

This chapter began by defining the research paradigm and justified the mixed methods paradigm, the necessity of adopting it for conducting this research. It then discussed the design of the research as case study, which took place in the Islamic Gallery in the British Museum. It elaborated the methods used to collect the data. The fourth section focused on sampling methods. Finally the ethical considerations of this research were presented. This chapter paves the way for presenting the collected data in the next chapter, which is the findings chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1: Introduction:

Having established the methodology and the methods of collecting data previously, this chapter represents the data. It is divided into three sections: the first relates to the organisation of the Islamic Galley (IG) at the British Museum. The second focuses on the visitors to the IG who participated in the questionnaire. The third section looks at the IG's curators and their roles in telling the stories related to the collection before the chapter is concluded.

4.2: The exhibition

The Islamic Gallery (IG), John Addis Gallery, or Islamic World Gallery, is located in the far north-eastern corner of the British Museum in Room 34. Visitors can reach the gallery through two ways, (see fig.4.1). Each gives a different experience, especially for First-time (Falk & Dierking 1992 in 2.3.2) visitors. The first route comes from the main block of the BM (and the main entrance in Great Russell Street to the rest of the museum) and exits using Montague Place entrance. Approached this way, the IG is the last gallery to the right of the visitor, which means the visitors arrive there at the end of their visit. In other words they might not have enough time to have in-depth visit to the IG. The second route goes in the opposite direction, starting from the Montague Place entrance and going inside the main block of the museum. Approached this way the Room 34 is the first to be visited to the left of the visitor.

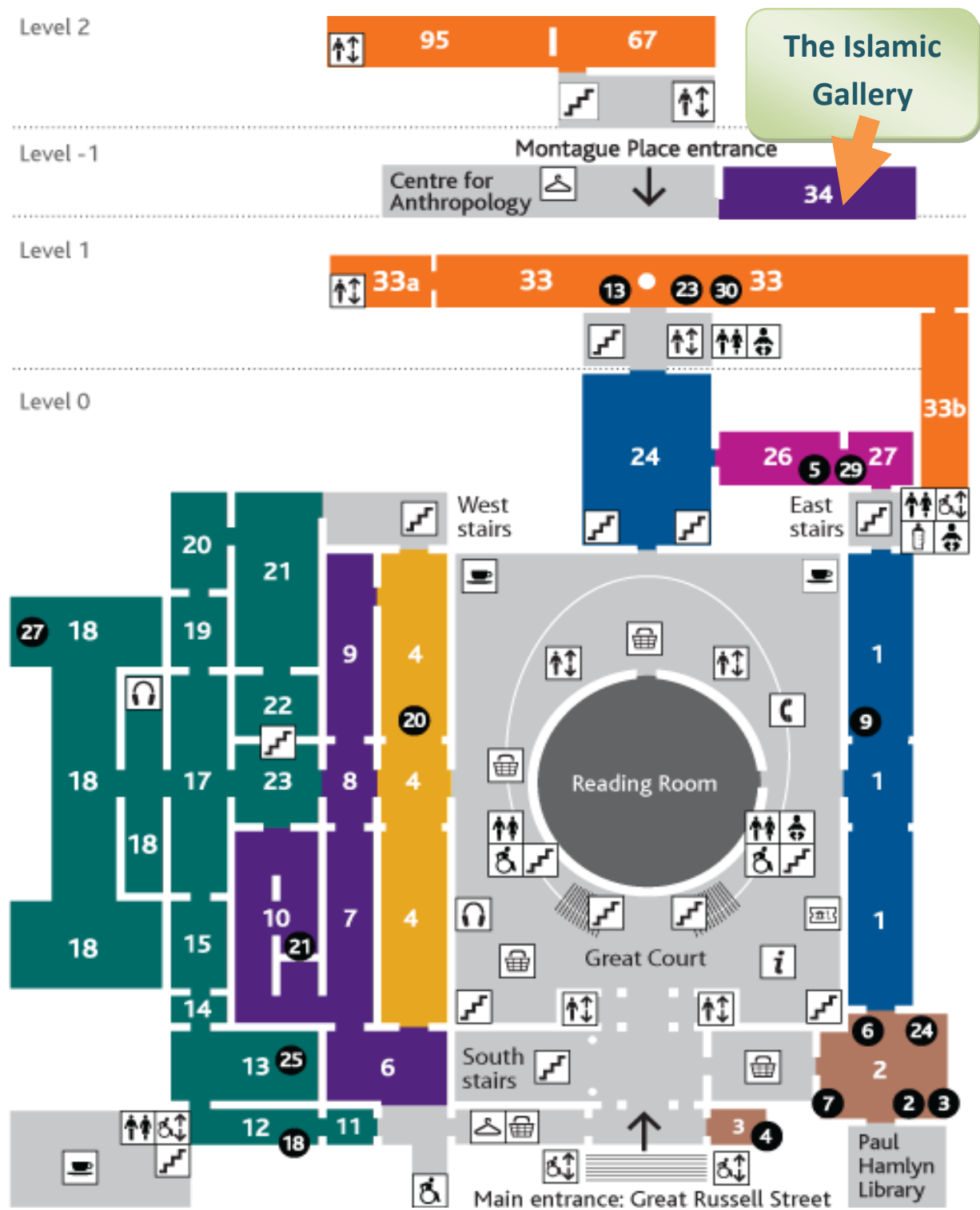


Fig. 4.1 British Museum Plane and the location of Islamic Gallery within it, available at: http://www.britishmuseum.org/visiting/floor_plans_and_galleries

The choice of the route implies two intentions in visiting the IG. The first might indicate visitors' eagerness to visit the rest of the museum, and hence paying less attention to the first galleries including the Islamic one. In contrast, the second might demonstrate the visitor's desire to visit this gallery in particular. These deductions are derived from asking the visitors about the time spent in the BM before reaching the IG and how long they intended staying there:

- 1- Time spent in the Museum before arriving to the Gallery varied from 0 to 300 minutes, producing an average of 91.62 minutes in the sample studied.
- 2- Intended staying time in the museum after visiting John Addis Gallery varied from 0 to 360 minutes giving an average of 139.74 minutes.

The numbers indicate that both ways are used and there was a tendency in the sample to choose the second route (60%) more than the first one (40%), as fig.4.2. In this regard, it should be mentioned that the questionnaire took place inside the Gallery. Therefore those who did not enter or reach IG are not included in this sample. This might be one limitation of generalizing these results to the rest of the visitors in the BM.

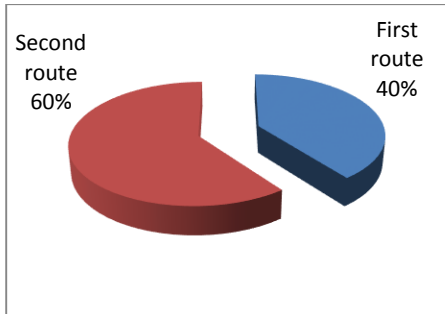


Fig. 4.2 Chosen Routes for visiting the IG

The IG has only one entrance for visitors, which is at the same time the only regular exit, and other two fire exits at the end of the Gallery. At the entrance to the gallery the introductory panel says:

The John Addis Islamic gallery

The objects in this gallery date from the seventh century AD to the present day. They show the breadth and richness of Islamic culture from Spain to South East Asia.

The first part of the gallery explores the Islamic faith, art, calligraphy, science and Islam's prominence amongst world cultures. The lower part of the gallery provides a geographical and chronological coverage of the history and art of Islamic lands. There is also a changing display area dedicated to works on paper from the Islamic world.

Fig. 4.3 Introductory Panel in the IG

Fig. 4.3 gives an idea of the IG's structure that is illustrated simply, without any added meaning, in fig. 4.4, while in fig. 4.5 cases' numbers were added that will explain more about IG's content later.

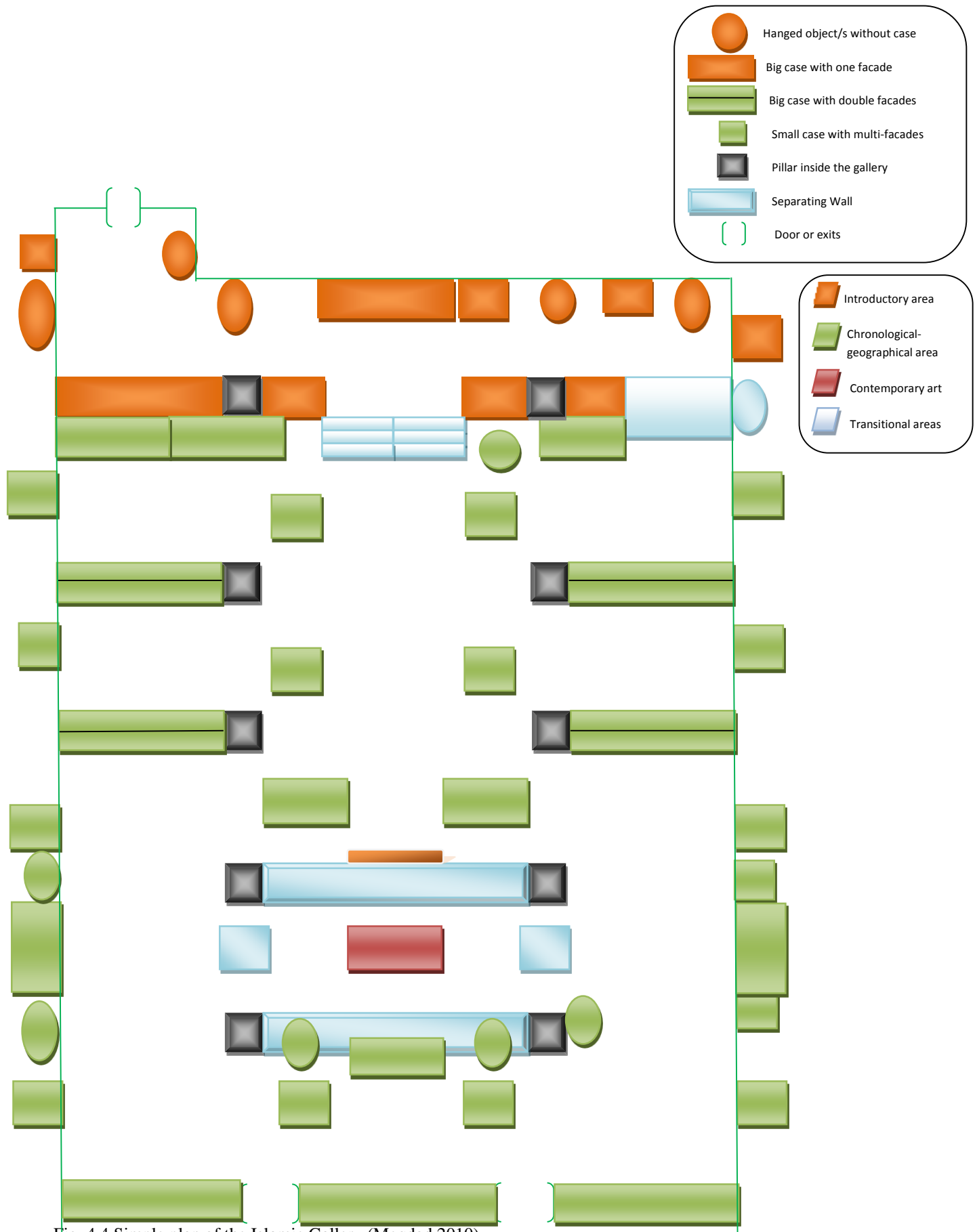


Fig. 4.4 Simple plan of the Islamic Gallery (Meqdad 2010)

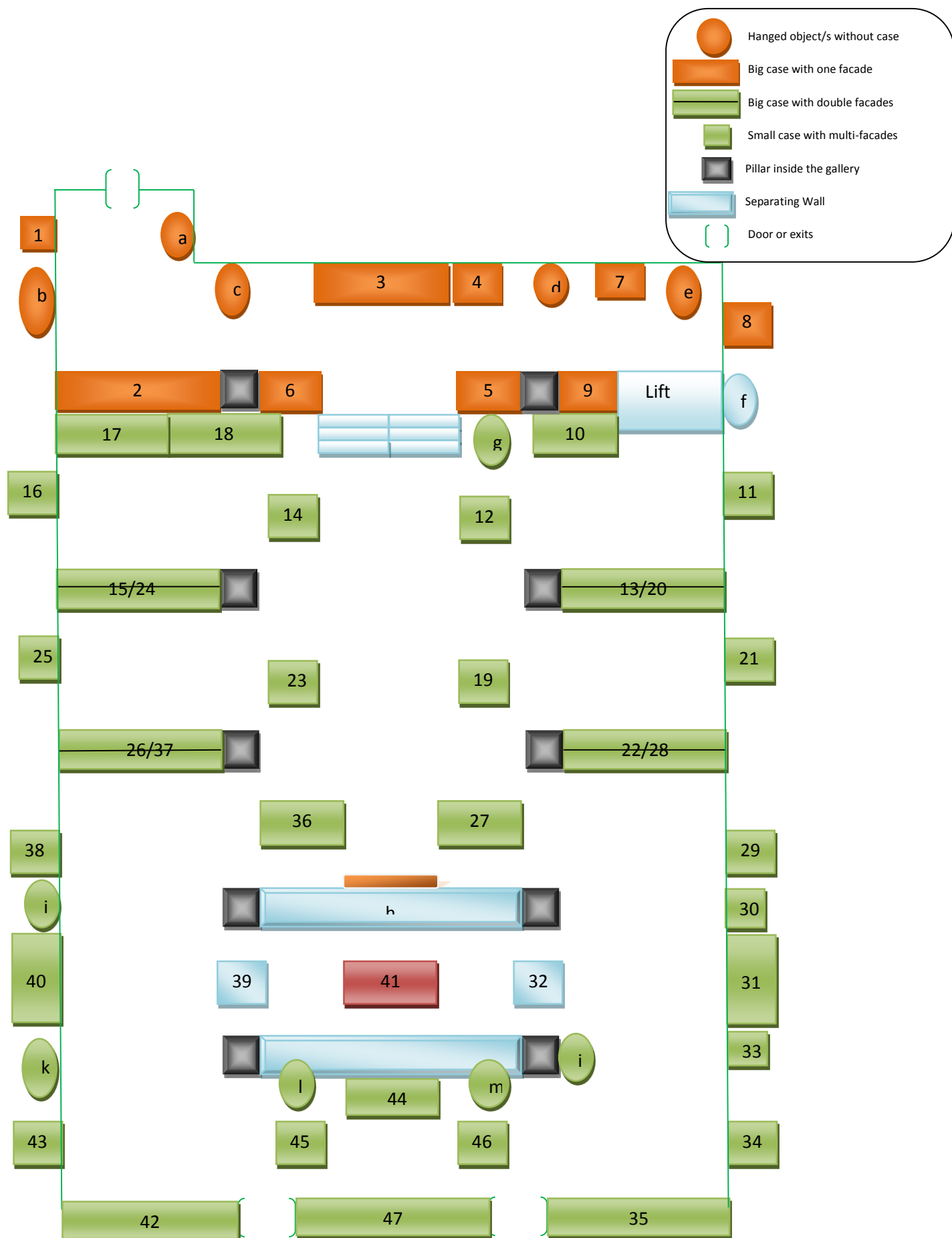


Fig. 4.5 Plan of the Islamic Gallery with cases' numbers (Meqdad 2010)

The IG is a gallery that consists of 47 cases: four of which have double-sided façades. It also has thirteen places where objects without cases are hung. The Islamic collection in the British Museum according to Heath, consists of: ‘100,000 individual pieces and Iranian material has a significant presence with over 20,000 pieces from excavations carried out in Siraf alone’ (Heath 2007:74). Heath states that: Iran and Turkey are the origin of the majority of pieces in the collection, Egypt and Syria are next, followed by India and Iraq. Spain, Afghanistan and other uncertain origin of pieces from Syria/Egypt rank last (ibid: 76). It is possible that some objects might have been added since 2007.

With respect to the lighting system in the IG and transitional areas, there are eight windows behind the small side-cases. They provide natural light during the day time. Artificial electrical lighting system inside the gallery and cases is used as well. Additionally, there is a stair that separates the introductory area from the chronological-geographical area. This transition from one space to another (coloured blue in the plans) also is provided for people with special needs by a wheelchair lift in the south-eastern corner of the first area, which adds to the variety of visitors who can access the gallery regardless of their circumstances.

Organisationally, the IG consists of three areas. The first one is the introductory area (coloured brown in the plans), which has nine cases thematically displayed. They are titled as: 1- The Qur’an 2-The mosque and the Qur’an 3- The early centuries of Islam: AD. 600-1000 4- Carved wooden door-panel 5- Lustre from the Islamic world to Britain 6- Embroidered felt cloak 7- The Arabic script 8- Islamic science 9- China and Islam. This area also includes six hung objects that are: a) Crested grave cover b) Stone-paste tile frieze c) Limestone capital d) Part of foundation inscription, Columnar tombstone, Proconnesian marble e) Ninety nine names of God f) Inscription frieze, carved wooden panel. The themes that are covered in this part are: Islamic faith, cultural continuity before and after Islam, contemporary art, calligraphy, science and Islamic relationships with China and Europe.

