

Major Commercial Exhibitions: *A Curatorial Perspective*

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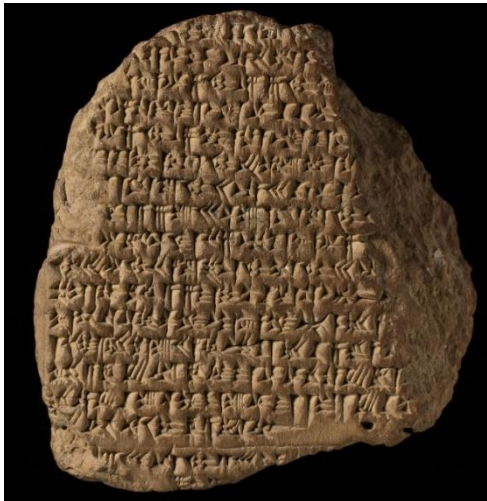
EXAMPLES DRAWN FROM *ALEXANDER THE GREAT: THE MAKING OF A MYTH*



- 21 October 2022 to 19 February 2023
- Paccar 1 Gallery, British Library, London
- Gallery size: 420 m²
- Charged entry – full price £19 (approx. €22)

EXAMPLES DRAWN FROM *ALEXANDER THE GREAT: THE MAKING OF A MYTH*

- **Theme:** 2,300 years of storytelling around Alexander the Great
- **Cultures:** items in 22 languages
- **Countries:** items from 25 countries
- **Formats:** Books, manuscripts, comics, film, music, paintings ...



BABYLONIA, 331-330 BC

Astronomical Dairy
British Museum



ENGLAND, 11TH CENTURY

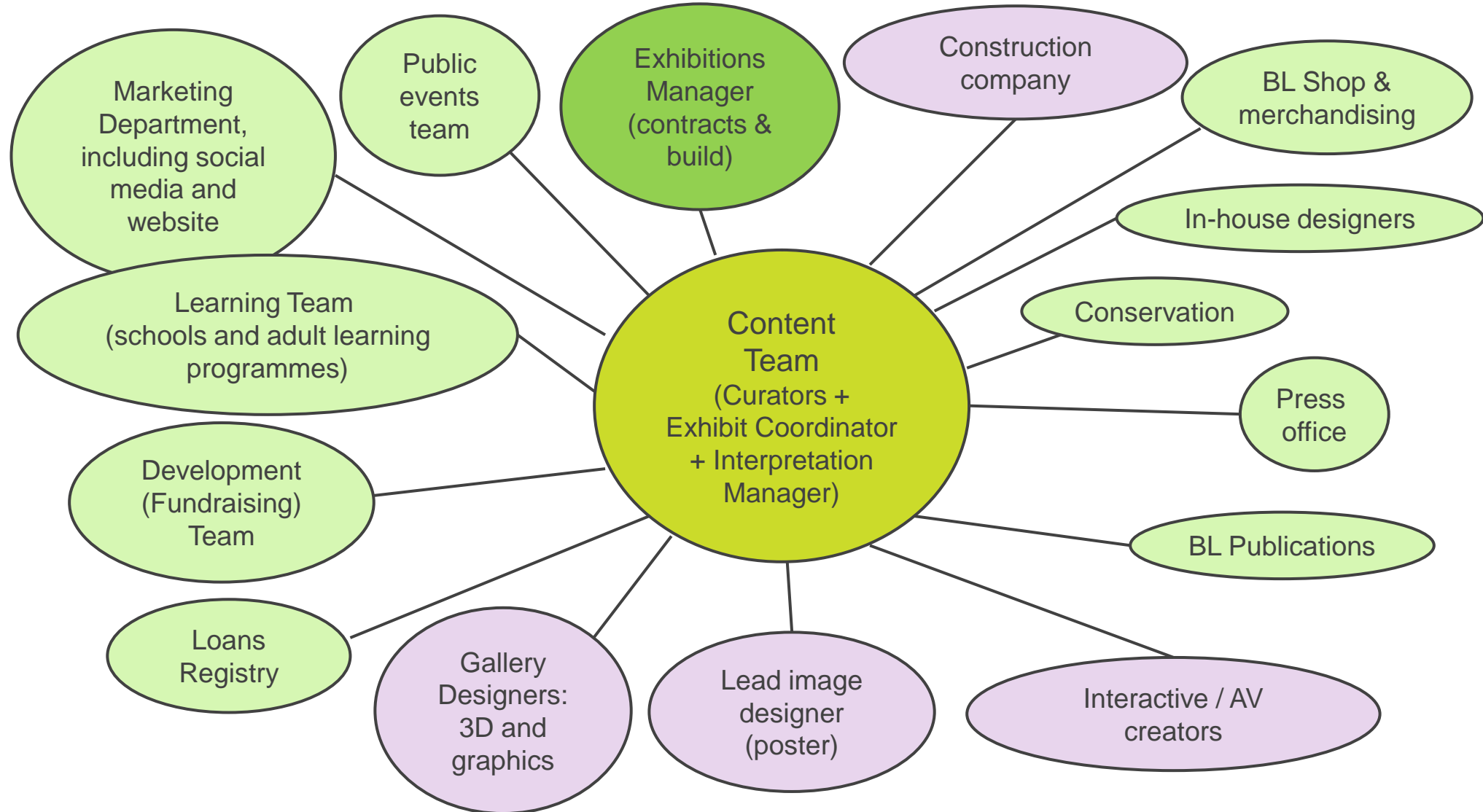
Latin texts about Alexander
the Great
BL Royal MS 13 A



