

# THE HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

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One of the most important things to take account of, and feel joy about, is that British imperialism has become a Museum. As we witness the development of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, we are filled with a sense of joy that surpasses all other joys. We come to this Museum with this sentiment.

The Museums in capitalism show no grasp of the relationship between the human being and history, the human being and the Earth, the human being and production. The Museums do not show the human being in the context of the development of society.

The aim of a visit to a Museum must be objective in the sense of elevating one's own cultural and scientific development. A visit to the Museum must seek a greater understanding of the process of history, along with the conclusions useful for today.

At the British Museum, we saw displays on the Hittites, Sumerians, Persians, Greeks and others<sup>1</sup>. With such visits, we educate ourselves in the ability to grasp how history was made. Nobody should do this for the sake of a literary or cultural veneer. We do this to constantly improve our materialist and dialectical understanding of history; for this is a source of poise

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<sup>1</sup> Hittites, Sumerians, Persians and Greeks - **Hittites**: a civilisation of Mesopotamia 1700 BCE to 1200 BCE. They had a sophisticated use of the wheeled chariot. **Sumerians**: 5000 BCE to 1595 BCE. **Persians**: 550 BCE to 336 BBC. Defeated by the Greeks (Alexander) in 336 BCE. Darius murdered 330 BCE. **Greeks**: 8000 BCE to 776 BCE. Classical Greece: 480-323 BCE. Rome invaded in 146 BCE.

and political orientation.

Populations go through stages of civilisation because the need for progress is an irrepressible condition. In humanity, the essential driving force of life and existence is the need to progress.

Even during the Middle Ages, progress was never stalled. Compared with the Greeks, that period seems to be an enormous retreat; but science continued to advance even then. Only, it became trapped and corralled within the limits of religious powers, of kings, barons, etc.

Intelligence always managed to break off its chains. Knowledge always ended up confronting the ruling circles. No ruling circle ever succeeded in keeping all the knowledge to itself. Historic time passing, the economy and productivity continued to improve, and knowledge came out of that. Past a certain point in the growth of knowledge – and even under Slavery and Feudalism – the servants of particular regimes had to let go of some. Today, this is happening to the servants of capitalism.

It is a fact that the human relations arise from the economy, but they do not stay there. They constantly push back against the intimidation of those in power, in every way and in every field. Intimidation is what power uses to keep people suppressed, but power never managed to send humanity back to its starting point.

For all its backwardness, the feudal regime was far from being humanity's starting point. It looks like this to us compared with the Greeks, and compared with today's scientific knowledge. In the feudal economy however, progress continued and prepared the ground for capitalism. It was a very empirical process, but it happened.

Everything you see in Museums demonstrates the utter empiricism of human development. It is clear that the Assyrian<sup>2</sup> or the Egyptian<sup>3</sup> civilisations – of which we saw many aspects in the Museum – never proposed to themselves the progress which they made.

The progress achieved by the earliest of those civilisations was slow and limited. Before the means of communication reached a certain level, long periods passed with only some changes. When alphabets and languages appeared however, the means of communication multiplied. The result was a quick development in the ability to think.

Observe how the development of the ability to think has depended on all this history. During the time before the written language - when little seemed to happen - advances were still being made. This is why there was an explosion of progress when writing came. This was a fight too because every ruling caste wanted to keep all innovations for itself.

The original impulse of the Assyrians had been to progress, to improve culture, production and military capacity. Their deep knowledge of military art gave them a great power. Pressed as they were by the need to defend themselves, they became a military caste. They became so limited in other aspects of knowledge that they eventually stagnated and lost. History shows that if it remains purely military, no power can avoid defeat.

At the time of the Assyrians, there was no class struggle comparable to what we know today. In those days, human

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<sup>2</sup> **Assyrians:** A civilisation in Mesopotamia, 1900 BCE to 226 BCE. Survived the Romans. Conquered by the Arabs in 650 CE (CE means Common Era, or AD).

