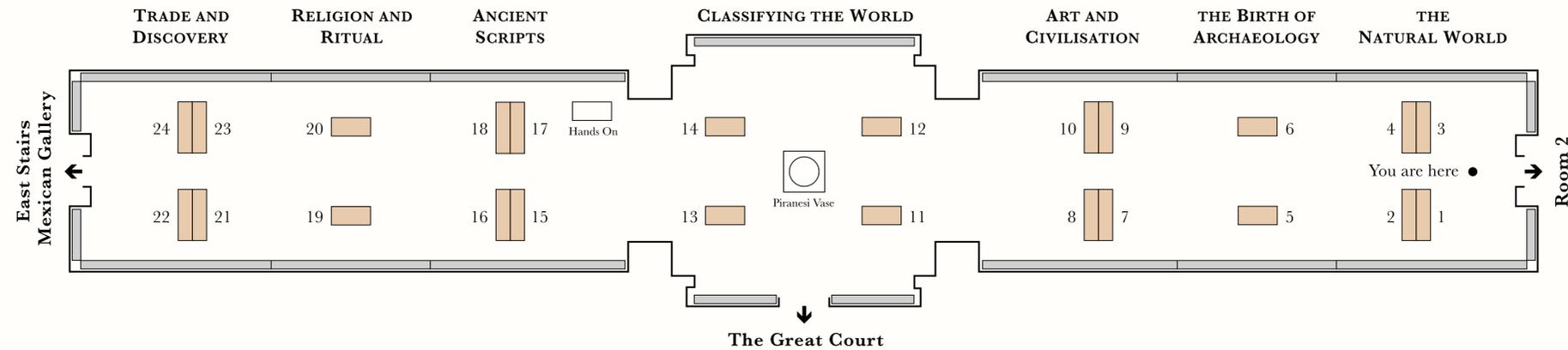




ENLIGHTENMENT

EXPLORATION, KNOWLEDGE AND IMPERIALISM 1680–1820



This room explores the era in which the British Museum was founded, through the objects that came into the Museum during this time and the people who collected them. The Enlightenment is the name given to a period of discovery and learning that flourished among Europeans and Americans from about 1680 to 1820, changing the way they viewed the world. This was also a time when Britain became a global power and grew wealthy. A significant part of that wealth came from Britain’s colonial empire and its active involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

Seven important Enlightenment themes are presented in the displays. The objects are arranged to reflect British collectors’ understanding of the ancient world, non-European cultures and histories, and the development of Western sciences and disciplines. They highlight investigations into the age of the earth, living and fossil nature and the origins of art history, archaeology and ethnography. The wall cases are filled with objects grouped by type. These convey a sense of how objects were organised and displayed during the eighteenth century.

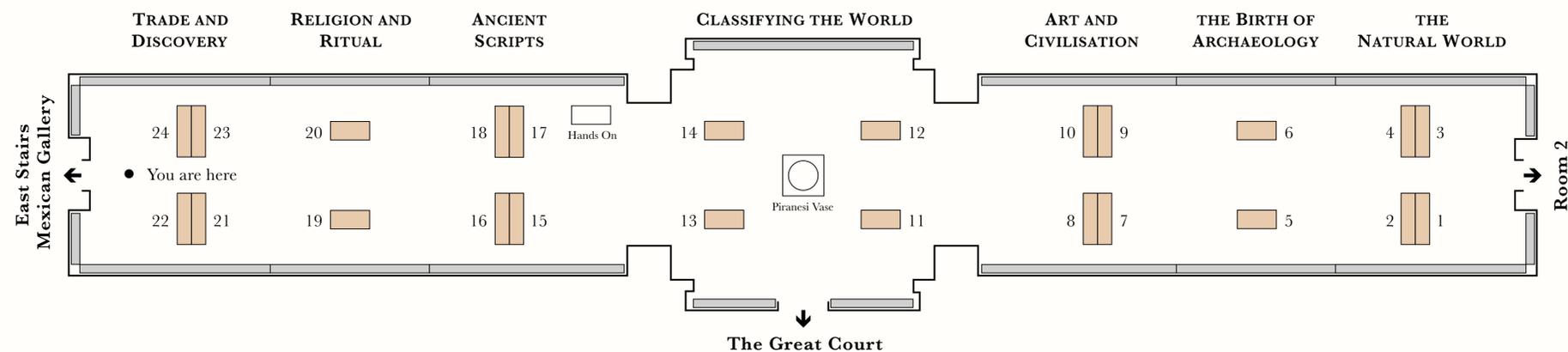
The gallery shows how Europeans and Americans during the Age of Enlightenment tried to organise their knowledge to form a universal and interconnecting whole, shaped by encounters between peoples across the world. It showcases the intentions and achievements of British scholars and collectors. While Enlightenment thinking and collections provided the foundations for much of our present understanding of the history of human cultural achievement, they also tended to tell that story from a predominantly European perspective. This period, and its legacies, are now increasingly being reassessed from a range of critical perspectives.

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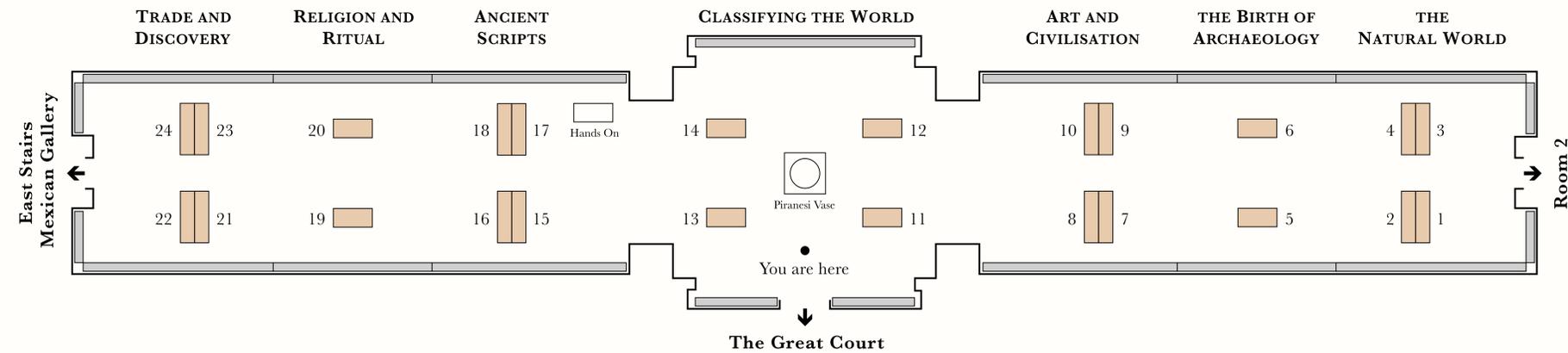
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