The second area of the gallery (coloured green in the plans) is constructed according to both chronological and geographical order. In order to make it easier, fig. 4.6 explains the spaces that is divided into by the cases. Spaces 1, 2, and 3 are explained in the introductory area. Space 4 is the ‘Fatimid period, from Syria, Egypt, and Sicily AD 950-1250’. It consists of the cases 10, 11, 12, 13 and g. Space 5 forms the ‘Eastern Iran and Afghanistan AD 850- 1100’, which includes the cases 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. Space 6 is from ‘Mamluk period in Syria and Egypt

AD 1250- 1517', it contains cases 19, 20, 21, and 22. Space 7 is related to 'Iran and Central Asia in the Mongol period (Il-Khanid), the descendents of Timur (Tamerlane), and early Safavids periods AD 1220-1576', which includes cases 23, 24, 25, and 26. Spaces 8 and 9 constitute the 'Ottoman Empire section in Turkey, Egypt, and Syria AD 1517- 1923', which has cases from 27 to 33. Space 10 has two cases: case 34 continues/extends the coverage in spaces 8 and 9 while case 35 is about 'Islamic Spain AD 1300- 1500'. Space 11, in the middle of the gallery, includes 'Iran under the later Safavid AD 1576-1722', which has cases 37, 38, and j. Although case 36 belongs to the space 11 spatially, its contents belong to spaces 8 and 9 from the Ottoman Empire. Space 12 is related to 'Qajar in Iran AD 1779-1924' and has cases 39-40. Space 14 is about 'Mughal India AD 1526-1858', containing cases 42 and 43. The last space, in the second area, is the 15th that is formed by The Deccan and Bengal AD. 1500- 1900 in the case 47 and 3 other thematic cases that are titled as: 'Islamic coins', 'Magic and divination in the Islamic World - Astrology in the Islamic World', 'Islamic arms and armour', and l and m.

Finally, the central part of the chronological-geographical area constitutes the third organisational area (coloured red in the plans). This part of the gallery, space 13, includes the section of art on paper from the contemporary Islamic collection. It has case 41 and the separation walls that are used to display this kind of art under a controlled light system. The exhibition in this part often changes annually, it is the live section that reflects the policy of changing the display periodically in the IG. At the same time, it offers the visitors a different environment from the rest of the IG through its system of low artificial lighting, the banning of photographing, the carpet on the floor, and the sense of calmness inside it. In other words, visitors experience a distinct transition, from the second area to the third one, as soon as they enter this section.

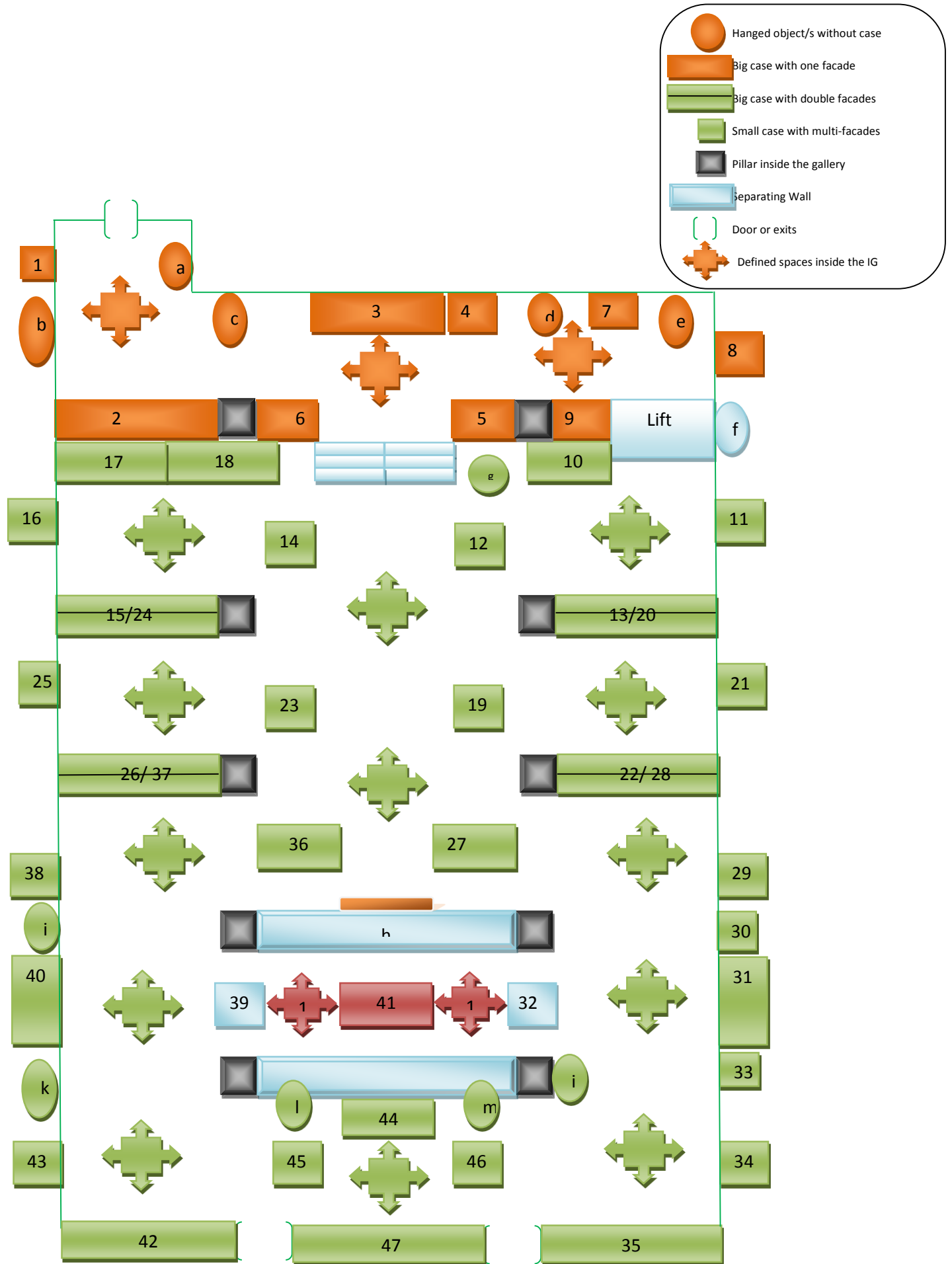


Fig. 4.6 Plan of the Islamic Gallery with the spaces defined by cases (Meqdad 2010)

All the previous data shows the components of the display within the IG. Based on that, the structure of the pathways is presented in fig. 4.7. Following arrows forms what is called a 'comb' style (Ravelli 2006; Hooper-Greenhill 1994 in 2.3.1). Although the cases are numbered indicating a certain sequence (thematic or chronological-geographical), there is no obligation to follow a specific pathway. At the same time, there are some points that push the visitor to decide in accordance with their interests, such as spaces 2, X, Y, 9, 10, and 12. This gallery is organized according to two methods. The first one is a thematic display in the introductory part. The second method is chronological-geographical display that is applied in the second part after the stairs. In this section, the centred structured display is adopted as well. The nucleus is space 13, where the visitor can feel that sense through the system of lighting, blocking two sides with the separation walls and the other sides with cases 32 and 39, and having case 41 in the middle that gives its content a feeling of preciousness. The rest is organised semi-structurally in a way that the visitor can choose between following the chronology from the early Islam to the present day or the geography were the left side of the visitor entrancing (northern side) has objects from the Western part of Islamic world: Syria, Egypt, Turkey and Spain; and the right side (southern one) has objects from Iran, central Asia and India.

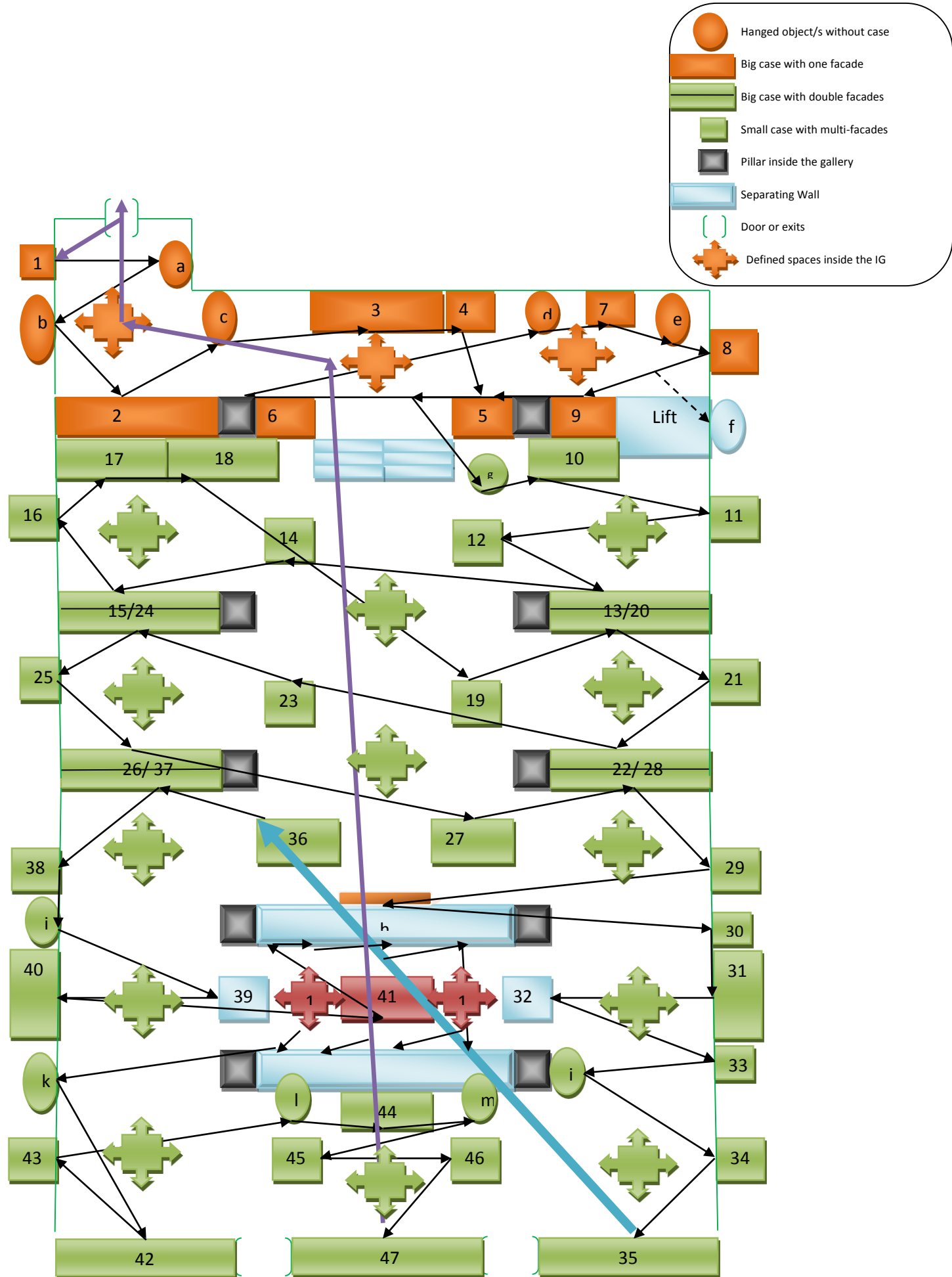







Fig. 4.7 Supposed pathways in the IG (Meqdad 2010)

Although the pathways inside the gallery facilitate a smooth movement for visitors, some gaps appear in some points, for example: moving between the cases 5 to 6 to 7, where the visitor has to move as following numerically between spaces:

2 (case 4)  2 (case 5)  2 (case 6)  3 (case 7-8-9)  2  X

A second example of these gaps is in the space 10 where the visitor should go back to the middle of the gallery, space 11, if s/he wants to follow the cases' numbers. The lack of instructing signs in the space 10 makes it difficult to guess the place of the space 11. Meanwhile, the chronological order makes the movement from the case 35 to the case 47 reasonable, because they have a chronological sequence. This situation confuses the visitor and at the same time makes him/her choose the route they think of as a solution of the conflict between chronological and geographical sequence of the cases.

In the previous examples the visitor is put in a position of confusion rather than simply asked to make a decision, because in the first example visitor might question the justification of having case 6 in the introductory part, while contemporary art occupies a separate section in Space 13. There is also another contemporary photograph in space 15 (object m). There is not the same smooth movement here as in the rest of the IG, where the transition from one space to another occurs once and not many times as it does in this case. Even though the second example follows chronological continuity, it too presents an unexpected geographical rupture (in moving from the far West, Spain, to the far East in India).

The second issue relating to the organisation of the display in IG is the individual level of the object and the case (Greenblatt 1991 in 2.3.1). Two examples demonstrate this, the first is case 43 and case 6. Case 43 contains a Jade Terrapin from Mughal India (1699-1605), from Allahabad (see Fig. 4.8) (Appendixes 2). This jade terrapin is exhibited in a small case alone on a glass shelf. The height of the shelf is less than 100 cm. Under this shelf there is a mirror to reflect the underside of the object and to allow visitors a complete view. The lighting is natural, from the window behind it. This object is considered one of the most visited objects in the gallery. Although the dimensions are not mentioned numerically, a reference is made to its naturalistic and realistic size. The label describes the object's context: origin, date, How it was made. On the other hand, the historical context is presented as well in this label. This label focuses more on the object where the object and its context are the centre of the label.

The second example is case 6 containing Iranian embroidered felt cloak. It is hung in the case at height less than 180 cm. It is introduced to the visitors by the label in Fig 4.9(Appendix 2). This object is interpreted in terms of its context '*The piece reflects the artist's memories growing up in Tehran during the revolution and until the 1980s at the height of the Iran-Iraq war*' '*signifying the keys to paradise*'. This provides a window to that historical context and an insight to the artistic perspective of that political environment without giving enough details about the object itself.

The last point is the uniqueness of the Islamic collection in the BM. In answering a question about the policy of acquisition in the last 50 years, the curator A emphasized this uniqueness by including modern and contemporary Middle Eastern artistic works, please see Curator A:1 (appendix 2). Therefore, curators' perception of collection's exceptionality is centred in the changeable section of the IG, which includes the modern and contemporary paintings of Muslim artists.

4.3: The visitors:

This section will present data related to the visitors in this research. It will focus on three contexts related to visiting the IG (Falk & Dierking 1992 in 2.3.2): firstly, the personal context (personal agenda) that includes: timing of the visit, prior intention of visit, the frequency, the reason/s behind the visit (the BM and especially the IG), their perceptions of their knowledge about the collection, and some demographic data. The second context is the social one that relates to the social accompany during the visit. The third is the physical one that defines the visitors' relationship with the physicality of the gallery.

4.3.1: Personal context:

Based on the timings by the visitors, the following table shows the average time spent at the gallery:

Time spent in the BM before filling the questionnaire	91.61905 minutes
Intended staying time in the BM after filling the questionnaire	139.6635 minutes
Spent time in the IG before filling the questionnaire	25.66346 minutes
Intended staying time in the IG after filling the questionnaire	29.28846 minutes

Fig. 4.10.a Categories of measuring time of visit to the IG

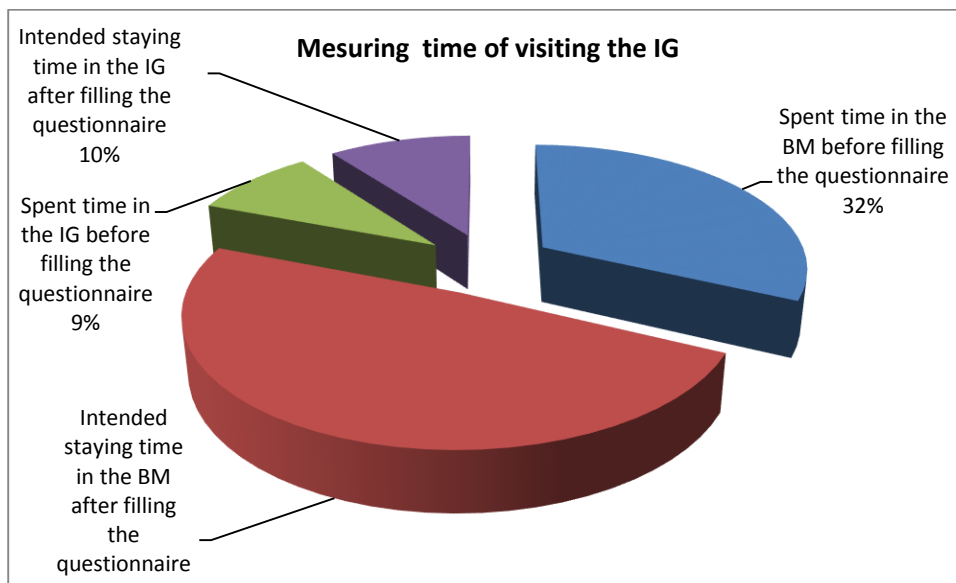


Fig. 4.10.b. Measuring time of visiting the IG

Fig. 4.10.a and b show that the average time spent visiting the BM is 231.28 minutes. Out of that, 54.95 minutes are dedicated to visiting the Islamic Gallery, about 23.76 %. However, it should be noted that this percentage represents only the people who visited the IG and does not include the rest of BM's visitors. With respect to the intention to visit the gallery, intention prior to the visit: 62% intended to visit the IG, 36% were wandering in, and 2% did not answer this question, as Fig. 4.11 demonstrates.