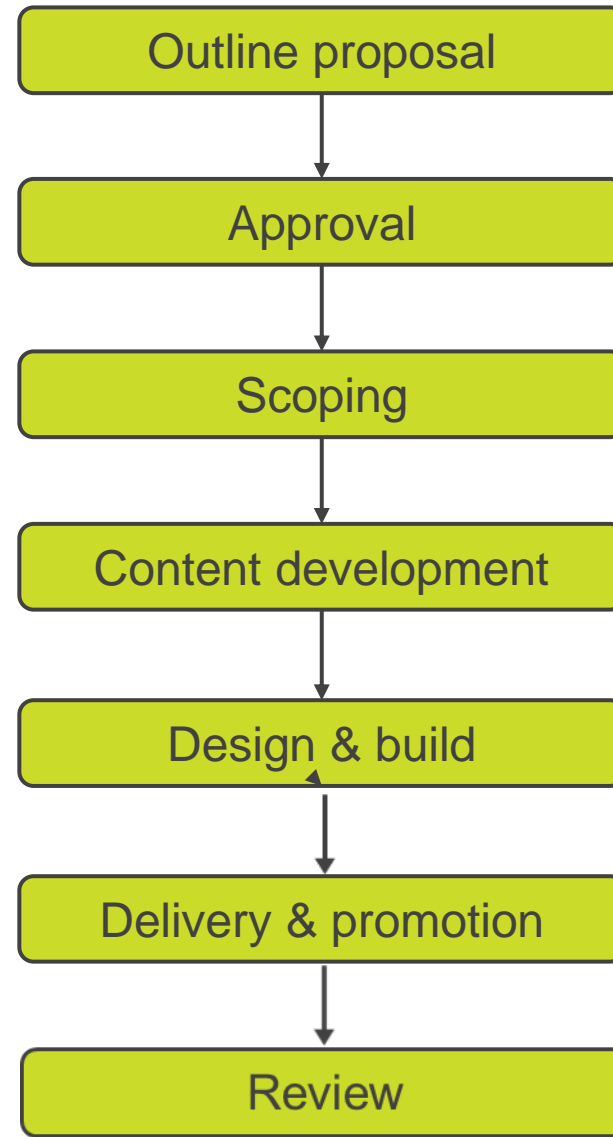
MALAYSIA, 2022

Reimena Yee, *Alexander, the Servant
and the Water of Life*
Digital graphic novel

THE WIDER EXHIBITION PROJECT TEAM



THE EXHIBITION PROCESS

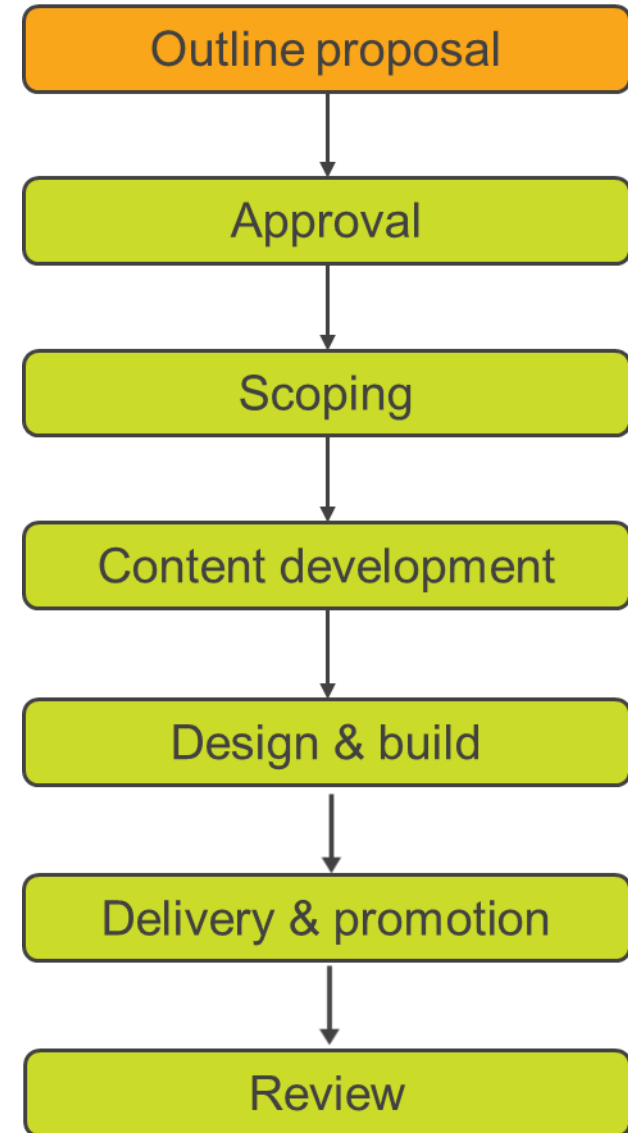


STEP 1: OUTLINE PROPOSAL

What makes a good proposal?

