

PRESS RELEASE

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Networks of the Past: A Study Gallery of India and the Ancient World

Featuring objects from fifteen Indian and global museums

Introduction

For the first time, a globally curated gallery will open to Indian audiences in Mumbai, giving them an insight into how the ancient world was interconnected through trade, writing, religion, art, and ideas, 5000 years ago.

Conceptualised by the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS), Mumbai—a museum of ideas—this new gallery, titled *Networks of the Past: A Study Gallery of India and the Ancient World*, will be inaugurated on December 12, 2025.

In a landmark initiative, and through 300 carefully chosen archaeological objects that tell riveting stories from the ancient cultures of India, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Greece, Rome, Persia, and China, alongside treasures from the regions of undivided India – the oldest Harappan (Sindhu-Sarasvati) Civilisation the gallery will invite, motivate universities and schools from all over India to teach history with objects.

Four years in the making, this pioneering initiative is supported by Getty's Sharing Collections Programme and is a result of an international collaborations between CSMVS and its longstanding partner The British Museum, London; joined by Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Museum Rietberg, Zurich; and for the first time, the Benaki Museum, Athens; the Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait; and the Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens.

The project is endorsed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India and features important antiquities from the rich collections of the Archaeological Survey of India, the National Museum, New Delhi; Allahabad Museum, Prayagraj; the Department of Archaeology and Museums, Government of Maharashtra; the Indian Museum, Kolkata; the Bihar Museum, Patna; the Government Museum, Mathura and the State Museum, Lucknow.

India at the Heart of the Narrative

Departing from a conventional Western narrative that centres the ancient world on the Mediterranean, this new study gallery positions India at the crossroads of global historical exchange, highlighting how it contributed to the ancient world and, in turn, was shaped by it.

The narrative presents key moments that have significantly shaped human society through a thematic rather than a strictly chronological approach. The starting point is the Harappan Civilisation, developed approximately 5000 years ago, concluding with the Gupta Empire in the sixth century CE. Between these two milestones of Indian history, the gallery explores India's history within a broader global context. The gallery concludes with the two most famous cosmopolitan centres of learning and knowledge in the ancient world, Nalanda in India and Alexandria in Roman Egypt.

Sculptures, inscriptions, edicts, coins, paintings, objects from ancient burial sites, jewellery, miniature models from tombs, global pottery, and extraordinary portraits and their replicas form the core of the display, establishing a rich and deep resource of primary historical material for study and enjoyment. Each antiquity, with its similarities in motifs, materials, and technologies, demonstrates how ideas and aesthetics travelled across regions. The objects show that ancient civilisations evolved through constant dialogue and exchange — the very essence of human progress, to this day.

Co-Curation – A New Model of Global Cultural Interaction

This project is a unique experiment in global co-curation — a new model of museum collaboration built on shared expertise, mutual respect, and the idea of collective custodianship of knowledge.

It moves beyond traditional exhibition practices, in which objects travel between institutions, towards a more equitable process in which ideas, narratives, and interpretive frameworks are jointly developed across continents.

Every object has been chosen, and its interpretation carefully developed — collaboratively — by Indian and international curators, keeping in mind Indian visitors. This project provided a global context to ancient Indian history, making India a part of a broader network of exchange.

In yet another unprecedented approach, the gallery will remain on display for a long duration of three years. Getty's Sharing Collections Programme and the profound generosity of partner museums have ensured that original artefacts and objects are made accessible to new audiences, many of whom will be encountering them for the first time.

An Educational Endeavour : Bringing Museums and Universities Closer

This new Study Gallery has been designed to support an ambitious educational programme, based on objects as material evidence of history. It has been developed by the CSMVS Education Department through strategic partnerships with academic and cultural institutions in Mumbai and across the country.

In a first-of-its-kind partnership between museums and universities in India, these long-term loans will make it possible for more than 20 universities across the country to structure their teaching around objects as primary sources of evidence. We hope that it will bridge the gap between museums and universities by converting galleries into classrooms where professors and students can engage, debate and learn from original objects.

The participation of Indian and many international scholars in developing and structuring the programme has already generated new methodologies of study and research, likely to impact both teaching and curatorial practice in the future.

CSMVS has created a specially designated learning centre, NALANDA, close to the Ancient World Study Gallery, where specifically tailored educational programmes will be conducted for the hundreds of schools that visit the museum.

Beyond large cities, rural audiences across the country will also experience this gallery through micro-exhibitions that will travel on the *Museum on Wheels* buses, as well as through the CSMVS *Trunk Museum* project.