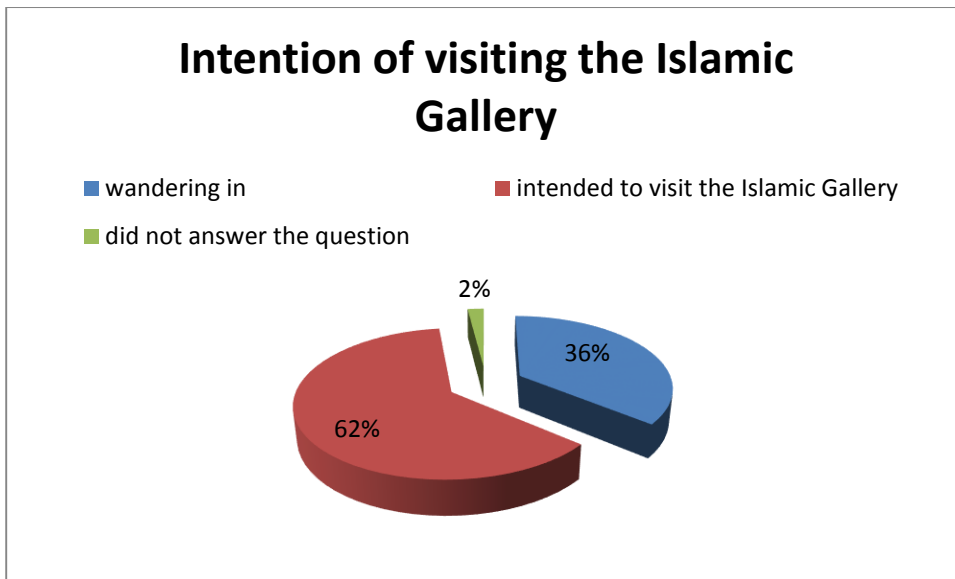


Fig.4.11. the intention of visiting IG

In other words, the majority of the visitors, 62%, were attracted to the IG and were curious to see its objects. Fulfilling this curiosity was what drew them to the IG. However, 36% came to the gallery without any prior intention of having exposure to such knowledge.

The data was further categorised according to the frequency of visits to the BM. The questionnaire asked them to categorise their current visit in terms of their habits. It was divided into five categories: a- first visit (56%) b- not the first visit in the current year (14%) c- not the first visit in the last 1-2 years (11%) d- not the first visit in the last 2-5 years (10%) e- they had visited the IG before 5 years (9%). These percentages are presented in Fig.4.12.

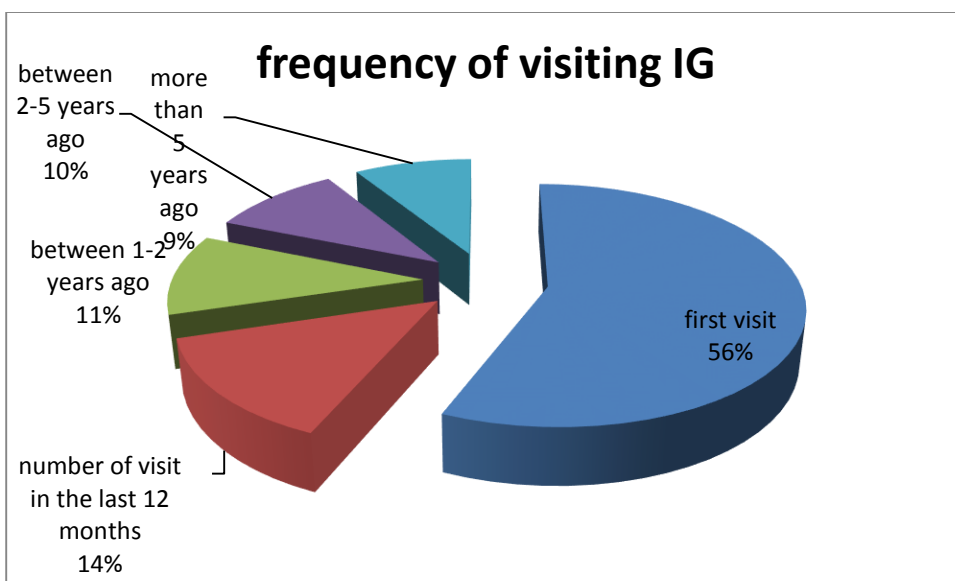


Fig.4.12. Frequency of visits to the IG

Fig.4.12 reveals two trends, which have no big difference between them, just 6%. In other words, this museum is able to attract its visitors to explore it and similarly has the power to make their first visit a habit or at least frequent, 56% came to explore while the rest repeated the visit.

Recognising that the frequency of visits might be connected to reasons other than a wish to see only the collections in the BM, visitors were asked about reasons for visiting the BM, whether it was: to see specific gallery or exhibit, a general visit, attending a tour, talk, or special event, visiting the shop, visiting the cafe, meeting friends, or other reasons. They responded as shown in the Fig.4.13.

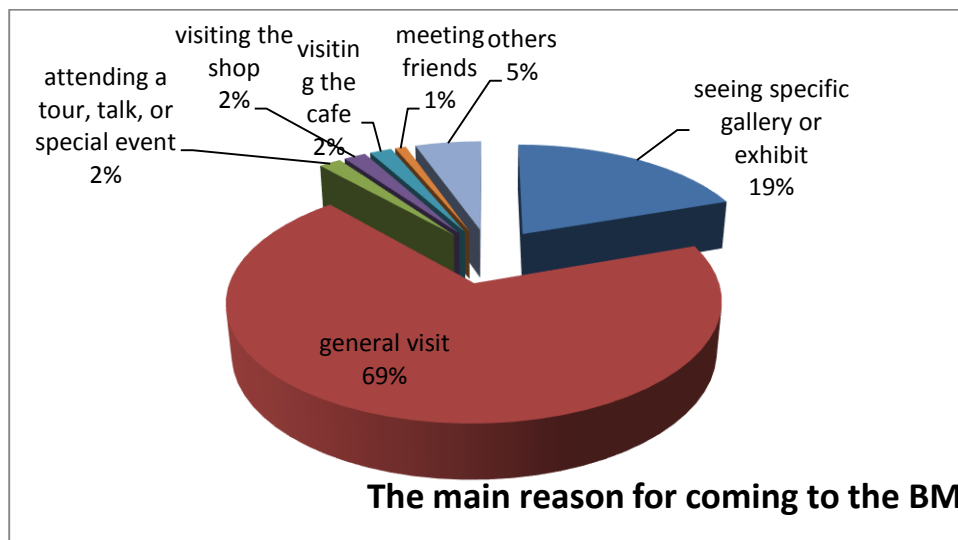


Fig.4.13 the main reason for visiting the BM

19% of the visitors came to see specific galleries (8% of them came especially to see the IG), and in mind a specific goal for their visit. Also, another 2% came for a different specific intellectual reason such as attending talk, tour, or a specific event. On the other hand, some visitors had social reasons for their visit: 1% to meet a friend, 2% to go to the cafe, 2% to go to the BM shop. These categories show a clear goal-oriented visit to the BM an intellectual or social. However, 69% had an exploratory visit without a pre-set, clear agenda. Therefore, they are prepared to communicate and ready to negotiate making-meaning, which is proposed by the BM's staff.

More specifically, the visitors were asked to identify their specific aim in visiting the Islamic Gallery. The reasons are listed in the Fig.4.14.a (appendix 2), each reason is linked with the percentage of people who stated it.

The questionnaire revealed three categories of reasons for visiting the IG. The first category representing the highest percentages, 70-78 %, was for pleasure and a personal or intellectual interest, to get exposure to knowledge about Muslim cultures, or to enjoy an aesthetic experience. The second category, 28-35%, came for social gatherings, educational purposes, self-identification and for emotional experience, to stimulate creativity, or relieving stress. The third category, 8-17%, of the visitors who visited the IG, came for very specific and focused aims, either for academic-professional interest or for emotional-linking experience with their origin (identity or culture). The fig.4.15.b shows the distribution of these percentages.

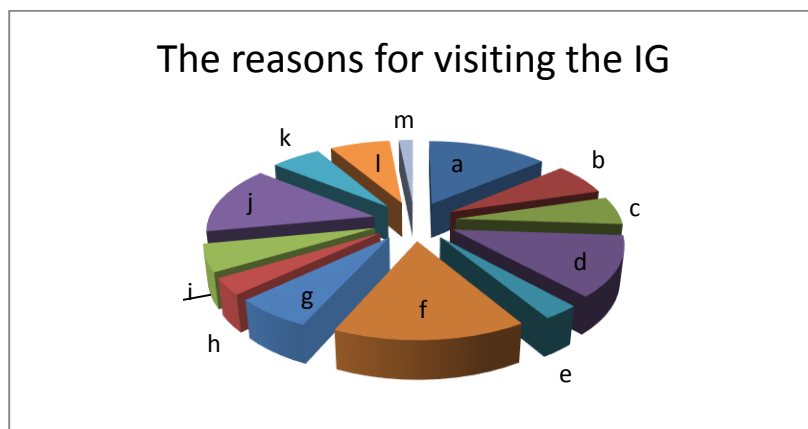


Fig.4.15.b reasons for visiting the IG

As a part of the personal context, the level of knowledge about the displayed materials was also considered. The visitors estimated their levels of knowledge between expert, general, and little or no knowledge. As fig.4.16 shows, 6% of the visitors felt themselves to be experts in the area of Islamic material culture, 64% had a general knowledge, and 30% considered themselves without enough knowledge. This explains why just 15% came for academic-professional interest, while 70-78% wanted to know more about Muslim culture or have an aesthetic experience.

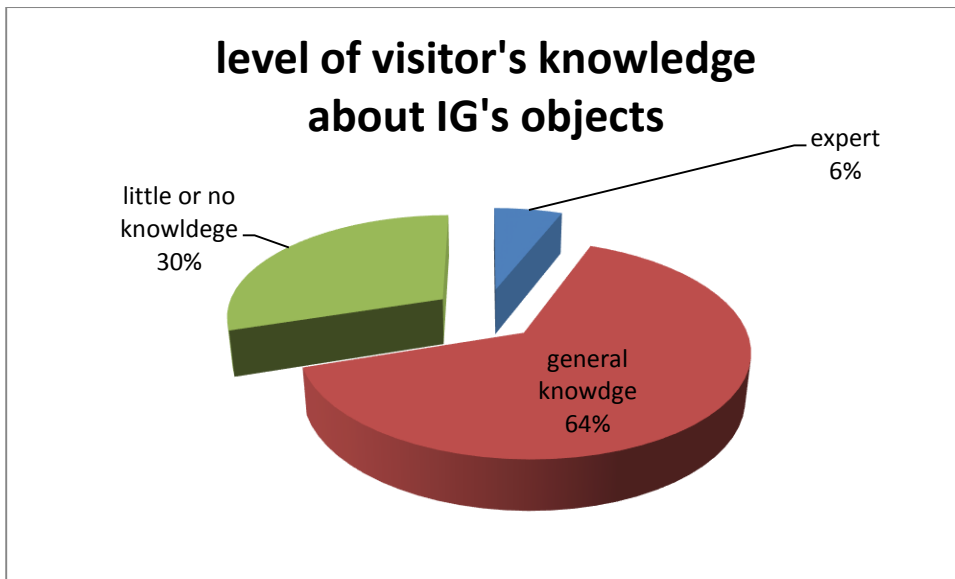


Fig. 4.16 levels of visitor's knowledge about objects in the IG

One of the elements, which also contribute to the shaping of the experience of visiting the IG, is the visitor's age. The respondents were divided into four age groups. Bearing in mind that age was not one of the criteria in choosing the respondents, 6% of the people were under 18 years old, 56% were between 18-35 years old, 27% were between 35-59 years old, and 11% of the visitors in the same sample were 60 years old and above, as demonstrated by fig 4.17.

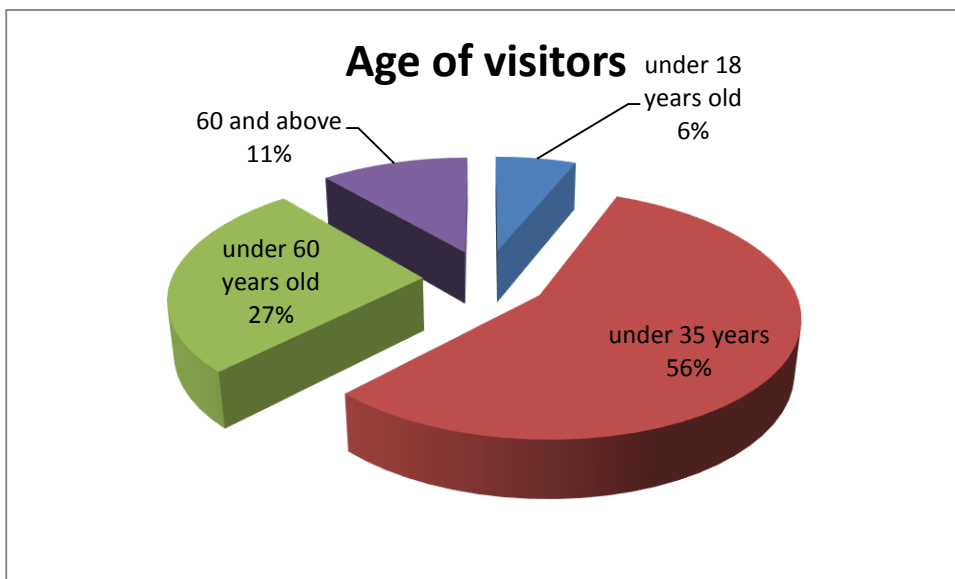


Fig. 4.17 the ages of the visitors

The sample consisted of 47% males and 53% females (see fig. 4.18). This factor was also not taken into account in selecting the visitors.

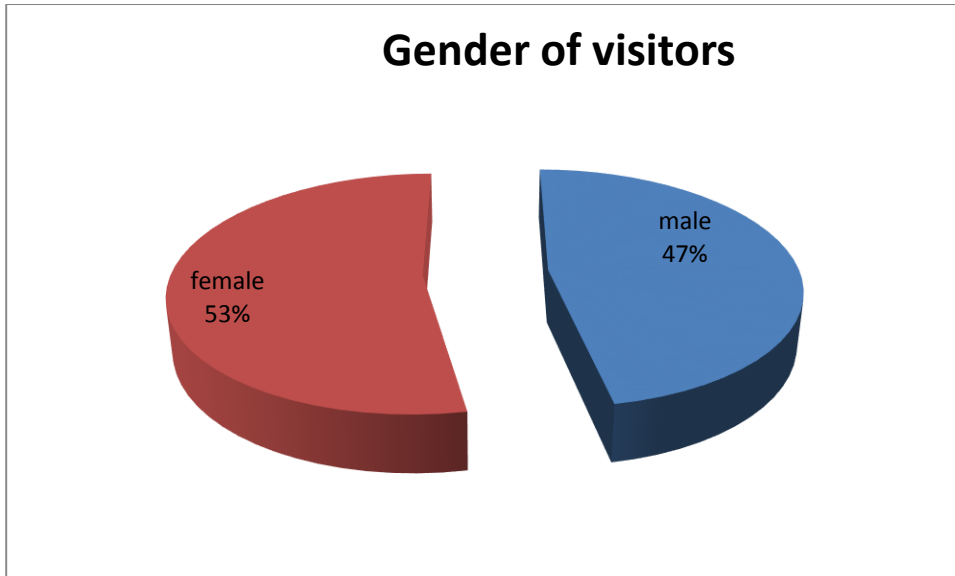


Fig.4.18 visitors' gender

4.3.2: Social context:

The second frame studying the visitors is the social accompany. This element has an important influence on the experience gained from visiting the IG. Apart from the school trip category that the researcher had no opportunity to connect with, the sample was divided into four other categories: visiting alone (29%), with children (9%), with adults (59%), and with organized groups (3%), as fig4.19 shows.

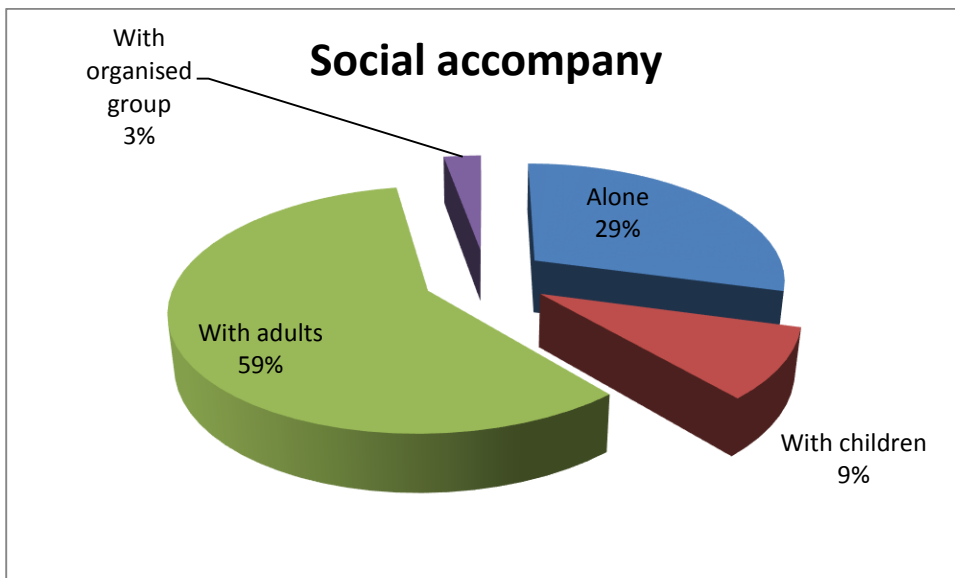


Fig. 4.19 Social accompany amongst the visitors

4.3.3: Physical context:

The interaction between visitors and Islamic material culture in the IG was explored through the eleventh question. Visitors were asked to name the objects they preferred during their visit. Fig.4.20 shows the names of these objects and the preference in percentages. The results are categorized into five groups. The most favourable objects were the Iznik objects (20%), the second group (6-8%) includes: The Quran, Arms and armours, Tiles, preferring one individual object, and preferring more than one object. The third group (3-5%) includes: Brass works, Jade Terrapin, Calligraphy, Daggers, and generally all objects in the IG. The fourth group (1-2%) consists of Glass objects, Islamic coins, and Kay Khusraw limestone. In contrast, 19% of the visitors did not like any objects. Clearly, obviously the Iznik collection is the main attraction in the collection, a relatively equal number of people were not attracted by the display at all. These percentages present three types of communication between the visitors and objects in the IG: the first one is Iznik attractivity to visitors that reflects a feeling of wonder (Greenblatt 1991 in 2.3.1). The second one is the rest of the objects, which appear to represent personal preferences (for Arms or aesthetics for example, while the third type shows a total lack of communication with displayed pieces. These percentages are displayed in fig. 4.20.

