



Intoxicated by Georgia

A Study of Visitors to
Wine, Worship and Sacrifice:
The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani



Office of Policy and Analysis
Smithsonian Institution
March 2008



Preface

It is quite a leap from Colchis to Washington, D.C., but precious artifacts from Western Georgia, the land of the Golden Fleece, made the journey for *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani* in December 2007. The exhibition displayed remarkable discoveries from Vani, the most sacred city of Colchis. The majority were discovered under the leadership of Dr. Otar Lordkipanidze, the renowned Georgian archaeologist. Dr. Darejan Kacharava is now in charge of the project.

Objects from the 8th to 1st Century B.C. were displayed, including an amazing bronze torso, sophisticated gold and silver jewelry, delicate glass scent bottles, rare coins, a fascinating bronze eagle, and incomparable iron figurines with gold earrings and bracelets. The outstanding objects are housed in the Georgian National Museum, located in Tbilisi, Georgia, as well as the Vani Museum, situated in the city of Vani, in Western Georgia.

The Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A), an analytical arm of the Smithsonian Institution, conducts visitor studies as a part of a mandate to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Smithsonian museums. The Director of the Freer and Sackler Galleries (FSG), Dr. Julian Raby, is very interested in the public's views of exhibitions. Over the years, he has showcased an extraordinary range of groundbreaking works from Asia, but this is the first time he has displayed Georgian artifacts. I give him my heartfelt thanks.

OP&A was especially pleased to review this exhibition as a result of the Director's longstanding relationship with the nation of Georgia and the Georgian National Museum, a treasure house of remarkable artifacts recovered over the centuries and rooted in the depths of history. Although the exhibit is a tribute to Dr. Otar Lordkipanidze, I would also like to recognize Dr. David Lordkipanidze for his invaluable contributions as the Director of the Georgian National Museum. His decision to share these great artifacts with the American public stands as an affirmation that art has no boundaries. I am also grateful to Misha Tsereteli, Deputy Director of the Georgian National Museum, for his efforts. He was patient and kept his eye on the big picture while paying careful attention to detail.

In the months leading up to the exhibit, four Georgian conservators Tea Kintsurashvili, Irakli Bokeria, and Nino Kaladadze, from the Georgian National Museum, and Nato Gabelaia from the Georgian Parliamentary Library studied current conservation practices at the Smithsonian's Museum Conservation Institute (MCI). Part of their practical training included the exquisite restoration of several of the objects on display in the exhibit. Dr. Robert Koestler, Director of MCI, Dr. Paula DePriest, Deputy Director of MCI, and Dr. Paul Jett, Head of Conservation and Scientific Research at FSG, played

major roles in the Georgian conservators' professional training – enabling both this exhibit and a bright future for Georgian conservation. All have my admiration, affection and respect.

In addition to thanking Dr. Raby, I would like to thank his talented staff, most notably the Galleries' proficient Head of Exhibitions, Cheryl Sobas, for her disciplined approach to managing the project and for her insights. I also would like to express my gratitude to my excellent staff. Whitney Watriss and Kathleen Ernst administered the surveys. Justin Cason and James Brown, two very able interns, interviewed visitors. Justin also participated in the qualitative analysis. Finally, I am grateful to Lance Costello who supervised all phases of the work and wrote the report. His professionalism, which includes flexibility, the ability to work collaboratively, and his writing skills, combined with his knowledge of design, played a key role in the visitors' evaluation of this wonderful exhibit.

Carole M. P. Neves, Ph.D.
Director
Office of Policy and Analysis

Background

Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani (WWS) was on view at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery from December 1, 2007 through February 24, 2008. The exhibition occupied four rooms on the second floor of the Gallery. The rooms' dark colors and lighting added a sense of drama. The influences of Greek and Persian aesthetics on artifacts from Colchis were highlighted throughout the exhibition; they evoked beauty and underscored the consummate craftsmanship of the objects.

Iron figurines with gold bracelets, necklaces and earrings were displayed in the first room. The inventive, masterful sculptures looked as if they were created by 20th Century modern artists. The second room presented examples of the region's intricate craftsmanship: stunning gold and silver jewelry, including necklaces, bracelets, rings and diadems. Large terracotta amphorae anchored the third room; they were flanked by additional gold ornaments, drinking vessels and Greek and Colchian coins. The amphorae and vessels conveyed early evidence of wine and winemaking. A majestic bronze torso was centered prominently in the final room, along with bronze busts of mythological figures, an eagle, claws, and a battering ram. The torso symbolized the breadth and grandeur of the collection, as well as the enduring Greek influence on Western civilization.

Methodology

In conducting this exhibition study, the study team used two main research methods:

A survey of a random sample of visitors exiting the exhibition. Visitors completed 316 self-administered survey questionnaires, with a response rate of 90 percent. Frequencies of responses to the questions on the survey are provided in Appendix B.

In-depth qualitative interviews with visitors to the exhibition. Some of these were taken prior to the survey for the purpose of informing its content. The OP&A study team interviewed 30 people. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by the study team to search for common themes and well-articulated insights.