- An idea with broad appeal.
- Accessible to non-specialists.
- Good fit with the British Library brand, where we can provide a unique perspective through our collections.
- Opportunities to highlight the breadth of our collection.
- Obvious marketing angles.

Anyone can submit a proposal, but only a few can be successful.



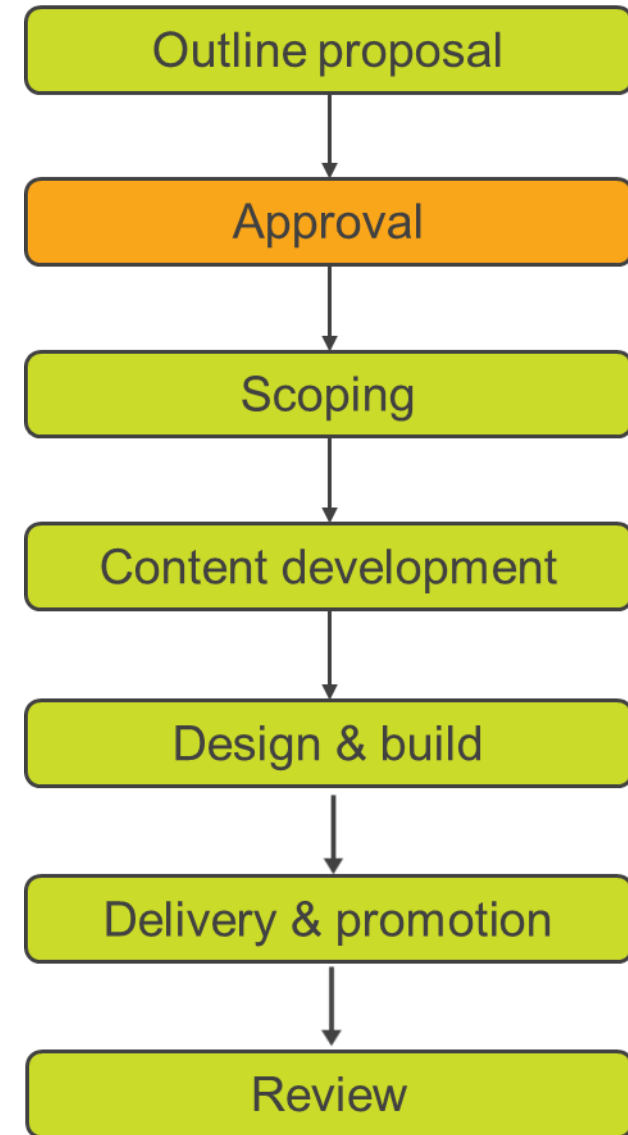
STEP 1: OUTLINE PROPOSAL (cont.)

EXHIBITION PROPOSAL FORM (to be filled in with reference to the Exhibition Proposal Form Accompanying Notes)
1. Working title Alexander the Great: Lost in Legend
2. Proposed by (include full team): Adrian Edwards, Ursula Sims-Williams, Peter Toth
3. Date and version: August 2019, Version 5.0
4. Exhibition space (please tick all that could apply): Paccar 1
5. Proposed slot: April 2022—August 2022, or October 2022—February 2023 (subject to future discussion)
6. Give a brief overview of the exhibition concept: Alexander the Great lived over two thousand years ago but his name continues to fuel passionate debate. In less than 10 years he conquered the Ancient world from Greece to India, but was dead by the age of 33. Although his vast empire did not last, Alexander’s legacy has endured through the stories told about his life and conquests. Storytelling began shortly after his mysterious death, and by the Middle Ages had developed into the <i>Alexander Romance</i> , a narrative featuring Alexander as the all-conquering hero who fought mythical beasts and explored the unknown using submarines and flying chariots. These tales spread across European, Islamic and Asian cultures: new adventures were added and the figure of Alexander was continually re-shaped into whatever kind of ideal hero people wanted him to be. The legend continues to evolve even today, as artists, novelists and film-makers present him as a hero in tune with the values of our own age, often exploring his sexuality.