<sup>3</sup> **Egyptian Civilisation:** 6000 BCE to 332 BCE. Defeated by Alexander but ruled by Greek kings.

progress could not be applied in any foreseen manner. The conditions were such that social development could only be empirical, completely so.

The development of humanity has been so empirical that the wheel invented 4,000 years ago<sup>4</sup> only reached the Incas in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The first time the Incas<sup>5</sup> saw a wheel was when Spanish invaders attacked them with field-guns<sup>6</sup>. War is what brought the wheel to people. This huge progress became used for production, afterwards. Here is a way to measure history.

Today, human development has become conscious. The Workers State is the proof. The Workers State is a deliberate construction based on everything already known. It has assimilated not only the economic, social and technical advances to date, but the best in the development of intelligence as well. A lack of knowledge of the universe used to inspire wariness and uncertainty. With the growing knowledge of today, humankind no longer fears the universe.

The progress of humanity was not planned. It just grew, and the forces that drove it were mainly military. All the Assyrian friezes in the Museum are about battles, scenes of ferocity or scenes of submission to Kings. This is how life has been.

About the very great slowness of the part of history we saw in the British Museum, the artefacts we saw showed that thousands of years passed before improvements were made in *production*. Today, the relationship that intelligence has established with the natural world allows us to produce objects in minutes. None of the civilisations we saw in the Museum could have done this, or

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<sup>4</sup> The earliest recorded wheel-chariot goes back to 1900 BCE in Mesopotamia.

<sup>5</sup> **Incas**: Indigenous civilisation in South America, 2540 BCE to 1572 CE.

<sup>6</sup> In 1582 CE (AD), the **Spanish invaders** won the battle of Cajamarca against the Incas in Peru thanks to very advanced war technologies and weapons.

even have thought about it!

The Greeks concentrated all the advances made by previous and surrounding civilisations, particularly in the Mediterranean<sup>7</sup>. Accumulated knowledge had boosted communications, refining the notions of time and distance. The Greeks were not born superior. A very special historic development buoyed them. They learnt from the Egyptians and took in all previous knowledge, that of the Hittites and Sumerians included. The special contribution of the Greeks was the importance they gave to the function of thought.

The fact that a civilisation like the Greeks' emerged when it did means that humanity was already prepared for an immense leap. The highest of Greek civilisation showed that this was the case, but it did not last long<sup>8</sup>. It did not survive because it lacked the economic<sup>9</sup> and the military means that would have allowed it to continue on the road it had opened.

This stumbling block meant that humanity itself did not continue, at the time, what the Greeks had started. The latter had had all the cultural and scientific qualities, but not the economic means and not the necessary dedication to war and military science. Humanity was just organising itself. It is nobody's fault that the Greeks were rolled back. This is how history has been.

The Greeks gave pride of place to the role of thought and intellectual function. They created little Odeon's wherever they went. Their intention was good, but because they did not develop the economy, they did not develop a military capability either. Add to this that the Pericles stage was short<sup>10</sup>, although it had

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<sup>7</sup> Phoenicians, Persians, Cretans, Myceneans, Lycians, Spartans, Cycladic and Doric cultures, Minoans, Ionians and many more. Editorial.

<sup>8</sup> From around 480 BCE to 323 BCE when Sparta defeated the Athenians. Edit.

<sup>9</sup> In other texts, the author refers to the lack of means of production and energy. These arrived only much later, with capitalism. Editorial.

<sup>10</sup> Pericles' reign goes from 495 BCE to 429 BCE. Built the Parthenon 445 BCE to 432 BCE.

been the highest, again due to the lack of economic and military force.

With the entry of the proletariat on the scene of history, the stumbling block that had defeated the Greeks started being lifted. The advent of the proletariat developed the conditions to start foreseeing the historic process. From the Greeks until the rise of the proletariat, the process continued in its completely empirical way. If military force developed during that time, the economic forces did not. The economic forces that developed after the Greeks did not keep up with the level of intelligence that was continuing to grow, and could have been used.

