Deciphering Museums, Politics & Impact

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Abstract

This paper makes a contribution towards deciphering the relationship between museums, politics and impact. I suggest that this is akin to that between three languages in the early nineteenth century: Greek, Demotic and Hieroglyphs. I argue that museums should be taken much more seriously by the discipline of politics and international relations. This paper begins with an analysis of the REF 2014 Impact Case Studies submitted under the Politics and International Studies Unit of Assessment. Thereafter, it looks at how museums have been examined in the field of politics and international relations. Finally, it outlines some of the benefits and opportunities of scholars in the field engaging with museums in terms of their research, as potential collaborators, and as partners for knowledge transfer and impactful activities – within and outwith the strictures of the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Keywords

Museums; history; politics; impact; public history; knowledge transfer

Introduction

> *No. You gotta move on. You gotta spread the word. You gotta go to Nazareth, please. And that's, very much like... me. My world does not end within these four walls*
>
> - David Brent

> *Museums are managers of consciousness. They give us an interpretation of history, of how to view the world and locate ourselves within it. They are, if you want to put it in positive terms, great educational institutions. If you want to put it in negative terms, they are propaganda machines*
>
> - Hans Haacke

In early 1802 a rather 'exotic' sounding Royal Navy warship sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar, past the Bay of Biscay and into the English Channel for the first time. HMS *Egyptienne*, a 50-gun frigate built in Toulon, had been taken from the French the previous year in Egypt. It sailed up the Thames against the backdrop of a new sovereign state at home – the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland – a newly created Consulship in France, and a struggle that would play out on a global scale until the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Several years previously, General Bonaparte had set out for Egypt with the ostensible goal of weakening Britain's hold on India, accompanied by 167 scholars and scientists (*savants* – 'knowing persons').[1] In the intervening period they had established

the *Institut d'Égypte*, ushering in the modern discipline of Egyptology, and amassed a huge collection of artefacts under the auspices of that other French Revolutionary standard – 'Enlightenment'. The Capitulation of Alexandria in 1801, however, would bring the French Expedition in Egypt to a close. It would also necessitate handing over six French ships that were docked in Alexandria harbour, three to the British Admiral Lord Keith and three to the Turkish Admiral Capitan Pacha, as well as certain 'Pieces of Ancient Sculpture' (Bell, 2008; Esdaile, 2008; Wilson, 1803: 268).

In the hold of *Égyptienne* as it sailed for Woolwich was a spoil of war that would reveal itself to be even more 'exotic' than the name of the ship in which it was conveyed: 'a stone of black granite, with three inscriptions, hieroglyphic, Coptic and Greek, found near Rosetta' (Wilson, 1803: 268). By way of the august Society of Antiquaries in London, plaster casts would be made of this object to be sent to four of the oldest and most prestigious universities in the country – Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, and Trinity College, Dublin. Thereafter it would make its way to Bloomsbury with royal assent. Acquiring the inventory number EA 24 (Egyptian Antiquities) during the nineteenth century, it remains there to this day bearing the fading legends on its sides: 'Captured in Egypt by the British Army in 1801', 'Presented by King George III' (Ray, 2012). This object, as a prominent Egyptologist and author of a book that accompanied a major exhibition on the bicentennial of its discovery in 1999 would argue, 'has turned from the booty of conflict into a symbol of cross-cultural understanding. Broken and slightly battered, it remains a symbol of the enduring power of human understanding' (Parkinson quoted in Bennett, 2004; see also, Parkinson, 1999, 2005).

I am of course referring to the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum: the most visited object in one of the most visited museums in the world (Ray, 2012: 1). Officially known as 'The Memphis Decree', it features script in Greek (54 lines), the official language of Ptolemaic Egypt; Demotic (32 lines), the common language of the people at the time; and, Hieroglyphics (14 lines), the sacred language of the High Priests of Memphis. It was issued to affirm the royal cult of the 13-year-old Ptolemy V on the first anniversary of his coronation during a particularly turbulent period in Egyptian history. It was discovered inside the wall of an Ottoman fort which had been built utilizing nearby ancient ruins, the French having taken over the fort after defeating Mustafa Pasha's army in 1799 at the Battle of Abukir. It would ultimately be the key to deciphering hieroglyphics of which all knowledge had been lost.

The Franco-British rivalry now played out in the realms of learned societies, scholars and encyclopaedia entries. The British polymath Thomas Young made a major contribution in recognising the significance of the cartouches drawn around royal names, but it would be the Frenchman Jean-François Champollion who would ultimately deliver a full translation in 1822. A child prodigy, Champollion is rumoured to have raced to the Academy of

Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres where his brother worked and cried out 'I have it!' before promptly fainting. Thereafter, scholarly and popular interest in Egypt would deepen substantially throughout the nineteenth century and at the time of writing it remains very much part of the cultural imaginary – as evidenced in part by the enduring allure of the Rosetta Stone. Amongst a cornucopia of artefacts drawn in from the four corners of the globe by various means, this stele, which dates from 197BC, is the most lingered over object at the UK's top attraction for ten years running – with almost 6.5 million people passing through its doors in 2016. More prosaically, the Rosetta Stone is the British Museum's best-selling postcard (Ray, 2012: 4).