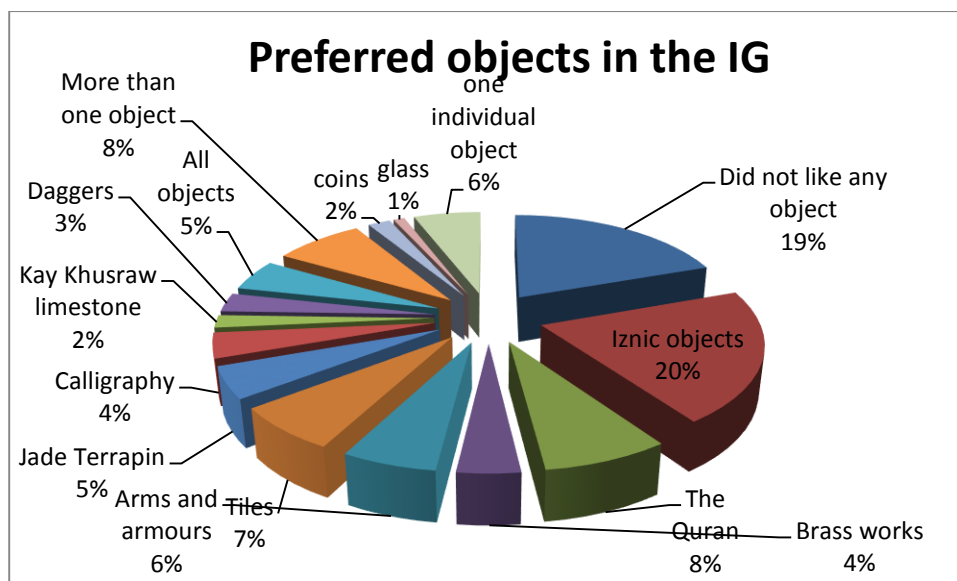


Fig.4.20 Objects' favourability in the IG

The sense of the visitors' satisfaction was captured through the question about recommending such a visit to a friend. 96% of the visitors recommended this visit to friends, while 4% did not, as seen in fig.4.21. This result conflicts with the 19% of the respondents who did not identify any personal communication with the objects. Two interpretations might be inferred here: the first one is that this result reflects not taking this question seriously or; the second

interpretations might be that the source of the satisfaction is not only derived from the objects themselves. Probably, as (Ravelli 2006: 70) notices, there is a spatial and dialogic interactivity with other factors than the objects themselves that gave the visitors a sense of satisfaction. In this sense, the gallery is providing a broader enjoyment that is not object-centred.

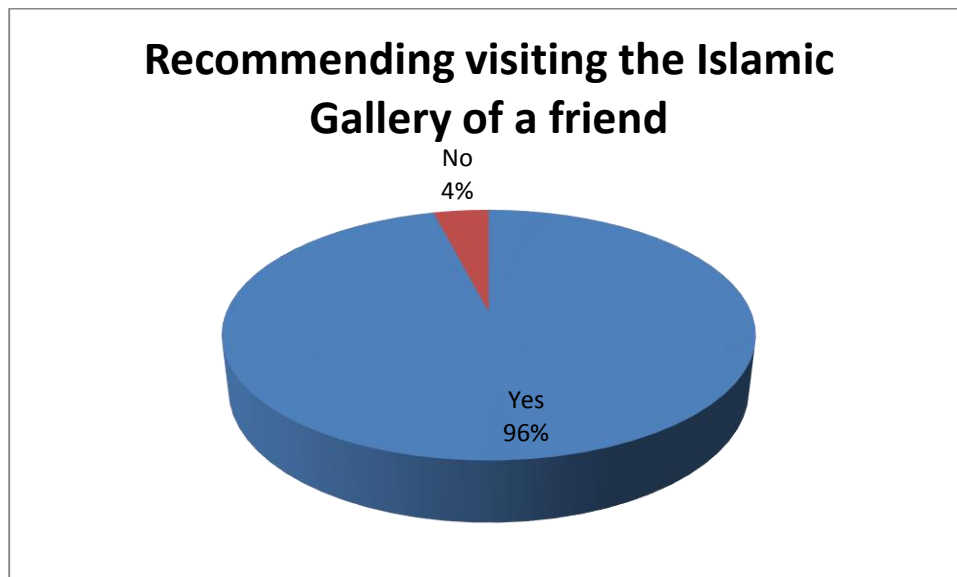


Fig.4.21Re commending visiting the IG

4.4: The Curators:

This section will talk about what the IG tries to tell its visitors. Starting with the criteria for collecting the collection, as the curators see it, Curator B: 1 (appendix 2) specified the following criteria in responding to why the collection was considered to be unique: the connection with European art and signed objects that enable BM's Staff to identify them archeologically and ethnographically. As a result, for example, unlike the V&A the BM's collection of carpets and rugs is poor. Therefore, the criteria of the past collectors have shaped the collection nowadays.

Based on that factor, the curators are limited to what they have in their collection and they build their messages and stories in accordance with the available options. Moving on to the construction of the story that should be told, according to the curator A the story is constructed, (see Curator A:2 appendix 2), according to curator's constructed story, s/he identifies the story then they implement the objects as evidence for it, which makes the objects story tellers of curator's messages(2.3.3).

On the other hand, curator B considers this process as: 'The question is like a chicken and an egg, does the story come first or does the object come first? Sometimes it is a bit of both'.

S/he explains the approach of the story before the objects (see Curator B:2 Appendixes 2). It is the conveyed message that determines displaying the objects: 'We need to tell people that in Iran in the 18th and 19th century artists were very good at producing lacquer objects' (ibid). Then the aesthetic and the historical importance support that to guarantee the quality of transmitting the story and getting it adequately by the visitor, which is similar to the curator A's perspective.

However, the second approach also operates in the IG as curator B continues, (see Curator B:3 Appendixes 2). In this case, the object determines the story that should be told to the viewers. Although, the curator here is responsible for constructing the story, other external factors interfere in the process, such showing the importance of a donor, appreciating their donations, etc. And this aspect involves another context of meaning-making in museums called institutional context. But because of the limitations, this study will not expand this point and will concentrate on the important objects that make the curator construct a story. The context of such an approach is more object-centred, which applies wonder (Greenblatt 1991 in 2.3.1). On the other hand, the first approach is more object-driven the goal focuses on seeing beyond just the object itself and it is the resonance (Greenblatt 1991 in 2.3.1).

Telling stories is one of the main communication methods in museums, but what are these stories about? Is the visitor informed about these stories at the outset or not? Going back to the Fig. 4.3 (the Introductory Panel in the IG), makes reference to these stories: '[Objects] show the breadth and richness of Islamic culture from Spain to South East Asia'. Therefore, the central story is the richness of Islamic culture that intersects with what curators A and B have mentioned. The sub-stories are elaborated as well in the same information panel systematically further on: 'The first part of the gallery explores the Islamic faith, art, calligraphy, science and Islam prominence amongst world cultures. The lower part of the gallery provides a geographical and chronological picture of the history and art of Islamic lands. There is also a changing display area dedicated to works on paper from the Islamic world'.

It is important to note the sequence of key words indicating firstly exploration (*explores*), then learning (*provides*), and then additional information (*dedicated*) using passive form. Therefore, the structure is explained, the importance is clarified, and the depth of information is referred to. However, 29% of the visitors were not able to discern this organisation, 15% answered

generally without specifying a clear reading of the exhibition. In contrast 56% were able to define the structure of the story in the IG, or at least some elements of it, as fig.4.22 presents.

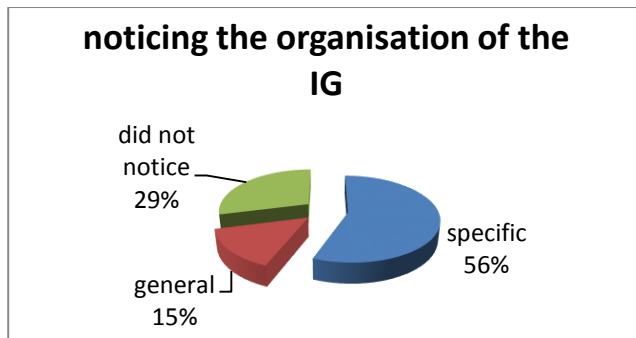


Fig. 4.22 noticing the organization of the IG

In this sense about half of the visitors of the IG were not able to get the exact structure of the story of the gallery, which is thematic, chronological-geographical, and contemporary collection organisation of the IG, which reveals the topic of this gallery, The Richness of Islamic Culture. Furthermore, problematizing this story is very important, what does it represent exactly? Does it represent Islamic art and culture or not?

The story is explicitly defined and the curators' mission is to apply it for the collection as Fig. 4.23 Introductory label in the IG (Appendix 2). In other words the collection will be a representative of this story. Curator A considers the collection of IG as:

I would say, it is **representative** of what **we** would call **Islamic culture** but within it there are a limited number of objects that were actually used for **religious purposes**.

This opinion corresponds to that of visitor E26, who says: 'I found that most of the objects displayed are from times of Islamic civilisation, but not many are *'religious'* objects'. On the other hand, visitor E57 considers it *'misleading'*. In fact going back to curators A and B and their opinions about the stories, one might conclude that the curators define the intellectual framework of the gallery and then they apply it through stories to the objects to create in the end a representative collection of Islamic culture. This does not mean that the visitors are confined to only a one dimensional perspective. Although this framework shows a curatorial oriented and controlled exhibition, the visitors to this gallery present an ability to negotiate this framework, for example E 20 came to see the: 'differences within Islamic world, how has fundamentalism developed', E 41 considers it a representative of: 'patience, beauty, dedication', and E 54 considers : 'it shows something about the past of human history', E 11

was able to go beyond the story and critique the display: ‘it has a very sterile shop like setting. It presents the objects with very brief context. The objects do not engage the viewer, like in the other galleries’.

Finally, although the IG is an ‘Old-style’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Ravelli 2006 in 2.3.3) conservative traditional gallery, its visitors are still able to negotiate its framework, take what they want from it, and sometimes oppose its stories, as E 20 did in rejecting the Islamic culture and came to search for Islamic cultures. This deduction is supported by visitors’ answers on the thirteenth question regarding their impressions of ‘Islamic World’ that they have gained from their visit to the IG. Only 34% of the visitors got the message of the IG, the richness of Islamic culture. 29% appreciated one aspect or more in Islamic culture, 11% appreciated some certain aspects of the display itself, and 22% did not answer this question. However, 4% complained about the IG, its content, and its message as presented in fig. 4.25.

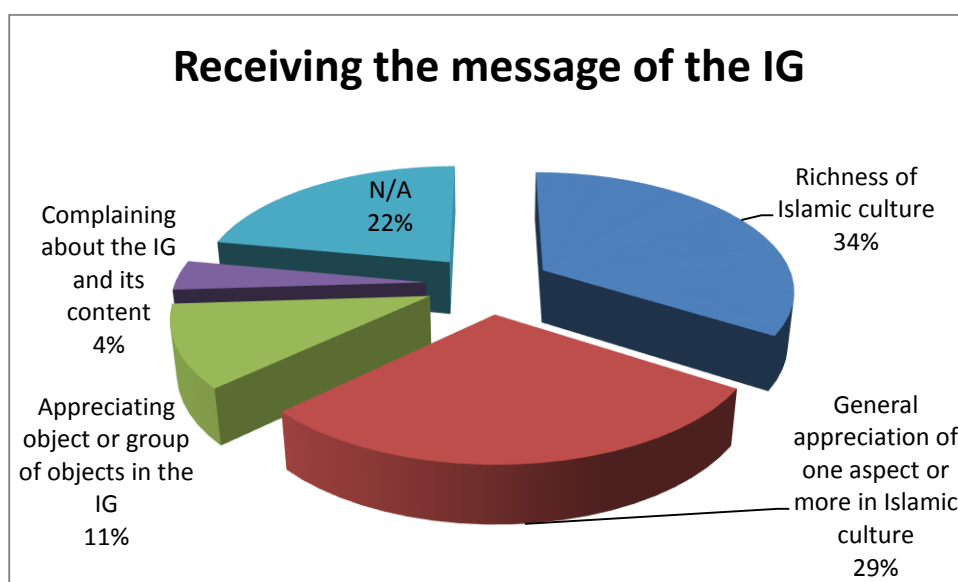


Fig. 4.25 receiving the message of the IG

Although the previous percentages prove the negotiability of the message inside the IG, they question as well transmitting the knowledge and communication regarding the richness of Islamic culture that is the topic of the gallery, because only 34% identified this message. In contrast 66% have gained other messages rather than the main story.

Going back to the linguistic discourse of the panel presented in fig. 4.23, the strong didactic language used is now more obvious. It expresses the authoritative role of the curator in providing the information here is an example: ‘The term ‘Islamic’ is used in this gallery to

define the culture of peoples living in lands where the dominant religion is Islam’ (my emphasis). Here the curator/s has named the gallery and explained its functionality without expressing any relativity. The panel expresses the curators’ understanding of the term Islamic, similarly Curator A said: ‘In the entrance of the galley we actually **define** what we mean by Islamic’. This statement reflects the lack of polysemic communication and maximises the authoritativeness of curators on the expense of potential empowering the visitor and democratizing the gallery.

In fact there is no space between curator’s labels and the object. For example Fig.4.25 (appendixes 2) presents the label of Manuscript X, 1996. The label attempts to read the painting for the visitor and define its elements in detail in such a way that the viewers limit their views to the specified elements in the label. For example viewer is pushed to use the gender lens for looking at this object by the statement: ‘This is from a series concerned with **female identity**’ (my emphasis). Therefore, the intellectual space between the object and its label is filled with curator’s interpretation: the viewer’s analytical reading is partly blocked. The viewer might ignore the labels depending on his/her own capacity to extract his/her knowledge apart from curator’s influence and messages through the labels. Such visitors exercise their right to refuse to communicate with one of the three agents inside the gallery, the curator, and reveal rupture between the curators and the visitors. Hence, this intellectual space, the labelling and the narrative, has the ability either to enhance communication (through using interactional language) or to create a rupture (by using didactic language) between the animate agents of the IG (2.3.3).

4.5: Conclusion:

This chapter presented the findings of this research in the Islamic gallery (IG) at the British Museum. It started with the organization of the exhibition itself. It then it moved to the visitors’ perspectives related to reasons for visiting the IG and the experience gained from the visits. Thirdly, it presented the curatorial aspect of the IG that is related to telling the stories about the IG and visitors’ negotiations of the meanings created through these stories. The next chapter discusses these findings, in light of the theoretical framework in chapter 2, and concludes with the result of this research.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1: Introduction

Communication inside the museum comprises three active agents: curator, visitor, and material culture. The process of making meaning results from the interaction between these agents, therefore measuring the success of any exhibition depends on the degree of engagement among them. Black describes the ‘role of museum in the twenty-first century’ as how it has been, ‘to seek contemporary ways to engage audiences with their collections’ (2005:267). In this research the museum aspect is represented by the curators only, and other institutional meanings, such as the relationships between the curators and other agencies inside the museum, are not involved.

Engagement means implementing the objects and empowering the audiences. The role of any museum is to attract audiences and engage with them through its objects, because the importance of such materials is not recognisable until they are displayed in museum (Dant 2009:15). This should consider audiences’ needs, because, for example: ‘If we put on an exhibition about football, and market it appropriately, people who are interested in football will come to see it’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1994:15).

Based on that, this chapter will discuss the data from the IG in the BM and attempt to make meaning at three levels: organisational, interactional and representational, combining organizational meaning with the exhibition (physically), interactional meaning with the visitors, and representational meaning with the curators.

5.2: Organisational meaning and the exhibition

The data on how visitors approached the IG revealed that 40% used the main entrance and 60% the northern one. This gives an evidence of that the location of the gallery has influenced approaching it, because the majority of its visitors choose the second rout. The second issue here is that the asked visitors had entered the IG, but the visitors who had not, were not asked i.e. this study recommends studying the entrances and their influences on visitors’ selection of the visited galleries in the museum.