- Curatorial team established during the process of developing the proposal
- 3 curators at the beginning, with a mix of knowledge and skills: an ancient papyrus specialist, an Islamic Persian specialist, and a Western Early Printed Book specialist
- *(Later joined by a 4th curator, focused on social media, video-game collaboration, and web content development)*
- Developed the proposal together
- This happened during the course of early 2019

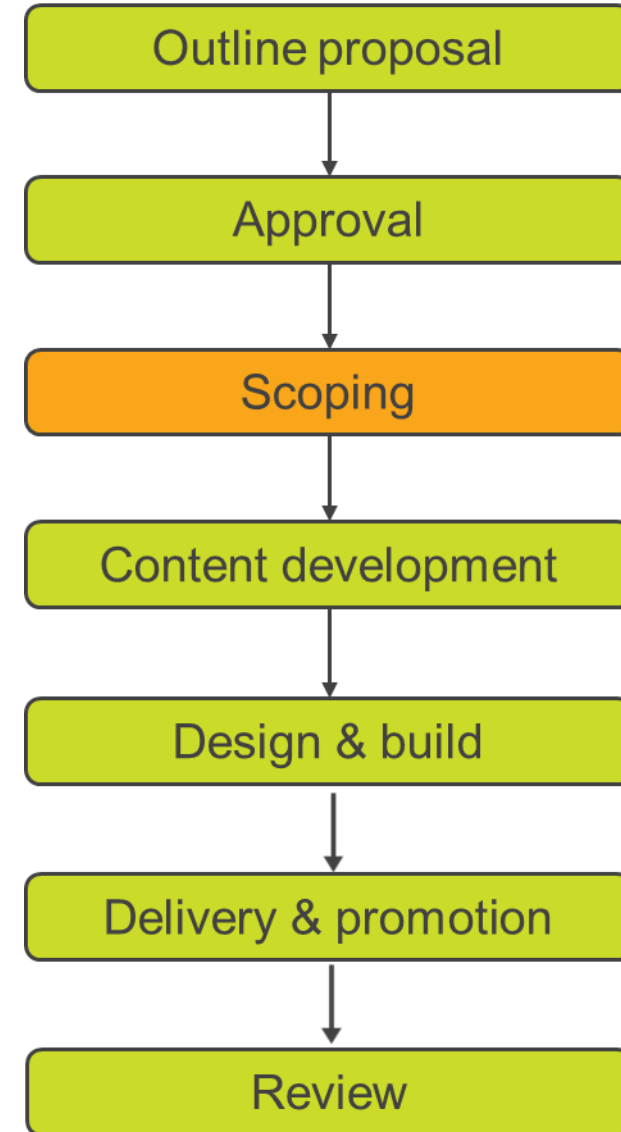
STEP 2: APPROVAL

- Exhibitions Commissioning Group meets four times a year; they consider suggestions within the context of a wider events programme.
- Batches of new ideas are audience tested to see what the great British public thinks.
- The Commissioning Group might approve or reject the idea...
- ...or they might request a feasibility study before going any further.



STEP 3: SCOPING

- Identify key messages and target audiences.
- Overview of narrative and star objects.
- For sharing.
- For audience testing.



STEP 3: SCOPING (cont.)

SCOPE OF EXHIBITION: Alexander the Great: a Life in Legend (working title)

21 October 2022 – 19 February 2023

Paccar 1

Overview

Alexander the Great lived over 2,000 years ago but his name continues to fuel passionate debate. In less than 10 years he conquered the ancient world from Greece to India, but was dead before his 33rd birthday. Although his vast empire did not last, Alexander's legacy has endured through the stories told about his life and conquests. Storytelling began in his lifetime, and by the Middle Ages had developed into the Alexander Romance, a narrative featuring Alexander as the all-conquering hero who fought mythical beasts and explored the unknown using submarines and flying chariots. These tales spread across European, Islamic and Asian cultures: new adventures were added and the figure of Alexander was continually reshaped into whatever kind of ideal hero people wanted him to be. The legend continues to evolve even today, as artists, novelists and filmmakers present him as a hero in tune with the values of our own age, often exploring his sexuality, motivation, and leadership qualities.