A project website is being developed for university and school teachers which they will be able to use for classroom teaching and discussions about themes connecting India and the world – all through archaeological objects. The website will grow incrementally over the three years constantly updating additional resources and information about the objects, lectures, talks and educational videos that will help viewers from around the world to learn from these initiatives.

Towards a New Vision for Museums in India

Networks of the Past affirms CSMVS's commitment to redefining museums as spaces of active learning, dialogue, and cultural diplomacy. The gallery, and the larger initiative it represents, underscores India's leadership in shaping global museum practice through collaboration, education, and shared heritage.

Quotes:

Civilisation is not a destination – it's a journey. The gallery invites us to explore the ancient world not as something lost to history, but as the foundation upon which our present stands and our future is built. The past has profoundly shaped global, national, and local relationships between societies and individuals. The events, innovations, and decisions made in antiquity continue to influence our world today. In today's interconnected world, no major event goes without impacting humanity. To understand our history meaningfully, we must move beyond isolated narratives and adopt a global perspective.

Sabyasachi Mukherjee, Director General, CSMVS, Mumbai

In today's interconnected world, museums are called upon to do more than preserve the past. They must also act as collaborators, educators, and cultural conveners, fostering dialogue across borders and generations. Networks of the Past: A Study Gallery of India and the Ancient World, on view at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) in Mumbai, embodies this evolving mission with remarkable clarity. By uniting institutions and collections from across continents, it invites audiences to reimagine antiquity not as a series of separate histories but as a network of cultural encounters that continue to shape the world today.

The Getty is honoured to support this landmark initiative through its Sharing Collections Program, an initiative founded by my predecessor, James Cuno, on the belief that meaningful cultural exchange occurs when institutions collaborate to make art accessible, share knowledge, and enrich public understanding. Original works of art—when viewed in new contexts and alongside diverse objects—can transform perspectives. Such encounters transcend the mere movement of objects; they forge relationships, inspire inquiry, and build lasting connections between peoples and places. It has always been a pleasure to work with the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS).

Dr. Katherine E. Fleming, President and CEO, J. Paul Getty Trust

When I joined the Rietberg Museum two decades ago, I was immediately told that CSMVS was the premier museum in India to collaborate with—and that sentiment has proven true time and again. Over the years, we have had the privilege of borrowing numerous objects from CSMVS for exhibitions in Zurich. One of the highlights of our partnership was undoubtedly the Alice Boner: A Visionary Artist and Scholar Across Two Continents exhibition, which we presented at CSMVS in 2014.

Throughout this time, we've witnessed the dynamic evolution of CSMVS, particularly its pioneering initiatives in art education, such as Museum on Wheels. In light of this, we were excited to be part of their latest project, Networks of the Past: A Study Gallery of India and

the Ancient World. The idea of positioning India within the broader context of the ancient world is innovative, offering fresh and compelling perspectives. We are therefore delighted to contribute objects from our own collection, even on a long-term basis, and are proud to support this significant educational initiative.

Johannes Beltz, Head of Collections and Deputy Director, Museum Rietberg, Zurich

I am deeply convinced that the “Study Gallery of India and the Ancient World” is a groundbreaking example for the international cooperation and dialogue our world now needs more than ever. In sharing our collections, we initiate meaningful dialogue on more than one level: between the treasures in our collections, between the objects and our audiences, between our colleagues working across continents. I hope for this impressive display to truly speak to the minds and hearts of visitors from India and all over the world!

Prof Dr Marion Ackermann, President, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin

What CSMVS has created here is more than a gallery. It is a reimagining of how we understand the ancient world, the story of a web of connection across time and place with India at the centre. The British Museum is honoured to support it.

“This gallery is also the embodiment of global co-curation: a closely collaborative partnership from the very beginning, equally engaged, culturally aware. Through the wealth of knowledge which has been developed, museums can have a genuine and significant real-world impact in the present and into the future.”

I do hope all is going well and I know that colleagues are very much looking forward to joining you all soon.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan OBE, Director of the British Museum

Project Partners

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Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz
Museum Rietberg, Zurich
The Benaki Museum, Athens

In Association with

The Al-Sabah Collection, Kuwait
The Ephorate of Antiquities of the City of Athens

Archaeological Survey of India
National Museum, New Delhi
Indian Museum, Kolkata
Bihar Museum, Patna
and several state museums

University Academic Programme

In collaboration with the Cambridge University – Global Humanities Program and 20 Indian Universities

The British
Museum



Staatliche Museen zu Berlin
Preußischer Kulturbesitz



museum
rietberg

Eine Kulturinstitution
der Stadt Zürich



National Museum
New Delhi



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