As noted in the findings (first section), the IG is organised along three lines: thematic in the first spaces of the Gallery, chronological-geographical in the second section, centre-structured, which is reached from the second section. This division determines or shapes visitors’

behaviours, (Ravelli 2006: 123; Falk 1993) note the visitor starts with getting a rough idea about Islamic world, then they more detail as s/he moves into the gallery chronologically and geographically. In parallel with this transition, visitors' freedom of choice increases. When they reach the centre-structured area, which is about art on paper, they are free to enter it or not. By doing that visitors are told the main message of the Gallery, which is the richness of Islamic culture. They are taken from the abstract level in the introductory area to the tangible evidence i.e. objects in cases. Then they are brought back to the contemporary Islamic world in the nucleus area. Therefore, the visitors are manoeuvred with the message and at some points they are given the freedom to escape it. In other words, this gallery is a semi-structured one and the organizational meaning reflects a degree of negotiability between the three agents mentioned above.

As well as this systematic order, the pathways also reflect something different. Fig. 4.7 shows that the design of this gallery follows a comb pattern, (Ravelli 2006; Hooper-Greenhill 1994 in 2.3.1). In this sense, the movement inside the gallery is not linear, but offers organised transitions between various spaces. The two examples cases 6 and 35 do not reflect this linearity. For example, case 6 with its lack of organised movement cannot be explained in terms of exercising freedom. At the same time, case 35 gives the sense of ambiguity and 'mind-numbing' (Black 2005 in 2.3.1), from a holistic level of the gallery. This ambiguity is repeated in spaces 12 and 14. Given that the clarity of pathways help in explaining the chronological order of the gallery (Ravelli 2006:137), this ambiguity confuses the chronological and geographical meaning of the IG. Visitors in a big crowd trying to follow those pathways, will find it create a problem in organising their movement in spaces such as X and 4, since these are points of intersection. All these elements make the organizational meaning in the macro level ambiguous sometimes and meaning-making process incomplete or disjointed.

Furthermore, considering that ambiguity means shifting the attention to the importance of visitors' time. It wastes their precious time because they can't work out which way to walk through the exhibition: 'Time is a major museum "cost". It takes time to get to a museum, and time to walk around it. When time is limited, potential museum visitors must weight their other commitments against the time required to visit a museum' (Falk & Dierking 1992:13). Hence, it is very important for the museum to facilitate visitors' movement and ease their paths through it to make it more enjoyable, rather than to confuse them or make the pathways confusing. Otherwise, visitors may be forced to look for a less challenging exhibition, because challenging

the visitors and attract their sense of adventure cannot be in the macro level of social historical exhibition, Karp considers: 'There has been less activity in historical and ethnographical museums, although there are definite signs of renewed energy there also' (1991:7).

The third point of note, in the organisational meaning is the element of salience, wonder and resonance (Greenblatt 1991in 2.3.1), that the display evokes. Two examples have been highlighted: the Jade Terrapin and the Embroidered felt cloak. The Jade Terrapin represents the elements of wonder through the sheer technique of its creation and its aesthetic value, its prestigious description and display position, contextualised historically, and its attractive colour, which have led 5% of the visitors to favour it over the rest of objects. These elements make this object unique and must see in the IG. As well, locating it at the end of the gallery is a successful strategic display policy. In order to see the Jade Terrapin, visitors must go to the Subcontinent section at the end of the gallery. In other words, a marketing of other objects takes place while visitors go towards the terrapin. It is an effective policy, because sometimes visitor has planned to see only one object or a limited number of objects, but then s/he ends up visiting the whole collection. This means here, negotiating visitor's personal agenda and offering him/her more visual narratives to be looked at if wished.

The second case is the Embroidered felt cloak. Like the Jade Terrapin, this object also works on two levels: individual attraction and as a marketing strategy. In fact the label mentions only three physical points about the object itself: the usage, the keys, and the inscription. The rest of the label is about interpreting its meaning and using it as a window to explain its original context, which categorises it as a 'resonance' display. This object has a similar display value to the Jade Terrapin, but the function is different. This coat has a promotional value where the visitor's attention is drawn to the contemporary and modern art pieces in the collection. This promotional value is embedded in its location in the thematic display area as an introductory object to the centre structured section that contains these contemporary objects. Therefore, the visitor is alerted to the presence of these objects right at the outset so as to be able to organize his/her agenda of exploration inside the gallery.

Furthermore, the promotional value of the Embroidered felt cloak, which is intended to orient the visitor to the centre-structured section, meets the perspective of Ravelli (2006in 2.3.1) regarding highlighting some objects on the expanse of others. This point could be proved by considering curator A's perception of the uniqueness of BM's Islamic collection: 'I would say

what is different about our collection is this added dimension of modern and contemporary because very few people are doing that actually'. Therefore, they displayed promotional object and set center-structured method of display, because they consider the salience attribute of the IG is its modern contemporary collection.

However, that salience should be juxtaposed against visitors' answers to the questionnaire. In fact none of them mentioned this collection or named it as favourite objects, or as determining their perception of the IG, or expressed the wish to know more, or the structure of the IG. This reflects the rupture in the communication process between the visitors on the one hand and, both, the curators and the objects. In fact, visitors' answers revealed an interest in the historical dimension of the collection not the modern one. Hence, the contemporary-modern collection needs to be reviewed in terms of structure, display and marketing. The urgent need of such review becomes important since, this collection is almost the only live section in the IG, where, as noted in the findings (section 1), the display is periodically changed providing visitors with a more organic feel of the Islamic collection in the BM.

To sum up this section, the organisational communication inside the IG has its strengths and weaknesses. This gallery can deliver to its audiences a message about the Islamic world that accompanies the visitors during their visit in the gallery through its semi-structural organisation. This organisation gives both the curators and the visitors the space to draw on their own understandings and to negotiate that with the materials. Such negotiation goes through the filtration of the salience strategy (in 2.3.1). However, as already noted, this strategy fluctuates between success and failure. In some sections it guarantees a strong personal communication with the object and in others it does not. This fluctuation might be considered an obstacle that constrains or enables the process of making meaning at the organisational level, which needs to be reviewed in order to improve this gallery.

5.3: Interactional meaning and the visitors

The visitors covered the spectrum from those who had just started their visit with their own prepared agendas to those who had just finished their visit having accomplished their aims. This was proved statistically: the average intended staying- time is close to the average actual time spent in the gallery. Visitors spent 23% of time at the BM in the IG, which could be considered a significant indication of the importance of this gallery. However, this study did not take into account those visitors who did not visit the IG, and so cannot claim to generalize

for all the visitors to the BM. The data relating to the interactional meaning in this context involves three sub-contexts: personal, social, and physical (Falk & Dierking 1992 in 2.3.2).

5.3.1: Personal context:

Investigating the personal context of the visitor began with exploring their intention in visiting the IG from the outset. There were three streams in this context: the majority of the visitors had in their already focused agendas in visiting the IG. They prepared for the visit drawing on their experience and knowledge about Islam, Muslims, and Islamic material culture to confirm and test and extend and challenge it inside the gallery. Making meaning for them is a conscious goal from the start.. In contrast, 36% of the rest were just wandering in. Although they did not intend to visit the IG, they were ready to explore a new experience i.e. Unlike the previous stream; their orientation was not focused on this gallery. Although they were more open to experiencing unknown knowledge, they had less ability, than the first stream, to negotiate this knowledge because it was not included in their agendas. The third stream is just 2% of people who did not answer this question This suggests one of two interpretations. Either they forgot to answer the question or they were not able to define their intentions.

After exploring the intention, this section will discuss the importance of frequency in visiting the BM in 2.3.2) (Falk & Dierking 1992. The data indicates two main trends: the first, the majority, (56%) were first-time visitors to the BM. The second, (44%), were more frequent visitors. These percentages present two tendencies amongst the visitors of IG: the first locates this visit in terms of experiencing the exploration inside the BM of which the IG is a part. Although the second has the element of exploration embedded in repeating the experience again, the sense of exploration gives way to other preferences. And priorities the experience of those, who mentioned visiting the BM for 3, 4, 6, 9, 27, 30 times in the last year, cannot be considered just exploration. It has changed to a personal hobby, or for focused research, (Falk & Dierking 1992:2). The personal agenda of each group differs, in the degree of openness, negotiability, and expected satisfaction and enjoyment, it is important to check frequency of visits because knowing why people chose to return may help in improving the communication between the BM and the society. However, another factor to consider is those who never come to the BM those who do not return. Such a study is beyond the scope of this research although it could form the topic of further research at the BM.

The frequency of visits is also related to another factor. The data indicates three motivations for visiting the BM: social reasons, (5%) to meet a friend or visit the café or bookshop, intellectual/emotional reasons, (21%) such as attending a talk or seeing a specific gallery. and indefinable (74%) who could not give one specific reason for their visit i.e. their agendas were not oriented toward a specific goal, but they were prepared to communicate with the BM input. In the third case, unlike the first two, the level of exploration is higher than the negotiability. The second interesting point here is that only 8% of the visitors came specifically to visit the IG. This explains why 56% of the visitors were first-time visitors (Falk & Dierking 1992 in 2.3.2). Hence the IG attracts only 8% of its visitors, which means this is an aspect that has to be worked on as well.

The reasons for visiting the BM were probed in more detail to discover the motivations of visiting the IG. The 13 mentioned reasons in the fig.4.14.a were derived from 3 areas (intellectual- motional- general) as it is presented in the fig.5.1:

Reason	Intellectual/Percentage	Emotional/Percentage	General/Percentage
A			1 14%
B		1 6%	
C	1 6%		
D	1 12%		
E	1 3%		
F	1 15%		
G			1 6%
H		1 3%	
I		1 6%	
J		1 14%	
K	1 6%		
L		1 7%	
M			1 2%
total	5 42%	5 36%	3 22%

Fig.5.1 dividing the reasons of coming to the IG

The first five of the reasons had an intellectual background and 42% of the visitors came for these reasons. The second five had emotional background and 36% of the visitors came for these reasons. The rest of reasons were general and 22% of the visitors considered these reasons for visiting the IG (see Falk & Dierking 1992 in 2.3.2).

6% of such visitors were experts in aspects of Islamic material culture and 64% had a general knowledge about these objects. The rest of the visitors, 36%, had little or no knowledge about the IG's materials. The levels of knowledge data indicate that the IG can attract different levels of people to visit it. Although the number of experts is considerably low, the non-expert groups reflect a tendency amongst the visitors to examine this experience. Experts often come with a clear purpose in mind, academic, professional, exploration, contemplation, etc. They could define their agendas exactly before entering the IG, because of their previous experience with the objects. In contrast, the other two groups had an open agenda of communication with the IG agents. This openness leaves the door ajar for a learning process to take place, while the first group with the certainty of its agenda might control such process and negotiate it.

Finally, there is the demographical element in the personal context that was not focused on in this study because of the need for a bigger sample. This element includes the age of the visitors and their gender. The gender aspect, 53% female and 47% male, indicates the IG is not gender oriented. This point might be important for future development in case there is an intention to orient the display or part of it toward one gender. In contrast, the sample shows a clear orientation toward people between 18-60 years old, 63% of the visitors. In other words, it is necessary to consider the people above 60 years old and under 18 years old as a target segments, which could be better tapped at the IG.

5.3.2: Social context:

The social context enables the researcher to make sense of the variations of behaviour between visitors, as (Falk & Dierking 1992: 3) observe. Social accompany data indicated, visitors with adults (59%), with organised group (3%), alone (29%), with children (9%). The majority of visitors were accompanied adults this is because most of them were couples or with friends, which reinforces the notion that this is a place for social interaction. However, this explanation was not reflected in the reasons for visiting the IG. This might be explained as indicating that, although visiting the IG is a social interactional activity, the individual agenda does not appear to corroborate this trend. In other words, the personal agenda framed the sociability of the visit;

otherwise the visitors would have chosen other places to meet in, such as parks, restaurants, etc. The second supporting evidence is that the percentage of people in organised groups is low, which suggests that there is a tendency to prefer having a small number of companions for the visit.

Furthermore, (29%) of the visitors were alone in the museum, perhaps not wanting to disturb their personal agenda with social interactions. On the other hand, even though bringing children to the IG might be educational, the percentage 9% suggests that they might prefer other kinds of galleries rather than a social historical one like the IG. The last interpretation might be influenced by two related factors: firstly, as noted the visitors' personal agenda meant a preference for the individual mode of communication and engagement with the environment of the IG. Secondly, the IG does not offer an enjoyment that the children might be interested in and would encourage their parents comfortable to bring them here. The interactivity, which is highly developed in Natural History Museum, Science Museum, or even some other galleries in the BM such as Egyptian section is not present at the BM.

5.3.3: Physical context:

Falk & Dierking (1992:3) highlight the importance of the physical setting of the museum, which were explained in the organisational meaning. In fact the relationship between the visitor and the physicality of the IG is very influential in terms of experiencing the visit. They describe this relationship as: 'Museum settings' as 'designed to provide visitors with predictable and specific experience... Embedded in the relationships between the physical context and the personal context is an unspoken contract of expectations.' (1992: 11). Although this description does not consider the exploration aspect of the visit, it stresses the importance of visitors' expectations and their fulfilment during the visit.

Therefore, the data of objects' attraction showed three trends amongst the visitors in fig.4.20: the first one is the attractiveness of the Iznek to visitors, 20%, reflecting a feeling of wonder and a high degree of visitors' visual interactivity with the objects. Also, it shows the success of 'repetition strategy' in displaying objects that was referred to by (Ravelli 2006: 135). The second one is the rest of the objects, (1- 8%), which might be considered low comparing with the first trend. In contrast, 19% of the visitors did not like any object in the collection, which suggests a rupture between them and the objects. Unfortunately, this study cannot offer a precise interpretation of why this is so., since this requires a qualitative approach to studying

visitors to explore this relationship between the visitors and the objects. But the importance of this study as the first evaluative study of the IG, is that it has uncovered the weaknesses of communication inside the gallery. This points to the need for further research using a qualitative approach to analyse this issue.

The previous ambiguity is reflected again in the sense of satisfaction that visitors had reported. 96% of the visitors recommended visiting the IG to their friends, which reflects a degree of satisfaction. The issue here is that this result conflicts with having 19% who did not like any object. And the interpretation drawn on is that suggested by Witcomb, who considers there is a sense of spatial and dialogic interactivity. That needs to be considered as well as the objects themselves which might influence visitor perception of the attractiveness of the objects. Their negative reaction could be explained by the other elements of physical settings rather than the objects, such as the design of spaces or cases, lighting system, ability of interacting with other people, semi-structured movement, etc.

5.4: Representational meaning and curators

Although the pathways show a kind of structured movement from one case to another, distributing the spaces allow visitors to practice relative freedom of choice over what case they want to observe. The eagerness to see all cases that visitors show in the first part of the IG becomes a preference in the second part, and then it transfers to a very specific interest in the center-structured section. It is a negotiation of power that accompanies the movement. The curators use the objects to narrate their understanding/s of Islamic “Faith”, science, cultural continuity, Islamic cross-cultural relations exploiting Visitor’s eagerness (Hooper-Greenhill 1994 in 2.3.3). Then the type of narration differs according to the objects’ categorisation, where the visitor recognises the need of selecting an object, a group of object, or general visit because of time limitations combined with the big size of the collection. Then, if the visitor is interested and has enough time in contemporary art, s/he enters the center-structured area or not according to his/her personal preference. Therefore, when the visitor sees more objects, the curator cannot tell their stories explicitly and the visitor becomes able to select which story s/he wants to be told.

As it has been clarified explicitly, in the introductory panel and by the curators’ testimony, that the IG talks about Muslim World and the BM tries to exhibit that for its visitors through the room 34. Paraphrasing Pearce (1992:4), the British Museum confirms and projects, for its

visitors, the contemporary world view about Muslims and their culture as a part of World Cultures. Therefore, it participates in the shaping of the knowledge of the visitors by implementing the material that it has, (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 2). And the museum's display of the abject reflects its approach to knowledge and values related to Islamic culture (Ravelli 2006; Pearce 1991 in 2.3.3).

The approach to knowledge is limited to what the BM has in its collection. These factors as explained by the curator B have influenced/ are related to the collectors of the BM in the past: firstly, the connection with European art, and secondly, the mandate of the BM as an archaeological-ethnographical museum (comprising documented objects more than aesthetical ones). And this point proves the suggestion of (Hooper-Greenhill 2000 in 2.3.3) regarding the influence of collectors criteria on the displayed objects nowadays. Therefore, as an answer to Ravelli (2006 in 2.3.3) questions about the story of gallery and its representation: the IG is about the richness of Islamic culture, which is embedded in the displayed objects. This is the main message of the IG that curators try to convey to the visitors.

Although, the visitors showed a variation in the degrees of receptivity to this message, (Hooper-Greenhill 1995: 9), the message itself was not polysemic and it was very curatorially controlled. Hence it does not adequately capture the richness of the diversity of Muslim cultures that it seeks to portray. The authoritativeness of the curators were evidenced and discussed in the linguistic analyses of the introductory panel and Manuscript X. Based on that it might be concluded that this gallery is an 'Old'-style, one (Ravelli 2006; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Witcomb 2003 in 2.3.3). It is very curatorially directed and controlled although it contains some 'New'-style features in the introductory area (2.3.3). In fact, it favours a passive positioning of its visitors and limits their interactivity.