Findings: Survey

Visitor Characteristics

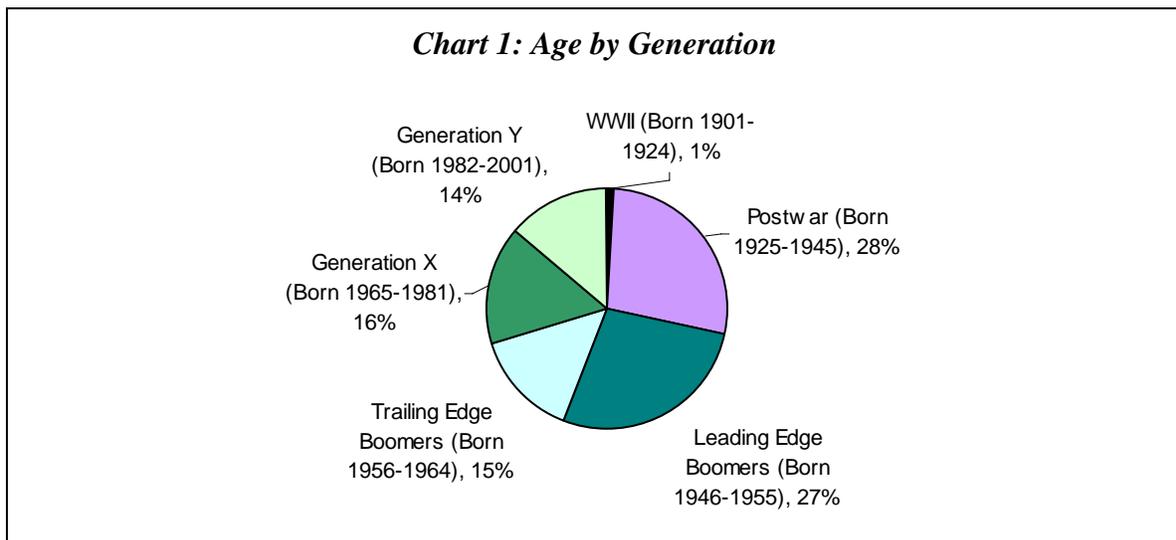
Intention: Previous studies of Sackler exhibitions have shown that the Gallery receives two broad categories of visitors: those who come for a particular exhibit and those whose visits are more general – sometimes to see Asian art and sometimes just to see “the Smithsonian.” Just over half of respondents (53%) came to the Sackler to see *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani* (WWS) – we will refer to these visitors as *exhibition specific* visitors.

Previous visits: More than four in ten (44%) WWS visitors were *recent regulars*; that is, they visited the museum at least once during the past year. Over a quarter of all visitors (26%) were *local regulars* or DC metropolitan area visitors who visited at least once in the previous year.

Recent regulars were more likely than others to be *exhibition specific* visitors (62% vs. 45%)

Demographics

Age: The average age of respondents was 50 and the median age was 53. Divided by generation, one percent of respondents were from the WWII generation (Born 1901-1924); 28%, Postwar Generation (Born 1925-1945); 27%, Leading Edge Boomers (Born 1946-1955); 15%, Trailing Edge Boomers (Born 1956-1964); 16%, Generation X (Born 1965-1981); 14%, Generation Y (Born 1982-2001).



Sex: Following art exhibition trends, visitors to the exhibition were skewed slightly toward female, 58%. This was even more pronounced among *exhibition specific* visitors, 68% of whom were female (vs. 48% of others).

Residence: Over nine-tenths of respondents (94%) were residents of the United States, and two-fifths (40%) were from the Washington DC metropolitan area. Half of the *exhibition specific* visitors were locals.

Group size and composition: About one in three visitors to WWS was an adult visiting alone (32%), about two in five (39%) were adults visiting with one other adult. Roughly one in ten (9%) came in a group with someone under eighteen.

Recent regulars were more likely to visit alone (41%). *Exhibition specific* visitors, on the other hand, were less likely to visit alone (27%).

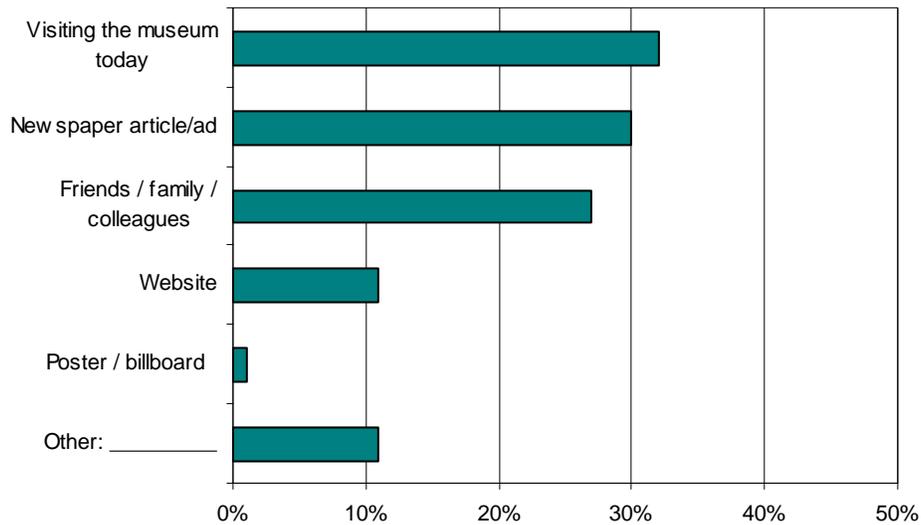
Awareness

The most commonly reported way visitors reported finding out about the exhibit was from *visiting the museum today*, which roughly one third (32%) of visitors marked. This accounted for two thirds of visitors **not** identified as *exhibition specific*.