'The fundamental purposes for which the British Museum was set up by Parliament in 1753, and for which it still exists today', argued the former long-running director of the institution and author of *A History of the World in 100 Objects*, was to 'allow visitors to address through objects, both ancient and more recent, questions of contemporary politics and international relations' (McGregor, 2004). Interestingly, though, this debate has by and large bypassed scholars whose very academic *raison d'être* is to specialize in contemporary politics and international relations. The same can be said when we think of museums and the discipline of political and international relations more generally; or, to hone in on the focus of this special issue, as institutions for impact.

In this article, I would like to argue that museums should be taken much more seriously by the discipline of politics and international relations. They should be taken more seriously as an object of study; as colleagues in the educative enterprise; as potential collaborators in the co-creation of knowledge; and as partners for impact – both within *and* outwith the strictures of the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

To return to the David Brent quote with which I opened this article, academics, in my view, have an obligation to 'spread the word', to share their expertise and to have it developed in turn as a result of this engagement. A deeper engagement with museums – which, no matter what you may say about them, punch their way into the political consciousness and subjectivity of more of the people, more of the time, more effectively than political scientists do – provides one particularly effective way to do so (on a related point see Starn, 2005: 68). Indeed, one could even say, without wishing to push the analogy too far, that at present the relationship between the discipline of politics and international relations, impact and museums is similar to that between the written languages of Greek, Demotic and Hieroglyphics in the early nineteenth century – Greek being 'the discipline of politics and international relations', Demotic being 'impact', and Hieroglyphics being 'museums'. Greek was known, the relationship between Greek and Demotic was gradually being unravelled, while the understanding of hieroglyphics was fragmentary and opaque. What

follows is a modest, but necessary, contribution towards further understanding between these three languages.

With an especial focus upon impact, as charged by the editors, I would like to think through the relationship between museums and the discipline of politics and international relations. The essay will unfold in three sections that build cumulatively and in an interrelated fashion. In the first two sections I will move from the specific to the general (although the reader with less interest in academic accountability in the UK may wish to proceed to the second section). In the first section, I will (1) analyse the 2014 REF Impact Case Studies that mention 'museum' or 'museums' in the Politics and International Studies Unit of Assessment (UoA) – situating them within a broader context by considering those that were submitted in some other UoA's, particularly adjoining fields. In the second section, I will turn to (2) how museums are dealt with in the discipline more generally. Despite the fact that REF Impact Case Studies are hardly a mirror reflection or a scientifically representative example of the discipline as a whole (a subject that lies beyond the confines of this paper), I contend that they can tell us something about the disciplines that they emanate from and are categorized into by the REF UoA's (for example, their subject matter, priorities, goals, biases, assumptions and so forth). Given the somewhat threadbare cupboard in terms of substantive engagement and quantity we will find in section one, then, we must also look to the discipline of which they are a distillation in section two. Based on the analysis in the first two sections, it seems that something must be said in section two about the profoundly political nature of museums and why they should be of more interest to scholars of politics and international relations. Following on from this, I discuss (3) the benefits and challenges of a deeper two-way engagement with museums for scholars in the field: as an object of study, as a resource, and as an outlet for knowledge transfer and impactful activities. I also discuss the particular skill-set that politics and international relations as a discipline could collectively bring to these important debates.

Epistemological and Methodological Caesura

Throughout this paper I will draw on my own experiences with the museum world. I will principally draw upon my own practical experience of being embedded within two major museums that have local, national and international audiences. In 2007 I held a research internship with Glasgow Museums, where I was charged with drafting a report on the representation of marginalized groups in Glasgow Museums, followed by a presentation to curators and other museum professionals. Glasgow Museums was an umbrella organization for the museums and heritage sites run and administered by Glasgow City Council – they include the Kelvingrove Museum and the Riverside Museum, the second and third most

popular museums outside of London after the National Museum of Scotland (Smith, 2017). Indeed, this report was deemed necessary due to the opening of the Riverside Museum, which would go on to win the European Museum of the Year in 2013, and the rehousing, reorganization and reinterpretation of the collection held in the soon to close Transport Museum. For the report I interviewed community stakeholders, curators and other museum professionals. I also read the relevant literature on museums and representation; combed through policy documents issued by Glasgow City Council and the relevant professional bodies; reached out to leading experts in the field, and sent out a survey to institutions that were seen to be ahead of the curve in this particular area. Merseyside Maritime Museum/The International Slavery Museum and Te Papa Tongawera/The Museum of New Zealand, for example, were seen as institutions that had navigated these difficult political and ethical shoals with a significant degree of success.

More recently (2015-2017), I held an Andrew W. Mellon Postdoctoral Fellowship with the National September 11 Memorial & Museum and New York University. My charge there was to develop a new book project and to engage in the daily life of a major international museum. While there, I worked with the curatorial department, the exhibitions department, the communications department and the education department, where I was physically and administratively located, and participated in a variety of activities that one could describe as public history, knowledge transfer – in both directions – the co-creation of knowledge, and impact. The culmination of the fellowship was the first academic conference to have been held at the former World Trade Center site. This conference, entitled 'The 9/11 Legacy: History Is not Was, History *Is*", included scholars, educators, artists, curators and museum professionals from across the United States and around the world.