However, the percentages receiving the main message of the gallery demonstrate variations in reception as well. It indicates the ability of the visitors to exercise Foucauldian power negotiate with the curators and -rejecting submissiveness. This negotiation over making the meaning of the Islamic material culture in the BM has its strength and weakness. The strength is embedded in the lively negotiation generated by a power conflict that rejects the primacy of only one meaning. This facilitates a continuous, renewing of polysemic meanings over time, keeping the door open to rethinking and reinventing of the gallery and its messages. However, the weakness is in the obstacles in the current communication channels between the curators and

the visitors which needs to be worked on, whether in terms of labels, displaying objects, eye opener tours, audio recorded explanation, etc. Such a reconsideration is crucial at this stage, because it will bring together the animate agents to agree on the best way of seeing the Islamic material culture., The solution might be, as Hooper-Greenhill suggests: ‘in order to know whether or not the message has been received and understood, the museum must complete the communication process by providing feedback channels for visitor response’ (Hooper-Greenhill 1994:22). It is very important to initiate a formal process of feedback relationship between the visitors and the curators that supports the aliveness of the IG, empowers the visitors, democratises the IG, and helps the curators in producing a work with minimal criticism and maximum appreciation.

The role of the curator is, to read, to interpret, and to contextualise the object in a way that the visitor can access its context (Ravelli 2006; Hooper-Greenhill 1994 in 2.3.3). As noted, the main channel of communication used is labels, which can have more than an explanatory function (Baxandall 1991: 35). It has a causal relationship with the object and represents curatorial understanding of the object and their attempts to accommodate the viewer, as an agent inside the gallery. As shown through the introductory panel and the Manuscript X, apart from the display, curators exercise their power through their labels that convey messages and accommodate both the subject of these messages and the recipients of them, (Hooper-Greenhill 1994: 2.3.3).

In fact, the label in the IG did not provide any ‘space’, (Baxandall 1991 in 2.3.3), between the object and its label for the visitor to have a say. The curator has filled this space with his/her presence. The IG’s labels failed to utilise this space leads to empowering the curators at the expense of the visitors, who are disempowered. The democratisation of the gallery faces the challenge of centralised curatorial power. This might lead to a rupture of communication and suppressing visitors’ initiative and their engagement in making their own meanings as Baxandall describes it: ‘the viewer, moving about in the space between object and label, is highly active’(1991:38). Baxandall explains here visitors’ sense of negotiability, because they are not able to involve enough in the meaning-making process. Therefore, they negotiate actively the meaning-made by the curators, as an active agent in the IG.

It is interesting considering what Susan Vogel, from the Center for African Art in New York, says about African Art Exhibition:

‘This is not an exhibition about African art or Africa. It is not even entirely about art. Art/Artifact is an exhibition about the ways Western outsiders have regarded African art and material culture over the past century ... An exhibition on how we view African objects (both literally and metaphorically) is important because unless we realize the extent to which our vision is conditioned by our own culture- unless we realize that the image of African art we have made a place for in our world has been shaped by us as much as by Africans- we may be misled into believing that we see African art for what it is’ (Karp 1991:8).

Similarly, the IG is a curatorial understanding of Islamic World/s, richness of Islamic culture/s, Islamic or Muslim material culture. It cannot be a representative of Islamic World or Islamic culture. It is important to highlight and explain this pre-defined perspective for the visitors, and invite their inputs which might enrich the IG’s content and develop the cross-cultural communications that take place inside it.

5.5: Conclusion

The organisational meaning of this study relates to the exhibition itself physically. The semi-structured organisation of the Islamic Gallery captures both the relative free movement inside the gallery and conveying to the visitors the main messages about the richness of Islamic culture. Transferring between sections is combined with changing of curatorial control and visitors’ freedom that continues delivering the main message of the gallery. Unfortunately, at some points of its pathways the process is disturbed by the lack of the instructions, which might not help the display to express itself to the visitors and waste some of their times inside the BM. But as the finding show that message is restricted in that it reflects the curators’ perspective and oversimplifies the diversity of both the collection and Muslim culture rendering it more monolithic than is the case in reality.

The usage of salience as a strategy of display shows multi-functionality and helps in attracting visitors to the rest of the object (Ravelli 2006 in 2.3.1). It follows both telling visual narrative in the way to the object or promotional function that directs the visitors to a certain object or section. Although theoretically the salience is successful in getting the visitors to the targets, visitors did not show an interest in some of these targets. They showed more interest in the told visual narratives in the way, which might lead to reconsidering the targets and their importance.

With respect to interactional meaning-making, that considers mainly the visitors on three levels: personal, social, and physical. Firstly, the personal context includes the personal agenda.

The findings also indicated that the power of IG is only attract only 8% of its visitors for intellectual, emotional and other reasons (Falk & Dierking 1992 in 2.3.2). On the other hand, a cross-level division appear amongst the visitors to the IG. This split comprises exploration trend that could be characterised with openness of communication and semi-organised agenda of priorities for visiting the IG. The second trend had more ability of negotiating the made meaning according to their pre-existing agenda. Both trends were examined through different questions that visitors had answered.

The second level of the interactional meaning is the social context. Although the social context is very influential in this experience, the personal context has showed an interference and effectiveness over the social context. The personal context frames the social one and organised its priorities. The third level is the physical meaning that showed different kinds of interactivity spatial and dialogical. Although the interactivity was existed there, the visitors did not show adequate degree of communication with the objects that should be considered for developing the IG's display.

The third framework, the representational meaning, considers the role of the curators in making meaning of the IG (Hooper-Greenhill 1994 in 2.3.3). Here, the findings show a clear authoritativeness, curatorial role on one hand and a process of negotiation that takes place, as a response to this curatorial control, by the visitors on the other.

The opportunity to periodically renew the exhibition is not exploited to its fullest in this situation. Furthermore, the data also reveals a lack of intellectual space between the object and the label, which can also be expanded to help the visitors to fill it or at least share it with the curators. The IG cannot be *the representative* of the *Islamic World* in *the UK*. It will be a representation of communal and societal understanding/s of material culture that came to *the UK* more from outside *Muslim Cultures*. Adding the felement of relative understanding of the IG, it will enable the gallery to be both alive, enriched and interactive as objects express themselves with multiple languages and expressions, visitors shape their meanings of Muslim Cultures, and curators will become more educated in the supervisors of these meanings to provide the appropriate contextualisation of such process.

This study concludes that while there is indeed a very rich collection and representation of Islam culture and artefacts at the BM, these are not fully exploited for the depth and diversity. Their meanings are confined by the organisational and interactional as well as representational

interpretations that originate in the Western monoculture. Further research along the lines this type of study is recommended using qualitative methods to tap visitors' knowledge and needs, as well as drawing on expertise beyond the museum itself and focusing on the channels of communication, such as the eye-opening tour and the audio recorded explanations. A longer term study of visitors' memories of the museum as well as outreach to those who do not visit the IG would inform the policies and strategies for the sustained and increased relevance and resonance of the museum itself.

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Appendixes:

(1) Cases and Hanged objects in the IG with their titles

The Case's Number	The Case's Title
1	The Qur'an
2	The mosque and the Qur'an
3	The early centuries of Islam: AD. 600-1000
a	Crested grave cover
b	Stone-paste tile frieze
c	Limestone capita
4	Carved wooden door-panel
d	Part of foundation inscription, Columnar tombstone, Proconnesian marble
5	Lustre from the Islamic world to Britain
6	Embroidered felt cloak
7	The Arabic script
e	Ninety nine names of God
8	Islamic science
f	Inscription frieze, carved wooden panel
9	China and Islam
g	Jar stand (Kilga)
10	Not titled (Fatimid textile fragments, golden rings and earrings, dolls, wooden comb, coins)
11	Not titled (Fatimid Lustre, rock crystal, metal work)
12	The ceramics of Northern Syria
13	Syria and the Jazira: around AD. 1100-1250
14	Eastern Iran and Afghanistan: AD. 850- 1100
15	Seljuqs in Iran AD. 1050- 1200
16	Not titled (Mina and lustre from Iran)
17	Not titled (Hoard, Amulet case, ladle, spoon)
18	Games of the Islamic World
19	Not titled (lamps from Mamluk period)
20	The Mamluk dynasty: AD. 1250- 1517
21	Not titled (Brass materials from Mamluk period)
22	Mamluk ceramics
23	Iranian metalwork: AD. 1250 -1400
24	Iran and Central Asia in the Mongol (Il-Khanid) period: AD. 1220-1335
25	Not titled (Tiles from Iran and central Asia)
26	Iran under the descendents of Timur (Tamerlane) and the early Safavids: AD. 1370- 1576
27	Not titled (Iznik pottery mid 16 th century)
28	The Ottoman Empire in Turkey, Egypt, and Syria: AD. 1517- 1923
29	Not titled (underglaze painted ceramics mainly from Turkey)
h	Tiled spandrel painted in Cuerda Seca technique depicting outdoor scene
30	Damascus tiles
31	Not titled (Iznik ceramic from Turkey)
32	Not titled (underglaze painted ceramics mainly from Turkey)

33	Iznik Tiles
i	Tombstone
34	Not titled (underglaz painted ceramics mainly from Turkey)
35	Islamic Spain: AD. 1300-1500
36	Not titled (stonepaste with underglaze ceramics from Turkey)
37	The later Safavids: AD. 1576- 1722
38	Not titled (Safavid glass, panel of three, glazed ceramic tiles)
j	Limestone panel
39	Not titled (Lacquered and gilded collection)
40	Qajar Iran: AD. 1779-1924
k	Shadi Ghadirian, untitled photograph, Iran 1998 Shadi Ghadirian, untitled photograph, Iran 1998
41	Ipek Duben Manuscript X.1996
42	Mughal India: AD. 1526- 1858
43	Jade Terrapin
l	A Qajar prince and his attendant, oil on canvas, 1840
44	Islamic coins
m	Part of foundation inscription
45	Magic and divination in the Islamic World (on the opposite side of the case) Astrology in the Islamic World
46	Islamic arms and armour
47	The Deccan and Bengal: AD. 1500- 1900

Fig. 4.5 Cases and Hanged objects in the IG with their titles (Meqdad 2010)

(2)Quotations from the interviews and the studied texts:

Jade Terrapin

Mughal India, Allahabad, 1600-1605

Carved of green nephrite or jade, this lifelike terrapin was discovered in 1803 at the bottom of a water cistern in the Allahabad Fort, India. It was presented to Lieutenant-General Alexander Kyd of the Bengal Engineers.

The carving represents a female of the species *Kachuga Dhongaka*, native to the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers which meet at Allahabad. In 1583 Mughal Emperor Akbar renamed the Hindu holy city Prag as Allahabad, making it one of his capitals.

By 1600 Prince Selim, the future Emperor Jahangir, had rebelled against his father and occupied the Allahabad Fort. The naturalistic rendering of the terrapin, with its head slightly off-centre, is in keeping with Selim's liking for realism and his interest in Indian wildlife.

The terrapin has recently returned after a tour of the United Kingdom as part of the British Museum's Partnership UK programme.

Bequeathed by Lt. Thomas Wilkinson, through James Nairne AN 1830, 0612.1

Fig. 4.8 Jade Terrapin's label in IG

Embroidered felt cloak

Bitā Ghezelayagh, Iran, 2008

This piece is a reinterpretation of a *named*, a felt cloak traditionally worn by Iranian shepherds. The piece reflects the artist's memories growing up in Tehran during the revolution and until the 1980s at the height of the Iran-Iraq war.

The cloak is adorned with 1001 metal keys, signifying the keys to paradise, alongside the Persian inscription 'Martyrdom is the key to paradise'. This famous slogan of the Iran-Iraq war and the keys transform the cloak into a soldier's body armour covered in symbols of resistance, divine protection and martyrdom.

ME 2009, 6029. 1

Fig. 4.9 Embroidered felt cloak's label

Can you please describe the way of collecting these objects in the last 50 years?

We started collecting modern and contemporary art, Middle Eastern art, that works on paper since the end of 1980s ... We probably have the work of 150-170 artists from across the Middle East now, artists who live in their countries of origins or artistes in diasporas who live abroad... We have really quite a strong collation now; we are collecting all the time and we are trying to put it out on display where we can sometimes. We put it in this gallery ... I would say what is different about our collection is this added dimension of modern and contemporary because very few people are doing that actually.

Curator A: 1 the uniqueness of IG

The reason or the reasons of visit	Percentage
a) It is an enjoyable way to pass the time	70%
b) It is a nice place to spend time with friends and family	33%
c) To encourage children's interest in history	29%
d) I have a personal interest in the subject and I want to improve my knowledge about it	62%
e) I have an academic-professional interest in the subject	15%
f) To get a better understanding of other people and cultures	78%
g) It connects me to my own culture	32%
h) For a strong sense of personal connection or identity	17%
i) To have an emotionally moving experience	28%
j) To see fascinating or beautiful things in an attractive setting	70%
k) To stimulate my own creativity	29%
l) For peaceful, quiet contemplation	35%
m) Other reason, please specify.....	8%

Fig.4.14.a the reasons of visiting the IG

What is unique about this Gallery?

A lot of our material has some connections to Europe, for example the Mamluk glass lamps were heavily admired and collected by Europeans and or copied by French glass makers. So that is one of the reasons why it was added to the collection. It was not added because they were produced under the Mamluks and they were hung in the mosque of Sultan Hassan, nobody understood that aspect. Another thing that differentiated the BM's collectors from the V&A's collectors is that: often because they were competing for the same objects at the same time they were buying from the same dealers from Paris and London, so they could not buy the same things. So one of the criteria for the BM was if an object had a signature, the signature of the maker, or the signature of the patron then the BM preferred to collect it. Because the British Museum was not a decorative art museum it was an archaeological museum and ethnographic museum and so things like signatures were extremely important, so again that is how it differentiates from perhaps other collections in Europe.

Curator B: 1 the criteria of the BM's collectors that shaped the IG collection

How do you go about displaying an object from choosing to placing it in a case with its label?

Basically what you do is you choose the story that you want to tell, so if you want to talk about the Mamluks for example ... you look at your best pieces and you then work out which of them you want to display and drop and see if you look at the Mamlouk [case] you see it [is a] mixture [of] glass, metalwork, ivory, ceramic, and those sorts of things. So you look at what are the pieces you want to show? What stories are they going to tell? That is very important and then you work out where they fit in the case.

Curator A: 2 constructing stories in the IG

How do you go about displaying an object from choosing to placing it in a case with its label?

I will look in my storage, and we have so much in storage, and I will say: we have so many beautiful objects made from lacquer for example. These beautiful pen boxes made from lacquer or this bookbinding made from lacquer. This is a story; we need to tell people that in Iran in the 18th and 19th century artists were very good at producing lacquer objects. In that sense, we decide, we look at all the objects, and we pick them based on their beauty, because obviously - something is beautiful - the person will come and look at it. But we also look at it for its historical importance: do we really want to make a point? What is the point? So we look for historical importance and we also try and make a coherent story. So the person can come to the case and we do not want them to have looked at two or three other cases before they understand this one, so I think that is one approach.

Curator B: 2 the first approach of constructing stories in the IG

How do you go about displaying an object from choosing to placing it in a case with its label?

[When] somebody just donated to us a group of objects, so this is an opportunity for us to display them because we can show it as a new acquisition. So again we have to think about the story. It is not simply based on the fact that they are beautiful objects, we have to talk about the significance of these objects and how can we connect them. Again we are in Britain we are in a society, we are in London, where people from all of the world come, so if we are able to make connections between objects and the international world then we try and do that. Just because we know that it is very unlikely then an art historian is going to come and appreciate this case, it is going to be an intelligent person from anywhere from around the world is going to come look at this case. So in my lacquer story going back to the story of lacquer the fact that there are images of king Solomon on this lacquer will trigger all kinds of interest because people know Solomon. They know him in the Christian context, in the Jewish context, in the Islamic context, so it is very easy to connect people to something like that. The fact that European art had such an impact on Iranian lacquer we make sure that we have pieces that look almost like Italian paintings but they were made by Muslim Artists. Then again we can show this international connection that Islam ... was never monolithic... there was always information coming from outside and people were travelling all the time, this is the kind of thing we want to show.

Islamic art and culture

The term 'Islamic' is used in this gallery to define the culture of peoples living in lands where the dominant religion is Islam.

It applies to religious works of art as well as objects for everyday use. At different times the lands of Islam have extended from Spain in the west to Indonesia in the east. The arts of this culture differ widely across time and region. However, there are recognizable features that appear throughout: the powerful presence of the Arabic script; the fondness for arabesque and geometric ornament and the relative rarity of the human figure.

Images of living beings appear rarely because of the belief in Islam that only God can create living forms. This means that humans or animals do not generally appear in religious contexts. They are never found in copies of the Qur'an and seldom in religious buildings. However, humans and animals do appear on other types of objects, where they were more popular during some periods than others.

Fig. 4.23 The introductory label in the IG

Ipek Duben

Manuscript X, 1996

This small painting depicts two face-to-face human figures in the centre, surrounded by coloured rectangles. The figures are in profile and their mirrored pose strips them of their individuality, as it is impossible to distinguish a clear-cut dividing line between them.

This is from a series concerned with female identity.

Donated by Case dell Arte Gallery, Istanbul
2010 60-111

Fig.4.25 Manuscript X, 1996

(3) English and Arabic versions of the used questionnaire

Number:

Date:

Time:

Islamic World Gallery (Addis Galley):

Hi, my name is Mohamad Meqdad. I am a master student and I am conducting a research for my MA thesis about displaying Muslim material culture in the British Museum. May I have a few minutes of your time to discuss your experience the Islamic Gallery?

Thank you. Please do not feel pressured to answer in any particular way. I will not be offended by any negative responses. The questionnaire is available in Arabic as well.