Another three in ten (30%) noted finding out about the exhibition through a *newspaper article/ad*. Both *exhibition specific* visitors (50%) and *recent regulars* (46%) were more likely to learn about WWS this way.

Over a quarter of respondents found out about the exhibition from *friends, family, and colleagues* (27%). This number rose to nearly four in ten among *exhibition specific* visitors (39%), but was less often the case among *recent regulars* (19%).

Chart 2: How visitors found about Wine, Worship, and Sacrifice

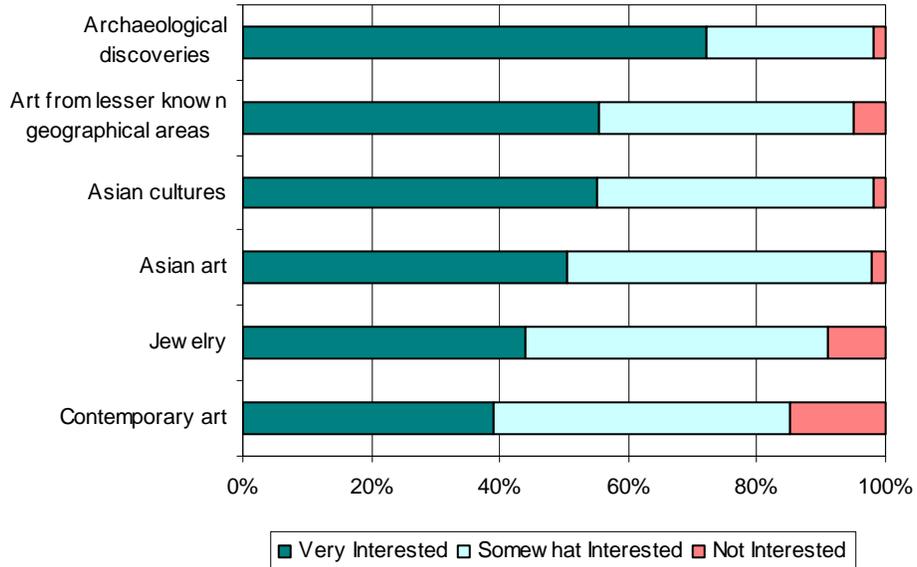


Interests

Nearly three quarters of respondents (72%) were *very interested* in archaeological discoveries. Half or more were *very interested* in art from lesser known geographical areas (56%), Asian cultures (55%), and Asian art (50%). About four in ten were *very interested* in jewelry (44%) and contemporary art (39%).

Exhibition specific visitors marked *very interested* more than other visitors in archaeological discoveries (78% vs. 65%) and jewelry (50% vs. 38%). ***Recent regulars*** were more likely, not surprisingly, to mark very interested for Asian cultures (68%), and Asian art (93%).