1. Museums and The Discipline: REF 2014 Impact Case Studies

For REF 2014 each submitting Higher Education Institution (HEI) was required to submit a minimum of two Impact Case Studies. Thereafter, the number of case studies required was dependent upon the number of staff submitted to each UoA, as outlined in Table 1 below (all data from REF 2014):

Number of Category A Staff Submitted (FTE)	Required Number of Case Studies
Up to 14.99	2
15-24.99	3
25-34.99	4
35-44.99	5
45 or more	6, plus one further case study per additional 10 FTE

Table 1: No. of Case Studies Required per UoA

The number of case studies submitted in the Politics and International Studies UoA (UoA-21) was 166, from a total of 56 institutions who submitted under this UoA in total. Of these 166 submissions, only three mention 'museum' or 'museums' (or 1.8%) – the same number as for the Mathematical Sciences. For REF 2014 as a whole 6637 case studies were submitted; 811 mention those same terms (12.21%). To see the breakdown per panel let us turn to Table 2 below:

Main Panel	Number of Case Studies Submitted in Total	Number of Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums'	Percentage of Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums'
A – Medicine, Health and Life Sciences	1586	32	2.0%
B – Physical sciences, engineering and mathematics	1469	69	4.7%
C – Social Sciences	1965	123	6.3%
D – Arts and Humanities	1617	588	36%

Table 2: Impact Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums' Per Main Panel

As a UoA, then, Politics and International Studies submitted more than three times fewer case studies featuring 'museum' or 'museums' than the average for the Social Sciences (Main Panel C). In percentage terms, this is 1.8% versus 6.3%. Indeed, it submitted less than the lowest percentage for *any* Main Panel (that of Main Panel A – Medicine, Health and Life Sciences). Let us break

this analysis down further by examining Table 3, which ranks UoA's per the number of Impact Case Studies submitted featuring 'museum' or 'museums':

UoA	Main Panel	Number of Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums'	Ranking
Art & Design: History, Practice & Theory	D	152	1
History	D	122	2
English Language & Literature	D	97	3
Geography, Environ. Studies & Archaeology	C	60	4
Modern Languages & Linguistics	D	50	5
Music, Drama, Dance & Performing Arts	D	48	6
Classics	D	40	7
Communication, Cultural & Media Studies, Library & Information Management	D	35	8
Physics	B	17	9 =
Computer Science & Informatics	B	17	9 =
Theology & Religious Studies	D	16	10
Architecture, Built Environment, & Planning	C	15	11 =
Anthropology & Development Studies	C	15	11 =
Area Studies	D	14	12
Biology	A	13	13 =
Philosophy	D	13	13 =
Earth Systems & Environmental Sciences	B	12	14
Sociology	C	9	15
Electrical & Electronic Engineering, Metallurgy & Materials	B	8	16
Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing & Pharmacy	A	7	17 =
Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical & Manufacturing Engineering	B	7	17 =
General Engineering	B	6	18 =
Education	C	6	18 =
Business & Management Studies	C	5	19 =
Clinical Medicine	A	5	19 =
Chemistry	B	4	20 =
Social Work & Social Policy	C	4	20 =
Psychology, Psychiatry & Neuroscience	A	4	20 =
Mathematical Sciences	B	3	21 =
Sport & Exercise Sciences, Leisure & Tourism	C	3	21 =
* Politics & International Studies	C	3	21 =
Law	C	3	21 =
Agriculture, Veterinary & Food Sciences	A	2	22 =

Public Health, Health Services & Private Care	A	1	23 =
Civil & Construction Engineering	B	1	23+

Table 3: Impact Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums' Per UoA (n = 35)

As we can see from Table 3, if *n* = 35 and if possible rankings range from 1-23, then the Politics and International Studies UoA at 21 = props up the bottom quintile (there were 36 UoA's but Economics and Econometrics is excluded as no case studies were submitted featuring the search terms). We will qualitatively examine the Politics and International Studies Impact Case Studies featuring our search terms in more detail soon, but even from this basic statistical analysis it seems difficult to believe that the discipline ends up where it does and below the vast majority of the other UoA's. Does the discipline have so little to offer the museum world and so little to say about these deeply political institutions? Below I will make a strong case that it does not and that this should not be the case.

Before we get there, however, let us continue our analysis by turning to Table 4, which ranks the UoA's per the percentage of case studies submitted which feature 'museum' or 'museums' (in this table all percentages are rounded up or down to the nearest decimal place):

UoA	Main Panel	Number of Case Studies Submitted in Total	Percentage of Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums'	Ranking
Classics	D	59	68%	1
Art & Design: History, Practice & Theory	D	231	66%	2
History	D	263	46%	3
English Language & Literature	D	280	35%	4
Geography, Environ. Studies & Archaeology	C	235	26%	5 =
Modern Languages & Linguistics	D	190	26%	5 =
Music, Drama, Dance & Performing Arts	D	194	25%	6
Communication, Cultural & Media Studies, Library & Information Management	D	159	22%	7
Theology & Religious Studies	D	75	21%	8 =
Area Studies	D	68	21%	8 =
Anthropology & Development Studies	C	80	19%	9
Philosophy	D	98	13%	10