Objectives, messages and audiences

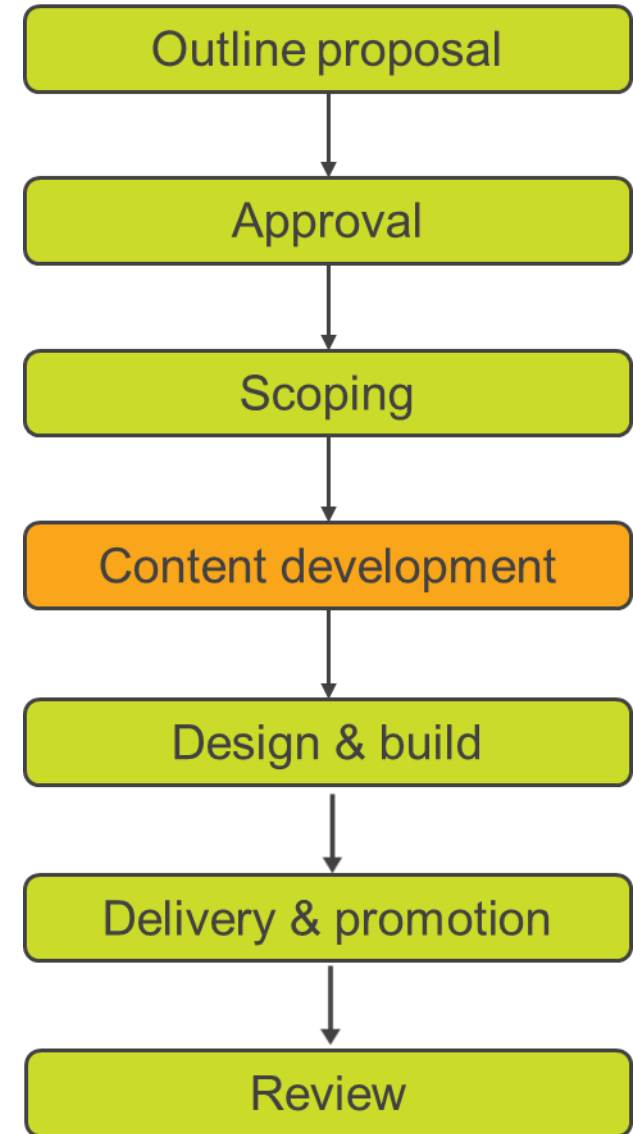
Internal objectives

- To mount the first ever exhibition about the myths and legends of Alexander the Great
- To collaborate across Western and Asian collection areas, reflecting the multiculturalism of Alexander stories
- To integrate heritage and contemporary items in a variety of media including sound, film, 2D and 3D works
- To present AV and videogames in an innovative and immersive way within a

STEP 4: CONTENT DEVELOPMENT



Image credit: <http://www.gotbetterideaz.com/2009/07/help-someone-stole-my-blog/>



STEP 4: CONTENT DEVELOPMENT (cont.)

Exhibit long list

	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	
1	DATE	SHELFMARK	LOCATION	AUTHOR	TITLE	PLACE	CONTENT	NOTES	PRO
2	1471	C.2.b.8	B2-7-498	Curtius Rufus, Quintus	Historiae Alexandri Magni [incipit: Inter hec Alexandri ad conducendum ex peloponeso militem Cleandro cum pecunia misso...]	Venice	Historical biography. Curtius. Original Latin	Ross, II.1. Earliest printed edition in BL of Curtius "Historiae Alexandri Magni" = "Res Gestae Alexandri Magni". Latin, clear roman type. No illns. Minimal illumination. Robust. (Other copies at G.9169, IB.19578)	
3	1472	G.9168	KL-4-015	Curtius Rufus, Quintus	[Historiae Alexandri Magni, ed. Pomponius Laetus]	Rome	Historical biography. Curtius. Original Latin	Ross, II.1. Early printed edition of Curtius. Latin. Clear roman type. Single column. No title. No illns. Wanting the illumination of the capitals. Folio. Robust.	
4	1472	IA.3326.	B2-4-283	Leo the Archpresbyter	[Historia de Preliis]. Incipit liber Alexandri magni regis macedonie de prelijs, etc.	Cologne	Alexander Romance [Pseudo-Callisthenes]. Latin translation	Ross, I.78-100. Earliest printed edition of Leo the Archpresbyter's "Historia de Preliis", a Latin translation of Greek Pseudo-Callisthenes (delta* recension). No illns. (Another copy at: Davis 51(8) = IA.3326a)	
5	1473	LOAN. National Library of Scotland. Inc. 65	n/a	Hartlieb, Johann	Historia Alexandri Magni. Das Buch der geschichte des grossen allexanders (Augsburg: Baemler, 1473).	Augsburg	Alexander Romance [Pseudo-Callisthenes]. German translation	With frontispiece portrait of Alexander as a vampire	
6	1474	G.10525	KL-4-018	Leo the Archpresbyter	[Historia de Preliis]. Incipit liber alexandri magni regis macedonie de prelijs.	Utrecht	Alexander Romance [Pseudo-Callisthenes]. Latin translation	Ross, I.78-100. Latin, clear black letter type, single column. No illns. Quite nice. Folio.	
7	1475	IB.48911	B2-4-288	Leo the Archpresbyter	[Historia de Preliis]. Historia Alexandri Magni. Incipit liber alexandri magni regis macedonie de prelijs	Utrecht?	Alexander Romance [Pseudo-Callisthenes]. Latin translation	Ross, I.78-100. Latin, clear black letter type, single column. No illns. Rubricated. Quite nice. Folio.	
8	1477	IA.20418	B2-4-283	Anonymous	Historia Alexandri Magni [Italian]	Venice	Alexander Romance [Pseudo-Callisthenes]. Italian translation	Ross, I.109. Earliest printed edition of 'Italian Prose Alexander V: Commenza el Libro del Nascimento, ecc' (via Leo "Historia de Preliis"). Good copy. Roman type. Divided into sections along the lines of 'Como Alexandro trovo femine barbate', etc. No illns. Wanting the illumination of capitals. 8vo.	
	1477	IB.55004.	B2-4	Anthony Wydeville, Earl Rivers	The Dictes or Sayengis of the Philosophres (Printed by Caxton).	Westminster	Alexander Romance derivatives. English	Ross, I.3. This work is an English translation from the French: Guillaume de Tignonville "Dicts moraux des philosophes" (14c). Alexander sections have their origins in Pseudo-Callisthenes, via the Arabic of al-Mubashshir b. Fatik, to Spanish, to Latin, to French. Another copy at IB.55005. 1477 [1480] Caxton edn at C.10.b.2.	