The Museum:

- 1- How long have you been in the British Museum today?What about the time in the Islamic section?
- 2- How long do you intend to stay in the BM today? What about the gallery of the Islamic World?
- 3- Is it your first visit to the BM? ☐ Yes ☐ No (if no, go to Q4)
- 4- If not their first time: **When was your last visit?**
 - ☐ 12 months ago or less (**Continue**)
 - ☐ Between one and two years ago (**Skip to Q6**)
 - ☐ Between two and five years ago (**Skip to Q6**)
 - ☐ More than five years ago (**Skip to Q6**)
- 5- Including today, how many times have you visited in the past 12 months?
- 6- What was your reason for coming to the museum today?
 - ☐ To see a specific gallery or exhibit (if so which).....
 - ☐ A general visit to the museum
 - ☐ Attend a talk, tour, or special event
 - ☐ To visit the shop
 - ☐ To visit the cafe
 - ☐ To meet friends
 - ☐ Other.....

- 7- I am going to list some reasons for attending the British Museum, specifically the Islamic Gallery, please have a look down the list and say which apply to you. Tick all that apply.....

The reason or the reasons of visit	If achieved, please tick it
a) It is an enjoyable way to pass the time	
b) It is a nice place to spend time with friends and family	
c) To encourage children's interest in history	
d) I have a personal interest in the subject and I want to improve my knowledge about it	
e) I have an academic-professional interest in the subject	
f) To get a better understanding of other people and cultures	
g) It connects me to my own culture	
h) For a strong sense of personal connection or identity	
i) To have an emotionally moving experience	
j) To see fascinating or beautiful things in an attractive setting	
k) To stimulate my own creativity	
l) For peaceful, quiet contemplation	
m) Other reason, please specify.....	

Which one of those reasons would you consider your main reason for visiting today?

.....

Which of those would you say was your main gained experience?

.....

- 8- Did you intend to visit the Islamic gallery? ☐ Or did you just wander in? ☐

- 9- How would you best describe your level of knowledge about the displayed materials and the cultures that they represent?

- a- ☐ Expert knowledge
 b- ☐ General knowledge
 c- ☐ Little or no knowledge

10- If expert knowledge, in which area would you consider yourself an expert?

.....
.....
.....

11- Of all the objects you saw, did any stand out or catch your eye? What was it? Is there any reason you favoured this object?

.....
.....
.....

12- Is there anything more you would like to know about this object or display?

.....
.....
.....

13- What impression of the Islamic world did you get from this gallery?

.....
.....
.....

14- How do you think the Islamic gallery is organized or structured?

.....
.....
.....

15- Do you have any other comments about the gallery or displays here? Any suggested improvements?

.....
.....
.....
.....

16- Would you recommend this gallery to a friend? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Demographics:

These questions are strictly for classification purposes and your name will not be recorded.

17- What is your first language?

18- In which country do you currently live?

19- Who are you here with in your visit to the museum?

- a- ☐ Alone
- b- ☐ Children
- c- ☐ Adults
- d- ☐ School Party
- e- ☐ Organised group

20- What age group do you fall into?

1- 0-7 years ☐ 2- 8-11 years ☐ 3- 12-14 years ☐ 4- 15-16 years ☐

5- 17-19 years ☐ 6- 20-24 years ☐ 7- 25-34 years ☐ 8- 35-44 years ☐

9- 45-54 years ☐ 10- 55-59 years ☐ 11- 60-64 years ☐ 12- 65+ years ☐

13- Prefer not to say ☐

21- Male ☐ Female ☐

Many thank for your assistance this research. If you agree on including your contribution in the research, could please sign the consent sheet?

معرض العالم الاسلامي (القسم الإسلامي) في المتحف البريطاني:

مرحباً، اسمي محمد مقداد و اقوم الآن بإعداد بحث من أجل رسالة الماجستير وهي بعنوان عرض القطع الإسلامية في المتحف البريطاني. هل لي ببعض من وقتك للتحدث عن تجربتك في القسم الإسلامي؟

شكراً جزيلاً لك لمشاركتك، أرجو ان لا تشعر بأي نوع من الحرج في الإجابة عن أي سؤال من هذا الاستبيان، أيا كانت إجابتك فهي لن تؤخذ بشكل سلبي.

المتحف:

- 1- كم مضى من الوقت على وجودك في المتحف البريطاني؟..... و ماذا عن فترة وجودك في القسم الإسلامي؟.....
- 2- ما هي المدة الزمنية التي تنوي أن تقضيها اليوم في المتحف؟..... و ماذا عن القسم الإسلامي؟.....
- 3- هل هذه الزيارة هي زيارتك الأولى للمتحف البريطاني؟ نعم ☐ لا ☐ (إذا كانت لا اذهب للسؤال رقم 4)
- 4- اذا لم تكن هذه زيارتك الأولى، فمتى كانت آخر مرة؟
 - خلال 12 شهرا الماضية (اكمل إلى السؤال التالي)
 - بين سنة إلى سنتين (اذهب إلى السؤال رقم 6)
 - بين سنتين إلى خمس سنوات (اذهب إلى السؤال رقم 6)
 - أكثر من خمس سنوات (اذهب إلى السؤال رقم 6)
- 5- متضمنا اليوم، كم مرة زرت المتحف البريطاني خلال 12 شهرا الماضية؟.....
- 6- ما هو سبب زيارتك للمتحف اليوم؟
 - لزيارة قسم أو معرض محدد (ما هو من فضلك).....
 - زيارة للمتحف بشكل عام
 - لحضور محاضرة أو جولة أو حدث ما هنا
 - لأشتري شيئا من هنا
 - لأجلس في المقهى
 - لألتقي بأصدقائي
 - لسبب آخر (هل من الممكن ذكره).....
- 7- سوف أقوم بذكر بعض الأسباب لزيارتك للقسم الإسلامي هنا، من فضلك ألق نظرة عليها و اختر ما ينطبق عليك (ليس بالضرورة أن يكون سببا واحدا، قد يكون أكثر من ذلك)

سبب الزيارة	إذا تم تحقيقه، يرجى وضع إشارة في الحقل المقابل
(أ) انها طريقة ممتعة لتمضية الوقت	
(ب) انه مكان لطيف لقضاء الوقت مع الأصدقاء و العائلة	
(ج) لتشجيع الأطفال على الاهتمام بالتاريخ	
(د) لدي اهتمام شخصي في هذه الآثار و أريد أن اطور معرفتي عنها	
(هـ) لدي اهتمام أكاديمي – مهني بهذه الآثار	
(و) لأتعرف أكثر عن أناس و حضارات أخرى	
(ز) إنها تذكرني بحضارتي	
(ح) لتعزيز شعوري بالانتماء و الهوية	
(ط) للحصول على تجربة مثيرة للمشاعر	
(ي) لمشاهدة قطع جميلة في مكان جذاب	
(ك) لتنمية روح الإبداع لدي	
(ل) للتأمل و الشعور بالسلام	
(م) أسباب أخرى (ما هي)	

أيا من تلك الأسباب, يمكن أن تعتبره سببا رئيسيا للزيارة؟

.....

أيا من تلك الأهداف, يمكن أن تعتبره قد تم انجازه؟

.....

- 8- هل كنت تنوي زيارة القسم الإسلامي؟ ☐ أو أنك فقط كنت تتجول؟ ☐
9- كيف يمكنك أن تصف مستوى معرفتك عن القطع المعروضة و عن الحضارات التي تمثلها؟

• ☐ خبير/ة بذلك

• ☐ معرفتي عنها عامة و لكن غير اختصاصية

• ☐ شيء قليل أو لا أعرف عنها شيئا

- 10- إذا كنت خبيرا بذلك, فما هو تخصصك أو على ماذا تركز؟

.....

- 11- من بين كل القطع, هل هناك أية قطعة في هذا القسم لفتت نظرك أو شددت انتباهك؟ ما هي؟ ما هو سبب اهتمامك بها؟

.....

- 12- هل هناك أي شيء تريد أن تعرف عنه المزيد حول هذه القطعة أو طريقة العرض؟

.....

- 13- ما هو انطباعك عن العالم الإسلامي بعد الزيارة التي قمت بها للقسم الإسلامي في المتحف البريطاني؟

.....

- 14- ما هي برأيك الطريقة التي تم تنظيم القسم الإسلامي على أساسها؟

.....

- 15- هل لديك أية توصيات أو اقتراحات حول هذا القسم تود أن تقدمها من أجل تطويره و تحسينه؟

.....

- 16- هل توصي أصدقائك بزيارة القسم الإسلامي في المتحف البريطاني؟ نعم ☐ لا ☐

معلومات إحصائية:

هذه المعلومات هي فقط لأغراض إحصائية و اسمك لن يذكر فيها.

17- ما هي لغتك الأم؟

18- في أي دولة تعيش الآن؟

19- برفقة من تقوم اليوم بزيارة المتحف؟

تقوم بالزيارة لوحده ☐

مع الأطفال ☐

بالغين ☐

رحلة مدرسية ☐

مجموعة سياحية- زيارة جماعية منظمة ☐

20- إلى أي مجموعة عمرية تنتمي؟

☐ 16-15 سنة

☐ 14-12 سنة

☐ 11-8 سنوات

☐ 7-0 سنوات

☐ 44-35 سنة

☐ 34-25 سنة

☐ 24-20 سنة

☐ 19-17 سنة

☐ 65+ سنة

☐ 64-60 سنة

☐ 59-55 سنة

☐ 54-45 سنة

☐ أفضل عدم ذكر ذلك

☐ أم أنثى

☐ هل أنت: ذكر

شكرا جزيلا لمساعدتك في هذا البحث. إذا كنت موافقاً على إدراج مشاركتك فيه يرجى توقيع الإقرار بالموافقة المرفق بهذه الاستمارة.

(4) Informed Consent Sheet

INFORMED CONSENT SHEET

[TITLE OF STUDY – Communication with Muslim material culture in the British Museum Room 34]

Aga Khan University – Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations requires that all persons who participate in research studies give their written consent to do so. Please read the following and sign it if you agree with what it says.

I freely and voluntarily consent to be a participant in the research project entitled "**Displaying Muslim material culture in the British Museum**" to be conducted with [Mohamad Meqdad] as principal investigator. The broad goal of this research program is to explore [the experience of visiting the Islamic World gallery in the British Museum]. Specifically, I have been told that I will be asked to [do an interview and/or fill the attached questionnaire]. The session should take no longer than [20 minutes] to complete.

I have been told that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I also understand that if at any time during the session I feel unable or unwilling to continue, I am free to leave without negative consequences. That is, my participation in this study is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw from this study at any time. My withdrawal would not result in any penalty, academic or otherwise. My name will not be linked with the research materials, as the researchers are interested in [my impression of visiting this Gallery] in general -- not any individual's [personal information] in particular.

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the procedure, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been informed that if I have any general questions about this project, or ethical issues relating to the project, I should feel free to contact [Mohamad Meqdad] at [m.meqdad08@aku.edu] or their supervisor [Sarah Savant] at [sarah.savant@aku.edu].

I have read and understand the above and consent to participate in this study. My signature is not a waiver of any legal rights. Furthermore, I understand that I will be able to keep a copy of the informed consent form for my records.

Participant's Signature

Please Print

Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the above-named has consented to participate. Furthermore, I will retain one copy of the informed consent form for my records.

Principal Investigator Signature

Please Print

Date

Mohamad Meqdad

(5) Interview with the curators of the Islamic

- 1- When you hear the phrase: “Islamic gallery in the BM”, what **impression** do you get as a curator of it? What is **unique about this Gallery**?
- 2- To start with the **name of the Gallery “Islamic World”**, some of the visitors had inquiries about it. Why is it called **Islamic World and not others**?
- 3- Can you tell me more about the collection? (**History of curatorship**) And could you **contextualise it as a section in the BM**, in the **society, scholarship**?
- 4- Shah Abbas exhibition was an example of **Cross-cultural communication with a Muslim country**; could you please elaborate more on **these linkages with Muslim communities** and the **role of the Islamic Gallery in this policy**? Do you think the Islamic Gallery **represents Islam**?
- 5- From the curator of the gallery’s point of view, could you tell me **how this gallery is organised**?
- 6- **How do you go about displaying an object from choosing to placing it in a case with its label**?
- 7- Can you please tell me more about the **process of making labels for objects**; (i.e. providing information, their languages, considering the interactivity with the visitor, **the messages you attempt to convey through the text**, linking between the text and the object)?
- 8- What about the **process of changing the display in the gallery**? How, when, what about your **Acquisition policy** (expanding the collection, and **how is that related to the policy of preserving heritage in the UK**) (do you have **more objects in store** or you display all what you have)?
- 9- Is there any place for **unusual display** such as organising objects according to objects’ colours, objects for children and others for adults, etc.? What is the **role of visitors in changing the display**?
- 10- If you do not mind, can we talk more in **detail about the visitors? Annual statistics? The Best times for visiting this gallery**? What are the times when the number of visitors is high and when it is low?
- 11- Have you ever **thought of visiting the collection as only a visitor to go through the visitors’ experience**? If so, what was your **impression**? In your opinion **what sorts of people come to visit it**?
- 12- How do you describe the **process of education or learning inside the Islamic Gallery** in the BM?
- 13- How do you describe the **enjoyment this collection provides the visitor with**? What about the **visitors’ satisfaction out of this enjoyment** and **its sustainability after many visits**? **Do you think it is an interactive gallery? Why**?
- 14- I have noticed some **Facilities for people with special needs** (the elevator), can you please elaborate more on that?
- 15- Do you like to add anything , any **recommendations or suggestions** ?

(6) An interview with one of the curators of the Islamic Gallery

Transcription conventions: **I** interviewer; **R** respondent

- 1) **I:** when you hear the word Islamic gallery in the British museum
R: yeah
- 2) **I:** what impression you got from that?
R: well it's difficult because I work here so.. ehh..
- 3) **I:** yeah as a curator
R: Well mm... I think it's a problematic term the use of Islamic in this way but it's the best we have at the moment there is a lot
- 4) **I:** I mean your personal impression
R: yes I mean my personal opinion of .. what you mean I think is my personal opinion of using the term Islamic gallery to describe these materials ..yeah.. I think it's the best term that we have mm.. but I appreciate that it's a difficult term and people are constantly discussing whether this the right way to describe this or not because we do not talk about Christian gallery and you know all kinds of these things but as long as people understand what we mean by the term is the objects and the material culture of the land where the dominant religious and political system was Islam then I can think it's ok ..then I think it's ok
- 5) **I:** because a lot eh..many of my informants they asked me.. they said why it's Islamic world so they said it's kind of misleading for them
R: yes.. but it is true that it's misleading but once you define what you mean so in the entrance of the galley we actually define what we mean by Islamic
- 6) **I:** yes because sometimes you use the art of the middle east
R: it's the art of the Middle East but the thing is it has to be you have to define it you have to find some way to define it in terms of chronology because when you say the art of the Middle East this could be from the pre-Islamic era
- 7) **I:** exactly
R: and ahh so I think you have to find maybe you could call it..you know.. the Islamic middle east or something like that
- 8) **I:** is it the only section for expressing the faith in the British museum?
R: yes in this way but it's everywhere everywhere you go it is not just the British museum.. Victoria and Albert museum .. Jameel gallery.. the Islamic art wherever you go ..you know in Paris or Berlin or all galleries they call
- 9) **I:** so scholarly it's known like that?
R: it's it goes back to the term Islamic art ok? and this is the term that we've used like started to be used like at the end of 19th century.. you know first of all they called it Mohammadan art then they called it Islamic art and so it comes from there and the trouble is that if you call it middle east you know we don't have just middle eastern material in gallery we have material from India yeah.. we have material from Islamic India so then you have to find another way of calling it.. I mean the difficulty for me is that people get to hang up on this subject in the end why we do not just concentrate

on what in the gallery and let you know from my perspective let just live with this title Islamic art gallery

10) I: yeah..it's the most conventional one

R: it's very conventional and you know nobody is worried about it people do question it from time to time and they're right to question it but it's basically if somebody came up with a really good alternative I will be happy but at the moment this what we have

11) I: what do you think of Muslim's material culture?

R: the material culture of Muslims.. well the problem is that it is not.. a lot of this art was not made by Muslims anyway and that's always the term the problem with the term Islamic art which's why if you define Islamic art as coming from the country where the material culture is made within the context of the dominant religion and political culture is Islam, and Islam is tolerant of other religions particularly the people of the book and so that for within those communities the craftsmen mm..were Muslims they were Jews they were Christians so what you are doing is you are defining ahhh..you are defining ..mm..you are giving kind of chronology in a sense you are giving a context if you were to call it .. the material .. what did you say?

12) I: Muslims material culture

R: I do not think that.. because that would suggest that.. that just belongs to Muslims this doesn't this belongs to everybody it's produced in those regions in the middle East and the broader Islamic world if you like but it belongs to everybody .. really , so you know, like everything in the museum..it's all of our heritage .. really of this

13) I: so what do you think is unique about this collection?

R: our collection in the British Museum?

14) I: yeah..yeah.. the uniqueness of this collection

R: well mm..I would say that it's quite a representative collection of what we can call Islamic art from the beginning until now mm.. we have quite nice archaeological material from Samarra for example ..we have some very good strong star pieces from Iranian metalwork or some of the Mamluk material ..we have a very good collection of Iznik ..I think.. I do not know how unique it is .. I guess we have some materials it is stronger than if you would may ask of V&A for example ..you know they are much stronger in Fatimid material for example they have they have Fatimid rock crystal we do not have we have just little pieces so you know every museum.. because the material were collected in a different way you know they have their strengths and weaknesses but I think may be what is different about our collection is because we collect modern contemporary middle eastern art and that's the big difference between what we do and what other museums do

15) I : can you describe briefly the way of collecting these materials in the last probably 50 years

R:Well we only started collecting modern and contemporary middle eastern art that works on paper really since the end of 1980s so it's not quite as long as that so it's we probably have the work of maybe 150-170 artist from across the middle east now artists who live in their countries of origin or sometimes artistes in Diaspora who live

abroad and we have really quite a strong collation now we 're collecting all the time and we're trying to put it out on display where we can sometimes we put it in this gallery so actually behind this wall there is.. I have not quite finished the display.. but it's the display of modern Turkish art from our collection and then there's modern Iranian piece thatso I would say what is different about our collection is this added dimension of the modern and contemporary because very few people are doing that actually really.