Architecture, Built Environment, & Planning	C	140	11%	11
Physics	B	181	9%	12 =
Sociology	C	97	9%	12 =
Computer Science & Informatics	B	248	7%	13 =
Earth Systems & Environmental Sciences	B	171	7%	13 =
Electrical & Electronic Engineering, Metallurgy & Materials	B	126	6%	14 =
Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical & Manufacturing Engineering	B	119	6%	14 =
Biology	A	257	5%	15
General Engineering	B	239	3%	16 =
Education	C	215	3%	16 =
Chemistry	B	125	3%	16 =
Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing & Pharmacy	A	342	2%	17 =
Social Work & Social Policy	C	186	2%	17 =
Sport & Exercise Sciences, Leisure & Tourism	C	122	2%	17 =
Civil & Construction Engineering	B	51	2%	17 =
* Politics & International Studies	C	166	2%	17 =
Law	C	216	2%	17 =
Agriculture, Veterinary & Food Sciences	A	125	2%	17 =
Business & Management Studies	C	410	1%	18 =
Clinical Medicine	A	383	1%	18 =
Psychology, Psychiatry & Neuroscience	A	316	1%	18 =
Mathematical Sciences	B	209	1%	18 =
Public Health, Health Services & Private Care	A	163	1%	18 =

Table 4: Percentage of Case Studies Submitted Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums' Per UoA

As we can see from this table, Politics and International Studies as a UoA hardly fares any better when looking at Impact Case Studies in percentage terms. Once again it lands solidly within the bottom quintile, sharing the second to last place with a number of other UoA's such as Civil and Construction Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Sciences, and Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy. Let us now examine the discipline in comparison to adjoining fields[2] by turning to Table 5, where we will see that once again the Politics and International Studies UoA compares less than favourably, propping up the bottom of the table once again:

	Number of Case Studies		Percentage of Case Studies	
UoA	*Number of Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums'*	*Ranking*	*Percentage of Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums'*	*Ranking*
History	122	1	46%	3
Geography, Environ. Studies & Archaeology	60	4	26%	5 =
Anthropology & Development Studies	15	11 =	19%	9
Area Studies	14	12	21%	8 =
Philosophy	13	13 =	13%	10
Sociology	9	15	9%	12 =
Social Work & Social Policy	4	20 =	2%	17 =
Politics & International Studies	3	21 =	2%	21 =
Law	3	21 =	2%	21 =

Table 5: Politics Ranked Alongside Adjoining Disciplines on Impact Case Studies Featuring 'Museum' or 'Museums'

Let us now, then, qualitatively examine the three Impact Case Studies submitted under the Politics and International Studies UoA that feature 'museum' or 'museums'. For perhaps more lies below the crude simplicity of numbers? As mentioned above, 166 Impact Case Studies were submitted under the Politics and International Studies UoA, from 56 institutions in total. 28 institutions submitted the minimum of at least two case studies, 15 submitted three, 7 submitted four, 3 submitted five, while three of the largest departments – the University of Warwick, London School of Economics and Politics Science, and the University of Oxford – submitted six, seven and nine case studies respectively. Royal Holloway, University of London, Oxford Brookes University and the University of Warwick submitted the three case studies that feature 'museum' or 'museums'. What we find here underscores what we have found from the analysis in this section thus far.

Our first case study, 'Political Communication in the New Media Ecology' (REF 2014a), mentions the word 'museum' once. Coincidentally, it is a reference to the 'British Museum', but it is merely used in brackets as an example to illustrate a larger point:

> *[The academic whose research the Impact Case Study was built around] 'Successfully assisted the Committee with understanding how some of the more nebulous concepts that are used in the relevant literature and by witnesses might best be pinned down, such as by recognising the distinction drawn between outputs (for instance, the number of website 'hits' that the British Museum receives) and outcomes (for instance, the change in attitudes about the UK that witnesses might have seen as a result of their actions)'.*

The second case study was titled 'Gender, Parenthood and Public Policy' (REF 2014b). Here again 'museum is mentioned once, in the context of delivering an opening keynote lecture at the Museum of Motherhood in New York City:

> *Other invitations have included [the academic whose research the Impact Case Study was built around] presenting her research findings on fatherhood to the Labour Policy Review group at the House of Commons (February 2013) and giving the opening keynote lecture at the Museum of Motherhood in New York (May 2013).*

Delivering a keynote address at a major museum is indeed an important and worthy endeavour and an excellent way to disseminate one's work. Utilizing the UK's top attraction for ten years running to bring something within the sphere of cognition of one's readers is a great way to communicate your ideas. What I am trying to say, then, is that none of this is in any way meant to undermine these fine case studies, their intellectual merit, or indeed their impactfullness. Nonetheless, what we do see from these two case studies is that museums are hardly central. I am merely illustrating a larger point with regards to the ways in which museums have been a blind spot for the discipline with regards to substantive intellectual outputs/research expertise and impact case studies.