STEP 4: CONTENT DEVELOPMENT (cont.)

Inward Loans

- 36 loan items
- 18 lenders

Shown here:

- 14th-century Greek manuscript of the Alexander Romance (Istituto Ellenico, Venice),
- Armour of Prince Henry Frederick, 1607 (Royal Armouries),
- Rolls Plaque, Liège, c.1160 (V&A),
- André Bauchant's 1940 painting of Alexander's funeral procession (Tate)



STEP 4: CONTENT DEVELOPMENT (cont.)

Rich Audio Visual Material



STEP 4: CONTENT DEVELOPMENT (cont.)

Writing panels and labels, with the Interpretation Manager

PANEL TEXTS

85–100 words.

Journey's End

Threatened with a potential mutiny in Punjab, Alexander was forced to turn back and lead his army through the desert to Babylon. On arrival, they were met by bad omens and Alexander became fatally ill. The cause of his death remains unknown, although there are plenty of stories. His body was transported on a magnificent carriage to Egypt, where it was eventually placed in a mausoleum at Alexandria. The tomb is now lost, but the sarcophagus that once held his body may have been identified.

LABEL TEXTS

70–80 words.

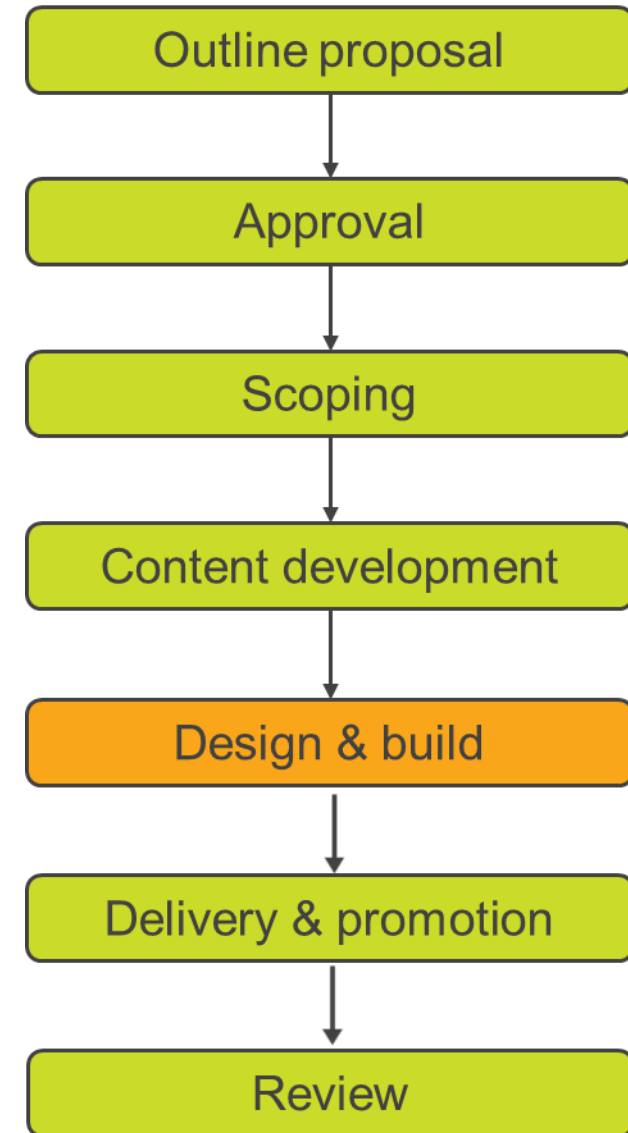
Alexander in Britain

The French medieval romance *Perceforest* contains a long account of an unexpected diversion made by Alexander. His ship is blown off course in a storm and he lands in Britain: an island of dark forests and evil enchanters. Alexander eventually brings order to its people by appointing two of his followers as kings of England and Scotland. The illustration, suggestive of Alexander and his companions arriving in Britain, is probably recycled from another work.

