



## **Archaeology: the science of investigation**

*The British Museum*

The British Museum is really not like any other museum in the world, because it was the first place where people attempted to bring together under one roof the cultures of the whole world so you could look at the whole world as one by looking at what people had made through the thousands of years of human existence.

The museum exists to allow the public to study and about 5 million people come every year, that means we have two huge responsibilities, we have to preserve the things and look after them to make sure that they're there for the future but we also have to investigate them because the assumption of the museum is that the more carefully you look at things the more you will find out about them and every generation can look at things in different ways, every generation has different questions to ask and one of our main tasks therefore is to find new ways of exploring the objects.

Over the last century the museum has built up an extraordinary team in-house of scholars and conservators who know how to look after the objects and to examine them and this is one of the great resources of the British Museum that is used worldwide. This bit of the museum's job of looking after the collection and examining it has of course been transformed by advances of science and in research, the research of course allows us to look much more carefully at what something is made of, it is also very valuable to be able to use the new techniques to look after the collection better so to find what are the best ways of making these objects available, making them usable, studyable without them suffering is one of our big worries.

Huge advances have been made in the science that allows objects to travel in controlling vibration in monitoring different changes in humidity and light and these things and this of course is crucial to the way we display the objects here.

When the museum was set up in 1753 it was set up as a museum for the whole world at that point all you could really do to make a museum open to everybody was put it in the biggest city and open it free but now of course particularly with electronic access there's a real chance of the whole world being able to use the collection of the British Museum and study them, so the big challenge I think is to get as much of the collection as possible available free for study online with as much information as possible available in the same way in as many languages as possible, so it's really a publishing of the collection in the widest possible way to the world public that's the big task over the next 5 years.