Indeed, only one Impact Case Study in the Politics and International Studies UoA evidenced any kind of substantive or deep engagement with museums, in the sense that a politics and international relations academic was working alongside museum staff – in this case the International Spy Museum – and that 'museums' form part of the fabric of the document. This final case study, 'Landscapes of Secrecy: Influencing the Public and Professional Debate about Intelligence, Secrecy and Openness' (REF 2014c), makes a point that ties into the larger argument made in this paper about the cultural production of knowledge and the sites at which political subjectivity is inculcated, contested and negotiated:

The Museum's chartered responsibility is to inform the public about the fact, not fiction, of espionage. [One of the academics whose research the Impact Case Study was built around] research was instrumental in convincing the Museum that spy fiction should be taken seriously, since it provides the public with a unique, if not necessarily accurate, window onto clandestine security relations. [One of the academics whose research the Impact Case Study was built around] idea that public perceptions about intelligence are disproportionately influenced by fictive ideas derived from popular culture is the overriding message of the exhibition.

As readers immersed in the institutional dynamics and politics of the REF system will no doubt be aware, this is an imperfect barometer of what happens in the field more generally. What we will find, however, is that the findings in this section are hardly a serious distortion of the extent to which museums are the focus of serious political analysis *within* the discipline.

2. Museums and Politics; The Politics of Museums

Research on museums and politics is burgeoning, but, regrettably, it is not burgeoning in the discipline of politics and international relations. As one of the few books to have been written on the subject from within the field points out, albeit outside of the mainstream, museums are for the most part ignored by political scientists. Museums are rarely 'regarded as affording rich opportunities for political analysis, and those that do exist are, all too often, consigned by professional prejudice to cultural studies departments at best or to the style sections of big urban newspapers at worst' (Luke, 2002: xii). Unfortunately, little has changed since Luke wrote *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition* in 2002. Yet, museums, to paraphrase Stuart Hall, are 'absolutely deadly political' (Hall, 1997: 290).

The Rosetta Stone did not come into the world fully formed, springing like Athena from the head of Zeus. Rather it came into being in a political context. It was produced during a time of internecine political strife. The decree was an attempt to shore up the political legitimacy of Ptolemy V. It was issued in Memphis for political reasons. Its propagandistic language was political. Greek, Demotic and Hieroglyphics were placed side by side for political reasons. It was torn down from the temple in which it was housed during a time of great political upheaval around the Mediterranean world. It came to be where it now resides in Great Russell Street during a period of deep political convulsion across the European continent. Today, meanwhile, politics have not left the Rosetta Stone alone to bask in the glory and wonder with which it is beheld. 'The Rosetta Stone is the icon of the Egyptian identity, without it there is no understanding of our monuments' (Hawass quoted in Garwood, 2003). 'Important icons', the former Director of Egypt's Chief Council of Antiquities would argue, 'should be in their motherland, period' (Zahi Hawass quoted in McElroy, 2010). Between the Rosetta Stone, the Elgin Marbles, the Benin Bronzes and the Koh-I-Noor diamond, we see contemporary Anglo-Egyptian, Anglo-Greek, Anglo-Nigerian

and Anglo-Indian/Pakistani relations implicated. Cultural restitution and how cultural artefacts relate to contemporary nations and states, and bygone empires, is merely one prominent facet of the politics of museums.

In his book *The Politics of Museums*, cultural policy expert Clive Gray (2015) outlines the multiplicity of ways in which museums are political institutions. This plays out on a number of fronts: the relationship between museums and their publics, whether local, national and international, or some permutation thereof (for the year 2014-2015 the British Museum reported that it had an online audience of 43.7 million, over half of whom were from overseas; British Museum, 2015); the relationship between staff and visitors, between curatorial staff and support staff, between staff and community advocates; the relationship of museum elites to other elites, whether in the realms of politics, business, or culture. Indeed, here we could ask a classic who gets what, where, why and when type question familiar to political analysts. Who in the UK gets to become a curator and what are the politics of this? While there is obviously no one way to become a curator, a degree from a Russell Group university, a masters degree, likely self-funded, and a series of unpaid internships, in the UK context most probably in London, possibly helps – yet, this is not within everyone's reach. How does this play out in terms of exhibitions, collections, education and museum management – even in terms of the labels that get written for content ('the foot soldiers in the museum's wars' as one curator has described them; quoted in Lord and Lord, 2009: 132)? As Laffey and Weldes observe (2004: 375):

> *The content of the stories we tell ourselves about our past – and hence how we understand our relations to the wider world then, now, and into the future – is crucially dependent upon who controls the institutions through which public memory is produced.*

How, indeed, does political history get portrayed, whether it be the Second World War, the Cold War, and 9/11, or the civil rights movement, suffragettes, and the history of the working class? How, moreover, is it being collected and catalogued (on the 2017 Women's March in the United States, for example, see Cascone, 2018) or given back (on Native American artefacts see Colwell, 2017)? The British Museum was the first 'national' museum set up by a 'state' in the modern sense, two concepts that are the bread and butter of the discipline, yet by and large, to go back to Luke's point, analysis of national museums and their relationship to states is consigned to other fields. As one scholar has pointed out (Palhegyi, 2017: 1052; see also Knell, *et al.*, eds., 2010):

> *…While often understood at the popular level as scientific and objective, national museums are better understood as inherently tied to the political, social, and cultural discourses and power structures of the society to which they belong… national museums provide the "scenography and stage" for identity politics in which the*

individual can discover his or her place within the larger national body, in turn reifying the symbiotic nature of the individual and their national community.