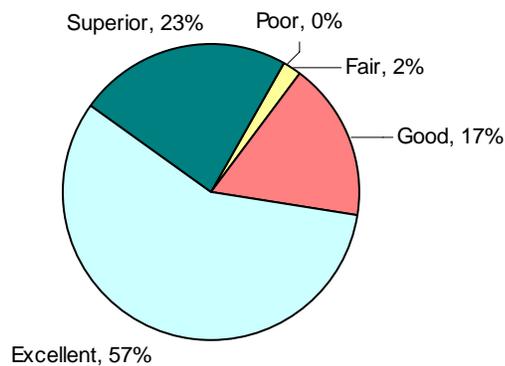
Chart 3: Visitors' interests



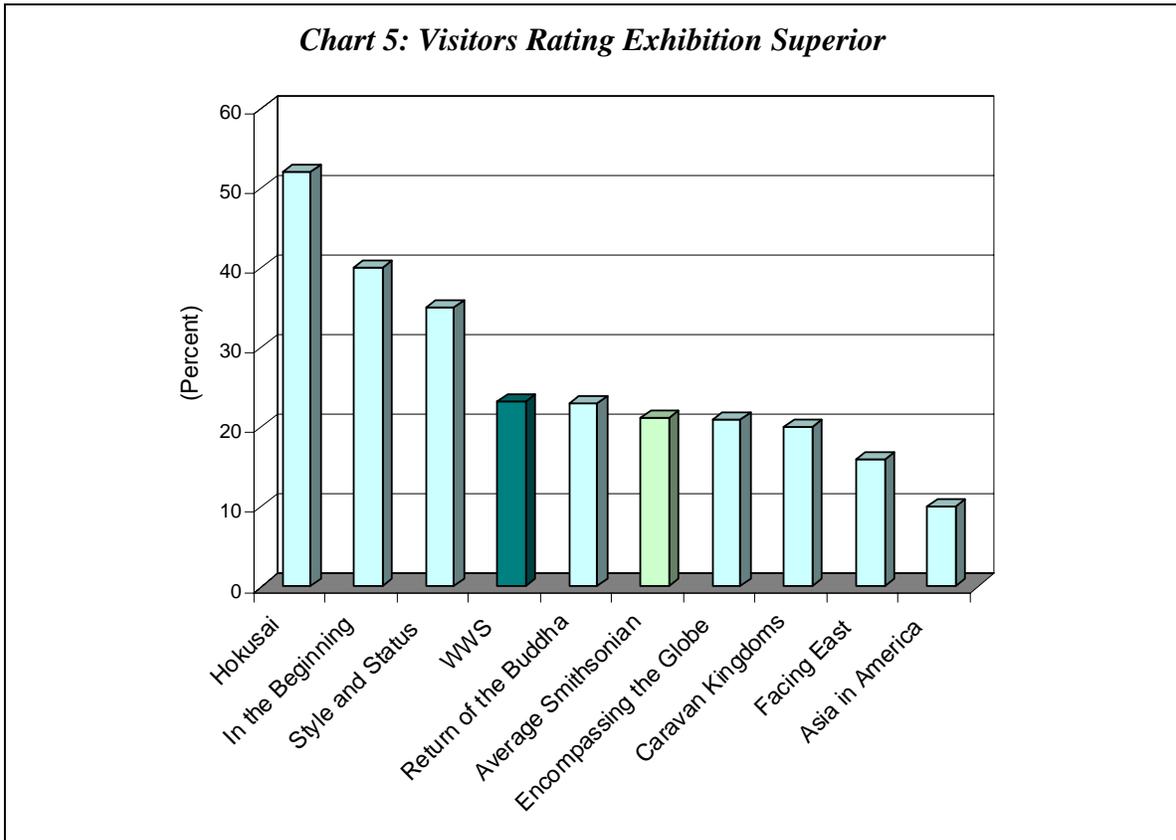
Satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction with WWS was slightly above average for a Sackler exhibition. On OP&A's five point satisfaction scale, 23% of visitors rated it *Superior*, 57% *Excellent*, 17% *Good*, 2% *Fair*, and 0% *Poor*.

Chart 4: Visitor Ratings of Wine, Worship, and Sacrifice

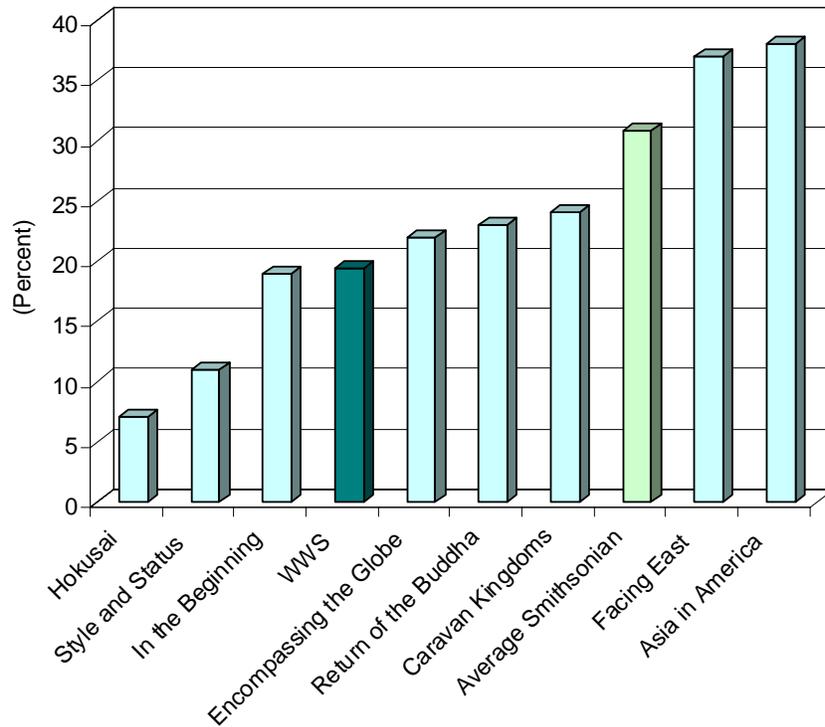


Superior ratings: In terms of *superior* ratings, WWS's 23% was higher than *Asia in America* (10%) and *Facing East* (16%) and was comparable to ratings of *Return of the Buddha* (23%), *Encompassing the Globe* (21%), and *Caravan Kingdoms* (20%); it was lower than *Style and Status* (35%), *In the Beginning* (40%) and *Hokusai* (52%).