Perceforest. Paris, 1528. 85.k.5–6

STEP 5: GALLERY DESIGN & BUILD

- 3D designers appointed
- Graphic designers appointed
- Construction company appointed
- Audio-visual and interactive developers appointed



STEP 5: GALLERY DESIGN & BUILD

3D Design by Drinkall Dean



STEP 5: GALLERY DESIGN & BUILD

Gallery layout and colour template

SECTION 1 – The Man and the Myth

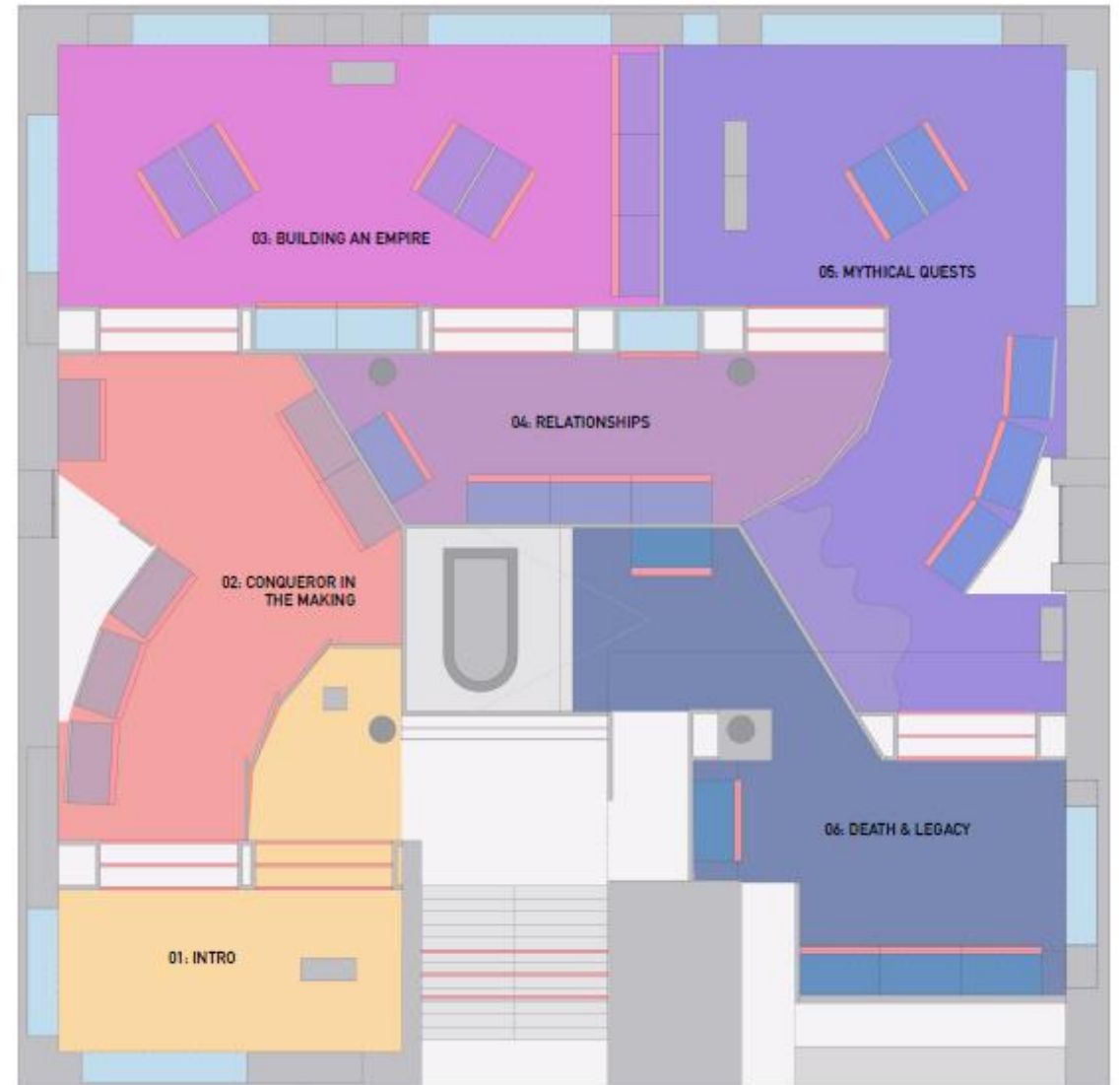
SECTION 2 – A Conqueror in the Making

SECTION 3 – Building an Empire

SECTION 4 – Alexander's Relationships

SECTION 5 – Mythical Quest

SECTION 6 – Journey's End



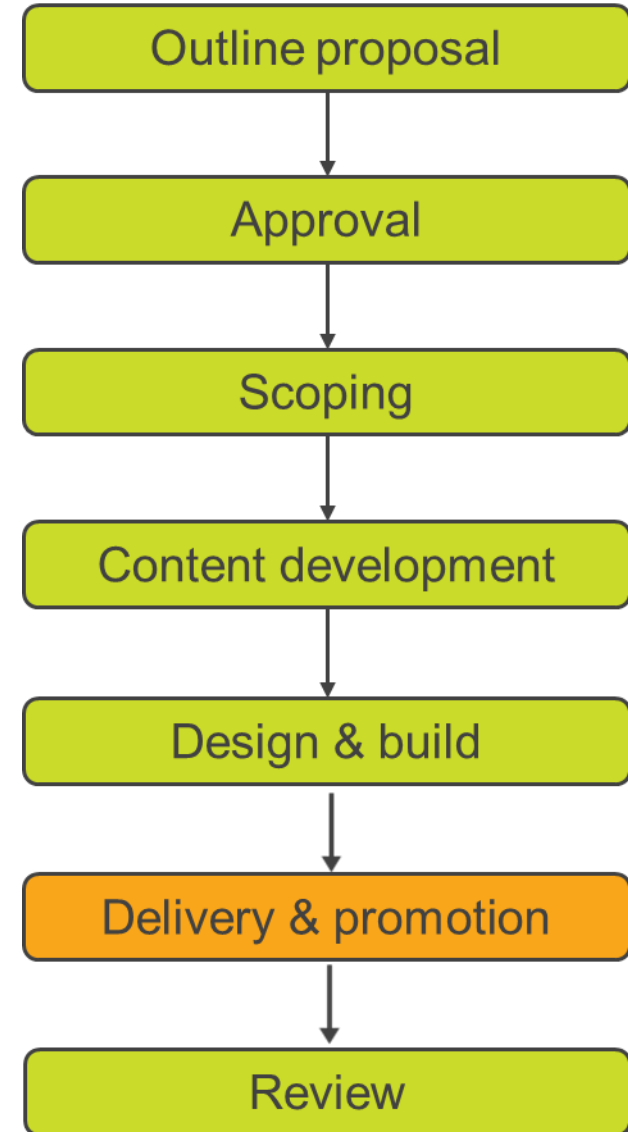
STEP 5: GALLERY DESIGN & BUILD

Exhibition Build



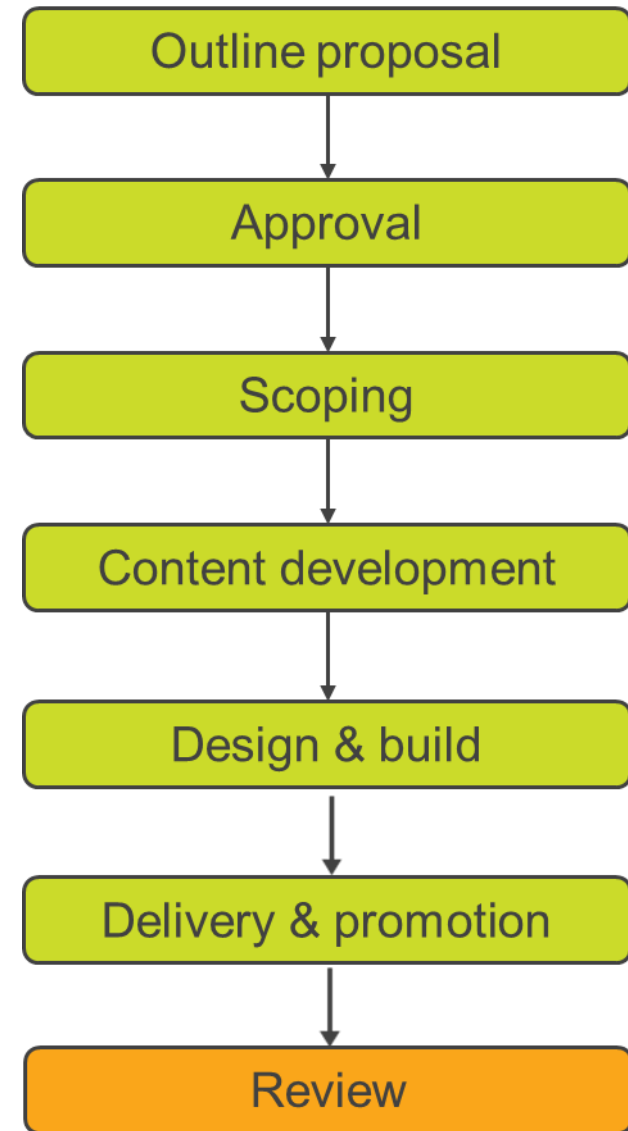
STEP 6: DELIVERY & PROMOTION

- Opening event, then...
- Media tours and interviews
- VIP and group tours
- Promotion for the exhibition book
- Associated events programme (talks, performances, parties)
- Associated adult learning programme
- Associated schools learning programme
- Associated conferences and academic workshops
- Responding to comments, compliments and complaints
- Constant, constant promotion through engagement with the media, with social media, with marketing campaigns, etc.



STEP 7: REVIEW

- Employ an external company to provide a 'summative external review' throughout the run of the exhibition.
- For Alexander, company called BVA-BDRC won the contract, and undertook:
 - 1,161 quantitative exit interviews
 - 18 in-depth qualitative interviews
 - 1 day of ethnographical research observing visitors
- Reported on type of visitors, what their expectations were, and whether they had been met.
- Learned, for example, that 3 in 5 of the visitors to Alexander were women – which is slightly more mixed than for the average exhibition in that gallery.



THANK YOU