Museums are also increasingly involved in what have been called 'museum wars' (for an interesting discussion see Jenkins, 2016: 163-201). Understandably, these have involved 'national' museums, but also museums of every shape and size: history museums, science museums, art museums, ethnographic museums, community museums, virtual museums and so forth. Like the 'culture wars' and 'science wars' that came before them, they have come to be a background condition of the very enterprise, from the proposed exhibition by the National Air and Space Museum's that would have included the Enola Gay (see Linenthal and Engelhardt, eds., 2000); to the Dutch right-wing Party for Freedom (PVV) calling for the closure of the Troppen Museum in Amsterdam as it made visitors feel guilty by spreading 'Western self-hatred' (quoted in Modest, 2013); and from recent calls for the Natural History Museum in New York to eject a billionaire Trump supporter from its board who denies climate change (Pogrebin and Sengupta, 2018); through to the most apposite adjectives to describe the Transatlantic slave trade (Tibbles, 1996). In short, museums are increasingly embedded in the 'contemporary politics and international relations' that the former Director of the British Museum mentioned above (see also Bennet, 1995; Karp, et al, *eds.*, 1992; MacDonald, ed., 1998).

In 2014 the International Council of Museums (ICOM) held an international conference on 'Museums and Politics'. 'The theme of this conference', the ICOM President proclaimed, 'is important, because the relation between museums and politics touches all museums, here and everywhere' (ICOM, 2014). As the Director of National Museums has argued elsewhere, 'The issue isn't whether it's right or wrong to be political – the issue is that all museums are, so why do people pretend they are not' (quoted in Atkinson, 2012). Recent current affairs articles attest to this, whether its 'The Louvre Isn't Just a Museum. It's a Power Tool (Zarestsky, 2017); 'Hong Kong's Democrats Say no to China's Treasures: The World's Most Popular Museum is Political, Too' (*Economist*, 2017); or 'Politics Are on Exhibit at Migration Museums, Not History' (Jenkins, 2016). In 'A Guide to Museums Getting Political This Year', meanwhile, the Director of the Minneapolis Institute of Art observed that, 'The public that's arriving on our doorstep is different'. It was, she went on, '...heavily influenced by the chaos in the national and international political world. They bring that experience with them as they move through the galleries' (Feldman quoted in Levere, 2017).

In one of the few serious interventions since Luke's 2002 book on *Museum Politics*, Christine Sylvester's *Art/Museums: International Relations Where We Least Expect It* (2008) examines the ways in which art museums in particular are enmeshed in global power relations: in terms of globalization,

colonialism and post-colonialism, international political economy, cultural diplomacy, international norms, nationalism – all topics that are grist to the mill of any scholar of politics and international relations. Other studies have examined museums through the lens of topics, concepts and themes that will be familiar to political analysts: nation-building (Aaronson and Elgenius, eds., 2015; Knell, *et al.*, eds., 2010), national identity (McLean, 2005; Jang, 2016), soft power (Hoogwaerts, 2016; Lord and Blanckenberg, 2015; Luke and Kersel, 2013), cultural diplomacy (Grincheva, 2013; Luke and Kersel, 2013), globalization (Mason, 2013; Pieterse, 1997; Prosler, 1996), inequality (Sandell, ed., 2002), ideology (Coffee, 2006; Denton, 2014), representation (Lord, 2006; Walsh, 1992), and democracy (Cameron and Deslandes, 2015; Chakrabaty, 2002). Theses books and research articles have been written by sociologists, historians, anthropologists, and philosophers – not political scientists.

For my own part, I believe that scholars of politics and international relations could bring a great deal to these debates. Within the discipline at present, however, one will struggle to find books and journal articles that analyse museums from an inter-disciplinary perspective that start within the discipline, let alone from a straight-up 'political science' approach. The findings in section one, then, can in part be explained by institutional and structural factors, but they would have been far more surprising if a lively and dynamic debate on the role of museums was taking place within the discipline or if scholars within the field were involved in a significant degree of intellectual cross-fertilization vis-à-vis museums. As we have seen, sadly, this is not the case.

3. Politics, Museums and Impact – Benefits and Challenges

Hopefully, the reader is now convinced that museums should be taken much more seriously by the discipline of politics and international relations, and that the discipline has something to offer and that museums are profoundly political. I shall now discuss museums as beneficial partners for engagement, knowledge transfer and impact. In doing so, I shall try to avoid sounding like a HEFCE document, a school level presentation on the benefits of REF, or the Minister for Universities and Science. For each of the benefits I outline, I will attempt to provide the reverse of the medal, lest the reader be tricked into assuming that museums are some kind of broad, sunlit uplands. Indeed, I feel that it would have been remiss of me to leave out some of the challenges for anyone willing to embark upon this journey. Nevertheless, while 'here be dragons', I do contend that it is a journey worth taking. Thus, in what follows, I will proceed on the basis of what I have argued thus far, on my own practical and research experience, and in my belief that 'spreading the word' is as an intrinsic part of the academic vocation.