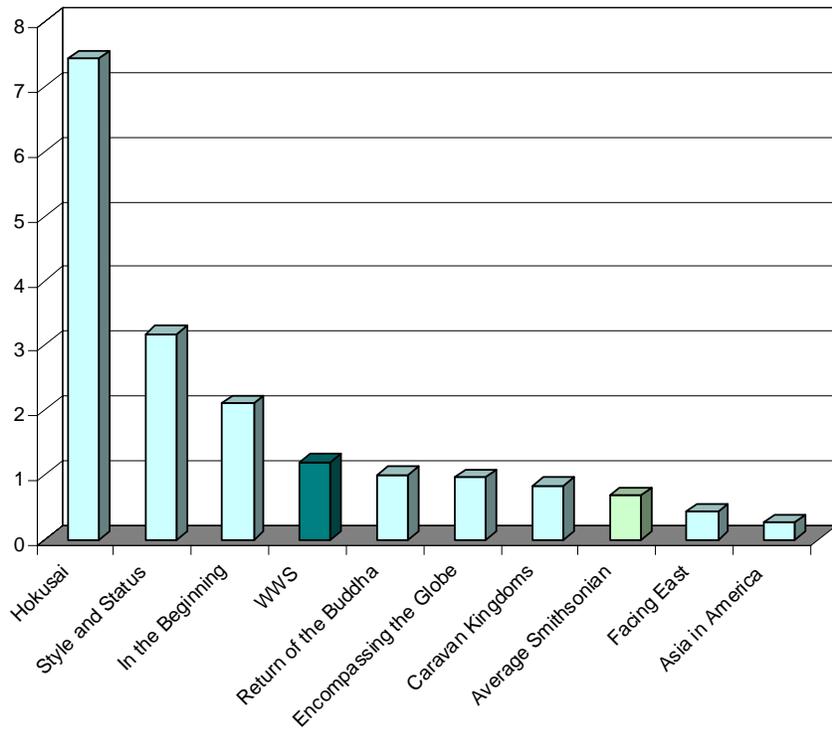
Low ratings: Combining the visitors who rated the exhibition *Poor*, *Fair*, and *Good*, 19% of visitors rated the exhibition less than *Excellent*. This total for low ratings compares favorably to the same sampling of recent Sackler exhibitions. Fewer visitors rated the exhibition low than had for *Asia in America* (38%) and *Facing East* (37%); it was about the same as *Caravan Kingdoms* (24%), *Return of the Buddha* (23%), *Encompassing the Globe* (22%) and *In the Beginning* (19%); and higher than *Style and Status* (11%), and *Hokusai* (7%).

Chart 6: Visitors Rating Exhibition Poor, Fair or Good



Ratio of Superior to Poor+Fair+Good: The percentage of visitors who rated the exhibition *superior* outpaced the percentage who rated it *poor, fair, or good* 6 to 5, or by a ratio of 1.2 to 1. This ratio lagged behind only *Hokusai, Style and Status, and In the Beginning* among recent exhibitions at the Sackler.

Chart 7: Ratio of Superior to Poor, Fair or Good Exhibition Ratings



Exhibition specific visitors were more likely to rate the exhibition *Superior* than other visitors (30% vs. 15%) and less likely to rate it *Good, Fair* or *Poor* (14% vs. 25%).

Slightly more than half of visitors 54% thought it was *better* than they expected, with 45% opining that it was *about as expected* and 2% saying it was *not as good* as they anticipated.

Experiences

When asked to select among a list of eight possible experiences the ones they found especially satisfying in WWS, five were marked by half or more of the respondents:

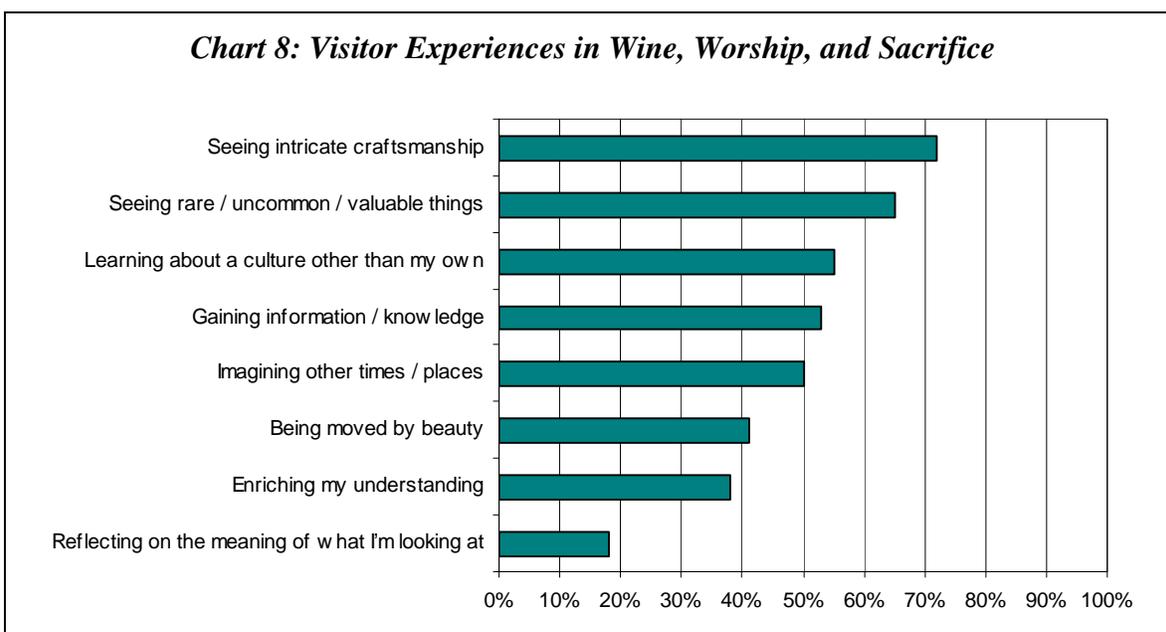
- *Seeing intricate craftsmanship* (72%)
- *Seeing rare / uncommon / valuable things* (65%)
- *Learning about a culture other than my own* (55%)

- *Gaining information / knowledge* (53%)
- *Imagining other times / places* (50%)

On average, visitors marked three experiences. Those who marked more, who we will refer to as **high experience** visitors, were less likely to rate the exhibition low – among this group only 10% rated it **less** than *excellent*.