With the proletariat on the historic scene, it became possible to envisage the conscious planning of the economy, society and the human relations. It is Marx who did this. Marx is the Greek of his epoch because he grasped, through ideas, the relationship which there is between the economy and the human relations. Marx broke through at the level of thought, like the Greeks had done.

In times previous to Marx, others had also wanted conscious social change. Only, the material conditions had not yet produced the means to do so. The proletariat had yet to arrive on the scene! It is the existence of the proletariat that allowed a Karl Marx to appear. There could not have been a Karl Marx without the proletariat! It is wrong to think that history emanates from the wishes of important people, or even from their intelligence.

The idea of organising society consciously was induced by the existence and development of the proletariat. It is only because the proletariat exists that you get such things as the programme, the objective and the political conception to organise society consciously. These aspects did not exist when the proletariat did not exist. Or if they did, their forms were minimal in a process

of class struggle that was not yet sufficiently advanced.

Before the rise of the proletariat, history was shaped by political alliances between powers that had been at war the day before. This was customary. It still happens today, but with less force and importance. Today's alliances are against the proletariat and the Workers States! We went to the Museum for us to keep learning how the history of humanity is the history of the class struggle.

The stiffness and rigidity you see in the Egyptian statues show that intellectual and social life had yet to develop in society. This was coming however, as proven by the Kourous<sup>11</sup>. The Kourous are Greek statues directly influenced by Egypt. In the Museum, one is beginning to raise a foot. This start of movement does not come from labour - it comes from thought. Human thought has been organised by knowledge and the systematisation of its application.

Everything we saw at the British Museum refers to when British imperialism dominated almost 70% of Africa, half of Asia and Oceania. It also shows how British imperialism itself has become a Museum. In this transformation, the British working class learnt to play its progressive role. As part of the world working class, it learns to lead and organise the socialist progress of Britain and of the world.

The Museum showed important artefacts, but not so much their importance in context. Clearly, the relationship between the human being and its environment has a history; and central to that history is the rise in the ability to foresee. The ability to foresee came when the repetition of phenomena led to knowledge. At the time of the Assyrians, knowledge and

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<sup>11</sup> A Kourous Youth (Attic Naxia Marble) dated circa 590-580 BCE is practically walking. Other similar ones are dated around 600 BCE.

foresight were still very limited.

This contrasts a lot with the epoch we live in. Take Vietnam: It used to be among the most economically backward countries in the world. Now, it is the most advanced in knowledge. What knowledge? Marxism! People in Vietnam have no material means, but the material means are in the Soviet Union. Marxism, Vietnam and the USSR materialise the progress of history. The historic road stretching out before us is known: Marxism foresees it.

Today, Vietnam and the Soviet Union represent the progress of history. They show what feats humanity can achieve when it applies its *knowledge of nature* to the human relations. When you apply scientific knowledge to society, you see ahead of you. You see the future of the social relations. No Museum can show this.

Marx concentrated what was the most advanced in the field of thought when he lived. He concentrated it, and made it serve the capacity to analyse. Just what the Greeks had done. He then gave a guarantee of continuation for what he had achieved through the thought method of dialectical materialism. This is why we say that Marx was the Greek of his epoch. Visits to Museums are opportunities to improve on this method of thought. The realisation of one's own limitations is the start of learning! This is a conclusion which we drew from our visit to the British Museum.

The evolution of the human sentiments is determined by the social relations, and not by people being good or bad. It is the social relations that induce sentiments and feelings. Humanity was not born good or bad; it organised itself on an empirical basis upon which its feelings became created and organised. Human sentiments must be seen as the product of the



development of the history of humanity; one must never separate the history of humanity from the history of the human sentiments.

A fact of great importance is that the British Museum was used by Marx to study and plot the fall of capitalism. This is where he did it! And British capitalism, petulant and haughty, used to say about him: "Poor Marx, what does he study there for?" And Marx to reply: "Just you wait!".

It is important to give to the power of thought all that is due to it, against all the arrogance of material, economic and military power.

The capacity of thought is the culmination of the development of the economic, social and scientific progress of history.

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