The first and most obvious benefit would be that they are an effective way to reach an audience 'beyond academia' (HEFCE, 2016). In terms of numbers, the sheer size of the museum going public is of course a considerable pull factor; as is the sheer variety of different types of museum. Generally speaking, there has been a global surge in museum attendance. In China visitor numbers have gone from 637 million to 900 million between 2013-2017 (Pinghui, 2017). In the US there are approximately 850 million museum visits per year, more than for all major league sports and theme parks combined (American Alliance of Museums, 2017). In 2017 the 9/11 Museum had 3.1 million visitors, 10.9 million since it first opened in 2014, while the Memorial had 6.8 million visitors, 37 million since opening on the tenth anniversary in 2011 (9/11 Memorial, 2018). In the UK, eight of the top ten visitor attractions are museums, while the UK has five of the top twenty visited museums in the world – one of whom, of course, is the British Museum, with the Rosetta Stone a major draw. In the UK as of mid-2017, almost half of museums reported a year on year increase in visitor numbers (Museums Association, 2017).

These of course are headline figures. For every metropolitan museum with millions of visitors, there are others who struggle to break even; for every British Museum with its in-house research department, there are others who employ staff-seasonally and who struggle with day-to-day running costs; and for every Rosetta Stone, there are much more commonplace, even mundane, artefacts, that are nevertheless important to their particular audiences. I say this because a potential hazard is that in chasing impact only through 'blockbuster' London museums, it will only reinforce the metropolitan bias already built into REF, in the sense that it is already the home of that most 'gold-standard' of impact communities, that will-o'-the-wisp for the discipline – policymakers. Nevertheless, all things being told in the UK at present there are over 2500 museums – or potential impact partners. Globally, on the other hand, it is estimated that there are over 55,000 institutions, 17,00 in the United States, 6,300 in Germany and 5,700 in Japan (ICOM, 2017).

Additionally, they offer a variety of opportunities to have an 'effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life' (HEFCE, 2016). For REF 2014, Impact Case Studies with a substantive museums component cited a number of ways in which they had had this effect/change/benefit: some cited the economic benefit of their work, for example, in increasing visitor numbers and therefore increasing footfall, revenue, and economic activity in the area (REF 2014d; REF 2014e); others cited an effect on society and culture (REF 2014f; REF 2014g), while others cited a change in public policy discourse (REF 2014h; REF 2014i; REF 2014j) or health and quality of life (Ref 2014k). This could obviously play out in different ways in terms of a more substantive engagement from the discipline of politics and international with museums, but one suspects that the economic, social, cultural and public policy components would be good

contenders for impact. A challenge here, and the same could be said for REF more generally, is that the lure of the 'economic' to evidence an Impact Case Study becomes so compelling that, in a sense, the bottom-line becomes the bottom-line; that besides chasing that grant bid that can become an end in and of itself, or that REF 4* article, a well intentioned attempt to disseminate one's work through a cultural institution gets transmogrified into some kind of infotainment and an attempt to engage with a broader audience becomes some 'bums on seats' enterprise. There is also the problem of evidencing impact, in the sense that for some types of impact, as HEFCE defines it, and this is more problematic. As Lukes points out, museums might not be able to *instantly* change public policy, but they are able to influence larger cultural values that will consequently alter policy (Luke, 2002: 230).

Another benefit would be the range of expertise that scholars from the field could bring to museums. One attitude to the lack of inter-disciplinary and applied work on museums from scholars in the field could of course be to say: well fine, if the work is being done by scholars in other fields, then all is fine and well. This would be to undervalue and to undersell the particular skill-set that scholars of politics and international relations can bring to these important questions. It would be to close off the ways in which taking part in these inter-disciplinary conversations will in turn be of benefit to broader debates about political meaning and our place in the world, to the relationship between politics and culture, to globalization and political identity, and to political life in the early twenty-first century more generally – in other words to the advancement of knowledge in the field. Practically the one thing political analysts can agree on is the centrality of power to their enterprise. Surely, then, we should seek out power in all its multiple manifold ways wherever it may be and bring the wisdom garnered from long-standing debates within the field on power, legitimacy, ideology, national identity, political economy, ethics and so forth to bear on these deeply political institutions and their publics. A potential challenge here, is that scholars in the field, generally speaking, are used to working as auteurs (or 'rowing alone', to borrow a colleague's expression), whereas the reality of the museum world is that, generally speaking once again, it is a much more collaborative enterprise, more akin to the studio system. One's relationship to the museum (s) will also clearly depend on one's position within the discipline, for example an Emeritus Professor will clearly have a different relationship with a museum when compared to a first year doctoral candidate or even an early career researcher.

For the relationship between politics and international relations academics to be at its most fruitful, then, it would clearly work best to have a genuine two-way interchange. Benefits in the collaboration between politics and international relations scholars and museums would include, but not be limited to: utilizing the museum as an arena for applied research; raising the academic and public profile of the individual scholar and their institution; collaborative

opportunities for research, grant applications and future impact (as the overview report of Main Panel C stated: 'Many of the strongest cases emerged from research in which user engagement was embedded in the research design itself and the question of impact had been thought through from the outset', REF 2014l); as collaborators for public engagement activities both large and small; as a resource for teaching and research and as partners in the educative enterprise; and as a source of knowledge, expertise and new ideas. Benefits to the museum would include: raising the profile of the museum; an injection of expertise and new ideas; staff-training and development; an improved visitor experience; income and footfall; and, potentially, collections and acquisitions (see also NCCPE, 2016). A potential danger here is that scholars go to museums 'impact shopping' and that museum staff merely becomes underlabourers whose sole role is to help the academic in this enterprise.