Both *exhibition specific* and *recent regular* visitors were more likely to be **high experience** visitors (55% and 53%, respectively).

Recent regulars marked *learning about a culture other than my own* (62%), more often than others did (50%). Two other experiences, *being moved by beauty* and *enriching my understanding*, were also cited by nearly half of this group (49% each).



Labels and Information:

Asked about the labels in the exhibition, a large majority of visitors indicated that they found *just the right amount of information* (70%). Another one in five thought there was *too little information* (20%).

On readability, only one in ten marked *type size was too small* (9%). Even fewer marked *not enough lighting to read text* (6%) and *not enough contrast between text and background* (5%).

Suggested Enhancements

Respondents were asked whether any of seven possible exhibition changes would have enhanced their visit. One in eight (13%) marked *no changes needed*. Among those that chose one or more of the seven changes:

- 46% marked *additional contextual information (e.g., history of Vani and Georgia)*
- 33% marked *illustrations showing the wardrobes of the time period*
- 31% marked *more/larger maps of the country and geographic area*
- 28% marked *more/larger maps of the tomb site*
- 25% marked *additional information on craftsmanship*
- 19% marked *additional information about individual objects*
- 16% marked *audio tour*

Exhibition specific visitors were less likely to mark *no changes needed* (6%) and more likely to mark *additional contextual information* (51%), *more/larger maps of the country and geographic area* (38%), *additional information on craftsmanship*, (30%), and *additional information about individual objects* (23%).

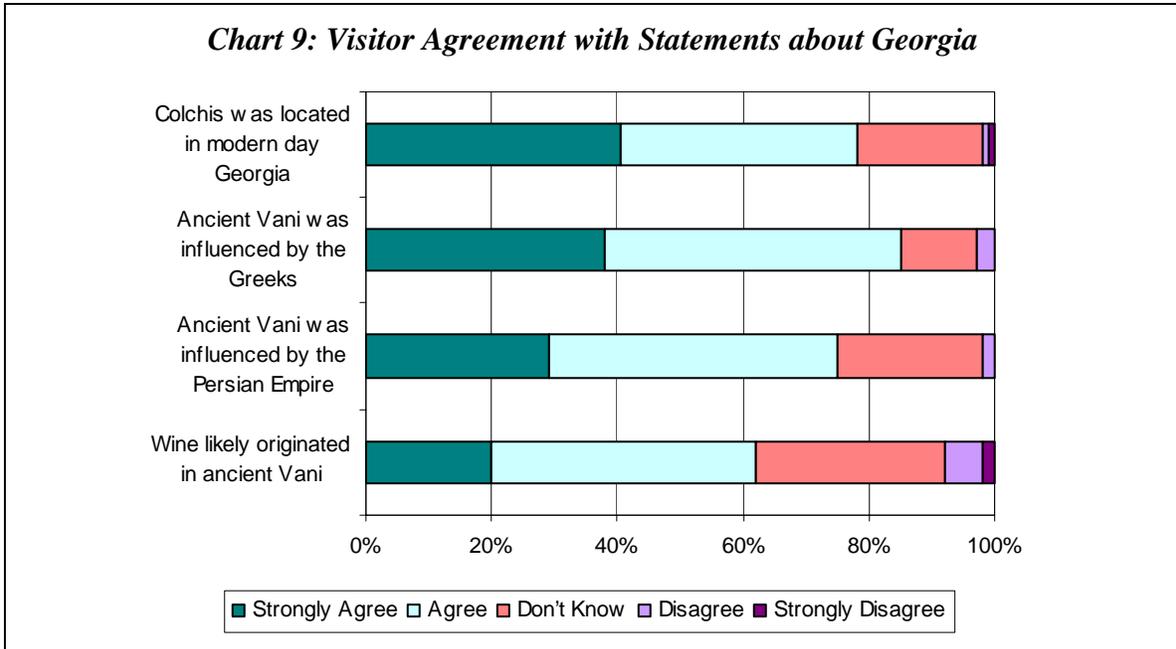
Knowledge:

Visitors were also asked about their level of agreement or disagreement with four statements related to the exhibition. Majorities agreed, to some extent, with each of the statements; however, the strength with which they agreed and the numbers who were not sure varied. On each of the statements eight percent or less disagreed.

Regarding the two statements about cultural influence, slightly more agreed that “Ancient Vani was influenced by the Greeks” (85% *strongly agree* plus *agree*, 12% *not sure*) than that “Ancient Vani was influenced by the Persian Empire” (75% *strongly agree* plus *agree*, 23% *not sure*).

One of the two historical statements, “Colchis was located in modern day Georgia” fell between the two influence questions in terms the percentage that agreed (79% *strongly agree* plus *agree*, 20% *not sure*). The other, “Wine likely originated in ancient Vani” received the least agreement of the four statements (62% *strongly agree* plus *agree*, 30% *not sure*).

With regard to each statement, *exhibition specific* visitors were more likely to mark *strongly agree*.