16) I: could you please contextualise the Islamic gallery with the rest of the sections of the British museum? so how can you put this gallery in relation with the others?

R: well..I mean basically the BM is representing all cultures of the world and so it's representing the art of the Islamic middle east..ah and you should probably see this in the context of the other galleries which focus on mid ancient middle east art not pre-Islamic.. yes I mean it would be better if they were all in one place they are all in one floor but you know we have to rebuild the BM in order to do that so we try to make connections between the galleries where we can probably we can do that better but yes this gallery could be seen in two different contexts one is in the context of I can say ...in the context of the art of the material culture of the ancient middle east so you see it in that context and then you see it in terms of the broader context of all of the different cultures of the world and it has you know you can see the people in here it has a very strong place that actually within the BM I guess.

17) I: what about the connection between the Islamic gallery and the society surrounding it let's say the people of London.. the tourists.. the visitors..so the society mainly the society

R: well everybody comes here I mean it's free and so you know even as we are sitting here you can see there're people from many different parts of the world there're British people there're tourists there're a lot of Muslims come actually and when it's term time there it's full of children because you know the state schools when they open they come here and they draw and that sort of things so I would say it plays very important part within you know people who are interested in this in this area they will come they will come here

18) I: yeah..what about the let's say the location of this collection in scholarship about Islamic art to what extent is it a reference point for the Islamic art historian?

R: yes it's actually because we have got quite a lot of important objects and people do come and look at so anybody can come and look at objects in our collection and they you know we take them out of display for them or get them from the reserve room so we do have a lot of pieces that are studied that people write about yeah so we have I would say we are like other museums with important that people publish

19) I: can I move to the issue of cross cultural communication in shah Abbas exhibition you showed kind of cross-cultural communication with Muslims with a Muslim country

R: yeah.. I didn't I didn't curate that exhibition

20) I: yeah..yeah.. I know I'm talking in terms of the collection itself the curator of the collection so to how can you describe these linkages with Muslim communities in

terms of cross-cultural intellectual communications apart from diplomacy apart from politics?

R: well you could do that you could that kind of things in an exhibition and they did that a lot in the Shah Abbas exhibition that was very very good mm..you know to show visitors.. European visitors to Iran and you know all of that of things and the relation between the Armenian communities you can do that much more easily in an exhibition because an exhibition is very different from permanent gallery you have to equally exhibit things in a different angles for you can tell much greater stories about particular moment in time mm..here in terms of cross cultural I mean the best example probably is two cases of thethe first is the relationship between china and the Islamic world so that fantastically cross-cultural to see pieces.. the travel.. the influence where they go from one direction to another mm..so you try as best as you can where there's where there's mm.. so like the next case with lustre you know that shows really cross- cultural element to that lustre which's invented in 9th century in Bagdad and then it carried on from there to end up in Europe and in England.. so that's an example of cross-cultural

21) I: if you have a question...to what extent this collection represents Islam? What's your comment on this phrase?

V: well do you mean representing the Islamic religion? What do you mean by Islam?

22) I: so.. because you have parts for religion parts for secular Islamic.... or you have parts for weapons , so do you think it's representative of Islamic culture

R: yes I would say it's representative of Islamic culture

23) I: including religion?

R: yes I mean religion mm..the difficulty with the term Islamic to go back to that is that people when they see the world Islamic they expect the material in here to be entirely religious but it is not a lot of it was made for secular use but there are objects in here which were made for mosques and shrines like the mosque lamp for example and some of the objects you see in the museum.. the gravestone something like that .. are made with a religious they have a strongly religious of the Quran that we exhibit in front of the gallery so I would say it is representative of what we would call Islamic culture but within it there is a limited number of objects that were actually used for religious purposes.

24) I: yeah.. yeah..moving to this collection, can you tell me how is it organised curatoraly ?

R: ok curatoraly, basically..

25) I: because a lot of my informants they were quite lost they were not able to define the way that this gallery is organised

R: really??

26) I: yes

R: I am very surprised because lot of other people they have said to me they liked the organisation they can understand it .ok basically you have an introduction and you start with the early Islamic periods that case 3 is very much about the Umayyad and the Abbasid period and then we have like a few thematic cases on the top there is

China Islam and lustre case and at the back writing and then when you come into the gallery actually it is if they bother to read the information panel they will realize that there is actually quite there is actually a chronological historical approach and then you have the western Islamic lands on the left of the gallery so you start with Egypt Syria turkey and on that side exactly contemporary you have Iran central Asia and then you end up with India at the back and you end up with Spain on that side because that is the west and then we have an area in the middle which is for temporary display then we have a couple more thematic cases at the end so we have magic for example and astrology and then we have coins and then we have arms and armours , so basically what we try to do is basically a chronological approach so within that some thematic cases where it makes sense to look at objects together so that's what we try to do

27) I: can I ask you about the process of displaying an object? can you elaborate more on that since the choosing of object till when you put it in a case and you write it's label?

R: yeah..well a lot of this actually I wasn't involved with that but basically what you do is you choose the story that you want to tell so if you want to talk about the Mamluks for example and the Mamluks are very important in terms of Islamic history and Islamic art and so you know you look at your best pieces and you then work out which of them you want to display and you see if you look at the Mamluks ... you see it's mixture of glass and metalwork and ivory and ceramic and that sort of things so you look at what are the pieces you want to show what stories are they going to tell that very important and then you work out where they fit in the case you must not have too many pieces on a shelf because obviously then they do not look good you can't have like rows of different objects you have one here and there so you try to make an aesthetic display something that looks beautiful and then you in terms of the labelling we have as you probably realized we have very limited space so basically we have your shelf and then you have your label's top and there you will describe the object and then how it was made then..

28) I: who does it?

R: the curator does it that's the curator job the curator's job is to look after the collection and if there's any conservation needed the curator would also select objects for display they will then write the labels so that's our job.

29) I: what about the language of the labels in terms of the variety because some of my informants said why they do not have many languages? and the language itself what the level of language you use for them?

R: the level?

30) I: yeah..

R: well there's two things here the language itself we can only really do in English and we are in England after all..Ok..and now if you couldn't..if you look at the way we do the labels you could not have.. which are other languages would you choose I mean you know we have been in this gallery for the last half an hour and we have had probably half a dozen nationalities of people already coming in, so I do not know which language you choose for start now we have got an introduction to the gallery

in Arabic and there is now a guide to the museum which is in Arabic (daleel) which's for the whole museum in Arabic we've got I think a few pieces we have an audio guide but there isn't unfortunately there isn't yet an audio guide for this gallery and if they were then we would be able to put Arabic onto it or Turkish or Farsi or something like that so mm. yes it is difficult but so you know..unfortunately.. we expect people to be able to read the labels.. now in terms of the level of the information we put on we try and it's a very difficult thing because you are actually talking to.. there is not one public there is like four five publics you've got your academic you've got your visitor who knows a little bit about Islamic art and they heard about the collection they come and they look at it you've got somebody who just comes in through the north entrance and says ohhh what's in here? Let's go and have a look at it you got children you got students doing courses so it is a complicated thing because you barely got 30 words in which to write a label so you have to find a way of not making it obviously you know we are aware of that a lot of people their first language is not English , so you can't write into complicated way, so you try to find some way in which everybody can understand it , but what you also hope is that by creating beautiful display people will be drawn to the object because you can't have a situation where you have lots and lots of texts and lots of information panels you can't you know people were think you knowohhhh my name they just put this in the book you know because museums are about objects ,

31) I: do you think that the texts here are quite interactive with people so do you think the text itself pushes people to read more about the object?

R: I think we could do better ..we could do a lot better because it is partly the way that is done and that is very difficult to know where you know if I want people to read more or am I going to put that on the label? you know What you hope is that people will go then to the bookshop and we do have some nice books about Islamic art based on the collection in our bookshop , so you hope people will go to that , I think probably there are a lot of ways in which we could enhance the visitor experience , it would be very good for example if we had you know interactive touch screens you know in the gallery so the people could see the context so they look at pieces of Iznik then they could look at you know a mosque in Turkey and see how the tiles were displayed or something like that you know, so I think there is not more that we could do but it would require a lot of changes to the gallery which you know that is very difficult to make actually.

32) I: do you think the visitors look at the text first or at the object?

R: they look at the object, oh yes people look at the object absolutely. If you are just observing the people you know what they are looking at is the object that is why they come to museum if they just want to read they go to a library.

33) I: what is your process for changing the display do you consider the visitors' suggestions and recommendations?

R: yes, it does not happen very often, I mean the display that we have basically the best of what we have in the collection. And the pieces are more example of this type, and what we do make changes to.. art.. particularly the contemporary display we

do change those every short time a year basically or sometimes in those cases we make some changes, so yeas we do make changes.

34) I: so what about the policy of expanding the collection a lot of people recommended that we hope the BM will expand this collection Islamic collection..what about that?

R:well I mean we are acquiring a modern middle eastern art quite a lot we're expanding our collection we can't put on display all the time because it is works on paper and you can only show some like these pieces that are just behind us and we are expanding in that area, now if we were to expand in terms of the historical objects or pieces Iznik or Abbasid pottery that sort of things , there are two problems ; the first is that these pieces when they come up at auction now they are very very expensive very expensive and it is very unlucky we pay fortune to buy them if they are good we might sometimes belt to find something like you know a piece no one has noticed it that interesting documentary piece fills the gap, so occasionally we buy pieces like that ..but the big problem really is knowing where something has come from and we are very very aware of the huge amount of smuggled material is coming into this country and it is sold in different places, so we have to be very careful if we are offered something for sell , so we can't basically buy anything unless we know where it been since 1972, 1972 is very important year conventional which was there , they draw a line and ok a lot of things were taken out in the past illegally but we have to draw a line and say ok that happened we will now do our best this is not happening in the future , so museums like ours now are very very strict about what we do actually , if we were able to find something we would be much more drawn to something that been in an English collection for a long time or something that rather than buying something directly from Syria or Turkey or Egypt or something like that we generally do not do that.

35) I: coming back to the display of this collection, is there any place for unusual display, for example displaying material according to their colures, according to the age of the audience?

R: I don't know what you are asking really..I mean..

36) I: I mean out of thematical chronological historical geographical way..

R: from all the way of doing it, you could you could put into a case everything that is blue for example, I mean that is quite interesting if you, you can do things by techniques and you know colours is very interesting because of the material which they are made, so you could easily so a case with everything is blue or everything is inlaid with..... for example, so you could look at things in that way

37) I: so there is a place for that

R: yes, I mean there is but that more in terms of temporary display rather than a permanent display.

38) I: now moving to the visitor section.. do you have some statistics about the visitor of this section?

R: no, have you seen there's a book by somebody who is called IAN HEATH, did you see that? It was in the BAR report?

39) I: no

R: you should read this actually because this is somebody who came and did a lot of this kind of work that you are doing visitors survey and things like that which is called displaying Islamic art in British collections and he is called IAN HEATH and it is in the series which is BAR reports, he did his work 7-8 years ago, but in terms of now the visitors number as you are asking I mean I do not know if anybody has counted specifically the amounts of people who come to the Islamic gallery we know the people coming to the BM is about 6 million people in a year

40) I: do you have any idea about the best times for the people to come to this gallery, the time when the number of visitor is the highest or the lowest for example, I noticed that between 2-3 pm there's just few people?

R: yes, I mean it depends on the time of the year, because there is a huge number of tourists actually at the moment in London and so you see a lot of them and that kind of the whole day, you can see it depends on the galleries some galleries I mean if you go to the Mummy gallery everybody wants to be in the mummy gallery and they come from all over the world to see that, but I do not know but in the early in the morning there is not anybody very much 10 clock sometimes because the museum does late evening that is actually quite nice time to go.

41) I: Have you ever thought of visiting the collection as only a visitor to go through the visitors' experience and isolate your curatorial identity?

R: I do often particularly when I take tours people around the gallery actually, I often see it from their perspective and then I think ohhhh that's really strange why is that next to that you know so yes I think it is probably quite good idea to do that from time to time.

42) I: what impression you get when you enter this collection, let us from this perception of being a visitor?

R: well I think, then I am biased of course because I feel very comfortable here, I love this gallery and it has a very nice atmosphere I think it is very calm and it is also because it has natural light as well and the object beautiful, I think it has a very nice aura actually this gallery which is good

43) I: do you have an idea about what sorts of people come to visit this gallery?

R: you can see yourself they are whole range of people, I mean look there is two people there they are really looking at the object and discussing them and that what I mean the whole range, different types of people really from the scholars to the personal use just you see those people they have to be really interested in order to go to the Islamic cases, you see? most people there are some statistics about how most people will only spent like a minute in front of the case unless something draws them so that is why you have to have in any one case you need to have some quite strong objects that people you know go to like that once you have got them there because they are looking at one object then you have opportunity to give them information about the piece and inform them as much as they want to be but I think there are all level of people actually all kinds of people.

44) I: so you think that this collection has educational or learning process?

R: definitely definitely definitely we have a lot of students who come whether they are students of Islamic art or students coming to study ceramic technology we have a lot of people who come just want to draw because they like the Islamic design or whatever so yes it has a very strong educational purposes and we have actually led it out with back in mind so if you go to V&A for example you don't have a chronological approach whereas we have this chronological approach because it is quite important to be didactic in that way

45) I: do you have an idea about the sense of enjoyment that visitors gain when they come and their satisfaction about this enjoyment after visiting it many times?

R: it is difficult to know because people do not generally tell me if they do not accurate you know, but a lot of people do say they love coming here and they like what they see I mean probably it is quite an old opened in 1989 and yes we have made some changes but not huge number of changes yes it would really really benefit from being refreshed you know it is a new show cases and more interactive and all of that but I mean on the whole I feel that the people who come here sort of enjoyable things what they see

46) I: do you describe this collection as an interactive one in the display and the text with the visitors?

47) R: this isn't an interactive display, I mean an interactive display is when you are using touch screen and you know that sort of things.. I mean this is perhaps interactive in a different way people will have a relationship with a particular object..I mean there're people who go to museums to look at one particular thing or one particular painting and probably this the case here we have noticed in the past when we have changed something is like ahhh no.. why did you move that we got used to it and this sort of things.. so I think yes I am not sure into interactive about way of describing it really of that

48) I: what about the visitors with special needs

R: we have cared of them very very well in the BM, so in this gallery actually there is the lift for the people I mean most of.....

49) I: I have noticed some people with special needs there , so do you think the height of the shelves is suitable for them

R: all of that is very well organised actually the height of the shelves it has to be a certain height for the average visitors but also somebody who is in wheelchair as well and all of that is something that our design office actually

50) I: what about the people those have sight problem?

R: partially sighted I do not know I guess there we do not have any object that people can touch in this gallery but there're elsewhere in the museum and then they've the audio that only helps them

51) I: now coming to my last question do you have any recommendation any suggestions for this study?

R: your personal study?

52) I: yes my personal study

R: no I think it's great that that you're doing this and I guess what would be good you know would when you go back to Syria you know you will look at those museums with a different kind of eye because you have been thinking about all these questions which is like, I mean who is the museum for? this is the basic thing who is it for? it needs to be you know in somewhere like Syria very different context it needs to be for Syrians you know because full of Syrian materials to love and appreciate the country wonderful culture and about the museum there the national museum is also for the tourists and their casual visitors and you know all of those people were students and so and so I guess you know I would say I hope that you will continue to work in inshalla in museums because working in museums is very very rewarding actually , it is very rewarding .

53) I: thank you very much that was really helpful

R: not at all good luck with your study and let me know.. and keep in touch..

(7) Funding the BM

The BM receives its fund from different sources. Some of them are related to the UK government, others are from organisations, and some others are just individual donations (BM 2009:17). Although, this museum is named nationally '*British*', its frame of reference is international. This is mentioned in the definition of BM in the Funding Agreement 2008-11 between the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the British Museum. According to this agreement: 'The British Museum was founded as a national institution with an international frame of reference. Two and a half centuries later it is one of the few and perhaps the only collection in the world where the history of mankind can be told through material culture over a span of two million years; where the nature of objects may be investigated and understood from many different perspectives; and where connections with the past may illuminate the present and show the potential of the future' (DCMS& BM agreement 2008:1).

This agreement, on one hand, refers to an international definition of the BM and its collections while on the other hand, it sets some rules for the continuity of its funding. For example, its funding is conditioned by monitoring the performance of BM through regular reports and considering some governmental priorities such as the diversity of both audiences and the employees in the museum, the promotion of its sustainability and the mitigation of the effects of climate change' (ibid: 4). The first fruit of such agreements was the British Museum's reception of £43.7 million revenue and £7.2 million capital grant-in-aid from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in 2008/09 that is in addition to £41.6 million and £3.3 million in 2007/08 (BM 2009: 18).



Journey in the IG



Journey in th IG



Journey in the IG



Visitoes' interaction with the IG



Visitors' interaction with the IG



A sample of the studied objects in the IG