Now is the time, however, to perhaps reflect upon a final challenge, and opportunity: it is the field more generally. As the cliché goes, it takes time to turn around a super tanker and at the moment there is a lack of engagement with museums in the discipline that will take time to right. Despite the disciplinary effects of the *discipline*, its journals, conferences, codes, rituals, and so forth, that very auteurism mentioned above means that there is nothing stopping the individual academic engaging with some of the literature cited in this article and, to quote Jordan Belfort in *The Wolf of Wall Street*, pick up the phone and start dialling.

Conclusion

And the decree should be written on a stela of hard stone, in sacred writing, document writing, and Greek writing, and it should be set up in the first-class temples, the second-class temples and the third-class temples, next to the statue of the King, living forever.

- Closing Text of the Rosetta Stone

As the reader will have been able to discern, I am strongly in favour of politics and international relations academics taking museums more seriously – as a subject of research, as collaborators, and as partners for the dissemination of knowledge within *and* out with the strictures of REF. In three sections, I firstly analysed the REF 2014 Impact Case Studies that featured the terms 'museum' or 'museums' in the Politics and International Studies UoA, noting that when compared with the submissions from the four Main Panels and when compared to adjoining fields, the discipline of politics and international relations lags behind in terms of utilizing museums as partners for impact. In this section, I also qualitatively examined the three REF case studies from the Politics and International Relations UoA, which further underlined the somewhat threadbare cupboard of the discipline collectively in this regard. In section two, I surveyed the state of the field with regards to taking museums seriously, underlining their

profoundly political nature, and demonstrated that the findings in section one are hardly a serious distortion of the extent to which museums have been the focus of serious political analysis within the discipline. In the final section, I outlined some of the benefits and challenges of engaging with museums as partners for impact and knowledge transfer, as well as underscoring some of the valuable contributions that politics and international relations can bring towards an understanding of museums.

As we began this paper, however, let us conclude by returning to the Rosetta Stone – at one and the same time the cipher, lodestar and chimera of this paper. In this paper, unlike Champollion, I have clearly not opened up some vast new storehouse of knowledge or unlocked the secret to understanding an ancient and much venerated culture: in sum, to have delivered some kind of 'Rosetta Stone' as we understand it in popular culture – a dazzling discovery that has provided *the* clue or breakthrough necessary to unlock an intractable puzzle or problem. Rather than running to the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-Lettres, I have made a much more modest contribution in this academic journal towards these three languages – museums, politics and impact – understanding one another better; in the sense of those unknown and long-forgotten scholars of the early nineteenth century who worked on decoding the relationship between Greek, Demotic and Hieroglyphics. I do not believe, then, and I cannot declare, like Champollion, that 'I have it!' – but I do believe, and I will declare, that I have something.

Endnotes

1. On the theme of 'exoticism', consider the following Oriental daydream Napoleon would later recount to Madame de Rémusat: 'In Egypt I found myself freed from the obstacles of an irksome civilization. I was full of dreams...I saw myself on the road to Asia, riding on an elephant, a turban on my head and in my hand the new Koran that I would have composed to suit my needs. In my undertaking I would have combined the experience of the two worlds, exploiting for my own profit the theatre of all history...The time I spent in Egypt was the most beautiful of my life' (quoted in Chandler, 1966:248).

2. By adjoining fields, I merely mean those subjects that have a substantive crossover with the discipline of politics and international relations thematically, theoretically or empirically. Typically in the social sciences or the humanities, they will often co-constitute a sub-discipline (e.g., political-economy, political-geography, political-sociology) or provide in some combination the foci for an undergraduate degree (e.g., history and politics, law and politics, development and international relations). I hope the reader will forgive me for not digressing into a long discussion on what the 'proper' boundaries of the discipline should be (for a further discussion see Hay, 2002: 1-6; 59-88). From the argument outlined above, hopefully the reader will garner that I believe in a healthy degree of intellectual cross-fertilization and cross-pollination. For a further discussion see Hay (2002: 1-6; 59-88).

Glossary of Terms

FTE
Full time equivalent. Used as an alternative to headcount to indicate the actual volume of activity.

HEFCE
Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEI
Higher Education Institution

ICOM
International Council of Museums

Impact
An effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life (HEFCE, 2016)

Main Panel
The expert sub-panels who assessed the REF submissions were grouped into broad subject areas and worked under the guidance of four main panels.

REF
Research Excellence Framework

REF Impact
Impact is defined by HEFCE as 'an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'. REF impact was assessed in the form of impact case studies and impact templates, where HEIs provided further information about their approach to supporting and enabling impact.

REF Impact Case Study
Each HEI submitted a selection of impact case studies for assessment in the REF. An impact case study is a four-page document, describing the impact of research undertaken within the submitting department. It also contains information about the research that underpins the impact that took place.

UoA
Unit of Assessment

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