Findings: Qualitative Interviews

The study team talked to 30 visitors to the WWS exhibition in a series of 23 semi-structured qualitative interviews. Through these interviews the study team probed visitors' reactions to some of the issues covered on the survey to garner a depth of responses that was not possible through the written survey, including their thoughts and feelings about issues that could not adequately be addressed through the questionnaire. Although results obtained in this way cannot be generalized to the larger population of exhibition visitors, interviewees' comments raised some interesting issues and provided deeper insights into how some visitors perceived *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani*.

Interests

One question the study team explored was how visitors reacted to an exhibition focused on objects from an archaeological site. Several interviewees noted how they were drawn to the exhibition specifically for this reason. Some noted how an element of surprise and an infusion of history added to their interest:

If anything, [it is] more interesting, just because you don't know what you're going to find. It's amazing to see the amount of detail.

I find it to be equally as interesting and possibly more interesting because it not only is presented from the perspective of artwork – it's also presented from a historical perspective. The history is important. It's a little more than art – it's educating about history in different eras.

I came in here thinking that I was going to see paintings, and when we started seeing archaeologically dug up things I was enthralled. [The objects] were so old, so many people had touched them.

We actually just saw [a sign for] 'Wine, Worship, and Sacrifice.' That caught our attention, and we bypassed everything else to come here.

For me the tomb is extremely new. I didn't know anything about it. To me, this is marvelous.

Not all visitors came specifically to see *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice*. The remarks of a visitor drawn to the museum because of his particular interest in Chinese art expressed a different reaction:

I guess if I had to chose between this and an exhibition on Sung dynasty Chinese paintings, I'd probably chose the Chinese paintings; but it was a nice exhibit, and I enjoyed it.

Reactions to an exhibition comprised of artifacts from a lesser known geographic region – Western Georgia – were noteworthy:

I think Vani added to it because it's something that you normally don't see. I think it's great when places that are forgotten by time are rediscovered.

I was intrigued because I don't know anything about Vani. And the dates on the excavation are really quite extraordinary.

I wouldn't be as interested in contemporary Georgian art, but old Georgian stuff interests me. It was one of the most important parts of the world.

I was in the neighborhood so I came here. I don't get here often and probably wouldn't have gone to this particular exhibit, but I'm glad I did.

I thought it was a good exhibit about a time period which I didn't know anything about.

Objects and Aesthetics

Interviewees offered favorable remarks on the art itself. Nearly every medium of art on display was mentioned by someone as particularly compelling. Some of the comments included:

I kind of liked the little bronze faces over here in the last room, because they were a little more naturalistic than a lot of things I've seen from that period.

I liked the bangles – I don't know why I liked the bangles. I thought they were pretty neat.

I liked all the really early jewelry, and the piece that I thought was from Iran – a stone necklace.

I just think that the women's grave goods are magnificent. They seemed to unearth more graves of women than men. But the jewelry – there is no reason why it should be this way, but it's such a wonderful lesson to see what good taste these people had over two-thousand years ago.

I thought all of it was very impressive.

Of special note to some interviewees was the craftsmanship involved in creating the objects:

I like the diadems, the ones that you put around your head ... The way they were designed; they were very meticulously done for that time, with what they had. The workmanship, the craftsmanship, was fabulous.

Very interesting what they could do back then.

It's fabulous. What impresses me most is the workmanship of the gold. The granulation is just overwhelming.

I was really unaware of the level of skill of the gold craftsmanship. Just absolutely overwhelming.

It's amazing. The intricacy of the jewelry is incredible.

The details in the gold jewelry; the turtle necklace was the most impressive.

What I really liked was how they were able to create tiny animals in gold; that must have been incredibly difficult, but they are so beautiful. Turtles, lions, tigers wild boars – just wonderful.

I was just amazed at the jewelry and the fine silver and gold work.

The golden jewelry – very intricate and very surprising.

Amazing detail.

The quality of the jewelry work, the gold work, I thought that was great. I love the statue in here, the Greek statue of a youth, the bronze.

It's amazing, [I'm] speechless... it just is so amazing to see earlier civilizations and how advanced they seemed to be. The beauty and the form of that statue, and all the ornamentation.

The necklace that was used for the introduction, it's a pretty big one. It's very plain, but it's also very complex at the same time. It demonstrated the wealth of that culture, but it also demonstrated skill.

The bronze deities in the far room – I have always been interested in mythology, and it's just amazing that they have those. They are just so richly made and the detail and the expressions on the faces are just so clear. It's just really neat.

It is so amazing that stuff could be made that detailed that long ago. I find it amazing that the stuff back then is so much better than the stuff now. Rich people

now are a lot richer than they were back then; so, I think it's interesting that rich people back then had way cooler stuff.

Aesthetics aside, one interviewee wondered how some of the objects were used:

The earrings are so heavy! How did these women wear them? My God that would hurt, gold is heavy! How did they wear that belt? It was interesting because they still wear silver belts there, but they are made from little things joined together so you can sit in them and dance in them.

Influences

Several interviewees noted influences from other cultures:

I am a little bit familiar with Persian art and a little bit with Greek, and you can see the influences. But finding out about the particular area geographically was interesting.

It was interesting to see where these pieces came from. That was the most interesting thing to me. And, the trade and influences.

It's fabulous!!! Being Turkish, the pendants, ornaments are very similar to what I find in my own culture. As you see, in ancient times they all interacted, the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians. All of those cultures are very similar to each other, and they have been sort of [borrowing] from each other and combining [elements to make] their own arts.

I was astonished at the preservation of the jewelry and how beautiful it all was. I was also astonished to see the similarity between the jewelry in this exhibit and the jewelry in an exhibit concerning Pompeii that I saw in my home city a few months ago.

There were elements in there that seemed as though one would see the motifs in other civilizations, so that was intriguing. And just the general date.

The Greek influence was particularly noteworthy to some interviewees:

I had no idea about the significant Greek influence; it was interesting to hear about the Golden Fleece and how the use of sheep skin or wool was the foundation for this idea of the Golden Fleece, I didn't know that. I didn't know about the origin of wine, at least apparently as we know it, dating from Georgia. So I thought it was very enlightening in that respect.

I didn't realize that Hellenistic culture extended into what's now Georgia that extensively. That was interesting to find out.

The first [object] I saw upon entering was a Greek bowl from – gosh, it was 3000 years old. I never expected that in this part of the world.

I didn't know that they had Greek sculpture.

Other comments highlighted visitors' recognition of Egyptian and Persian influences:

The symbolism fascinated me. Also the interactions with Persia, which were very obvious and nicely brought out in some of the labels.

I was really surprised by the Egyptian/Persian influence. I had no idea there was trade between Egypt and Persia, but it did contradict one of the statements in the exhibit where it said Georgia was the Eastern most part of that world; well, Persia's right around there and I think parts of it are more to the East than Georgia is, I'm not sure; I need to look at a map.

I was trying figure out some of the trading. For example, some of the beads looked like they were what you would buy in modern day Turkey now, as was the eagle eye.

Historic context

Many interviewees commented on how the artifacts provided a historic perspective:

Gold! The gold! Gold has a cherished value but it's the art that was created with it. To get a historical perspective – what exists today and the way it was centuries ago.

I thought the jewelry collection was absolutely magnificent. I was aware of the area cultures, just because of the history, and I thought “what an interesting perspective.” But I was particularly fascinated by the little coin of Philip of Macedonia that dated most of the artifacts and jewelry to about 300 BC. I thought that was very well done.

The one I'm going to remember the most is the iron battering ram head, because I didn't know they had iron then.

I was fascinated with it because my impression was Georgia did not have a rich history. What you read in the paper tends to give a negative connotation towards the country, and I was never aware of its richness.

Many visitors made observations on learning about the history of Georgia – of special note to several visitors was how developed Vani and Colchis were:

I was particularly excited to learn that it was the land of Colchis from Greek myth; I did not realize that. I knew Georgia existed, and it was a part of the former Soviet Union but not much more than that.

I didn't know that they had such a well developed civilization that they would have inspired the envy of the Greeks and led to the myth of Jason and his assault and theft of the Golden Fleece.

This was obviously a very sophisticated and highly developed civilization about the same time that Philip and Alexander were conquering the 'supposed' Barbarians. It was interesting to me to see how the Barbarians, so to speak, had such skill in their jewelry making; it is such exquisite stuff, and it showed a great deal of technical skill and talent.

I thought about those delicate golden drinking bowls and how they are shallow instead of what we think of as a long goblet. Wherever there are grapes there is going to be wine, but I didn't know that they had such a well developed civilization.

In particular, many interviewees noted learning that archaeological evidence suggests Georgia was the birthplace of wine:

I found the stuff on wine interesting. I didn't know that wine started in Georgia. Even the Georgians didn't say that when I was there, and they brag about everything as being Georgian.

Yes, I learned a great deal, especially the business about the wine and the derivation of the words 'vino' and 'wine.' So it was very informative, well done.

I did not know Georgia was the home of wine.

I think it's really neat. I didn't realize they were the first to create wine in that region. It's amazing.

I never knew anything about Vani and that area was so significant historically. That is where wine was invented.

I didn't know where wine came from. The word wine is actually a Georgian word. So yeah, I was never aware of that culture at all.

Asked about the relative importance of the art versus the historic perspective which it provides, some interviewees observed a symbiotic relationship between the two:

I like art and history combined because to have art means you have a more advanced and cultivated society. Just like in Italy, you have the great paintings and a lot of inventions. I was not aware of Georgia ... [this exhibition] gives you terrific insight and appreciation.

You can't separate the art from its cultural context. I'm an art historian, that's how I think about art. I mean it's gorgeous, but there's more to it than that.

Information and Labels

The study team queried visitors about their thoughts on the amount of information in the exhibition. Responses were mixed. While some visitors felt the labels went into too much detail, others would have liked more information. Still others were pleased with the exhibition as presented:

Maybe too much. I mean maybe if you could highlight and then go into a little more detail.

I would have loved to have had more information, if they would have given it to us. I know they don't know very much about the religious practices. One thing that was interesting was that they put such precious goods in the graves, like real silver cups instead of ceramic imitations of them. Just seeing this beautiful, beautiful jewelry is enough to teach one a great deal. But the more information they have, the better. I mean I wouldn't want this exhibit to turn into a series of a lot of things we have to read because it takes too much time for people to go through. But Georgia is an amazing and fascinating place so I would have loved to have known a little more.

I thought there was enough. And everything seemed pretty clear to me. There were more things I wanted to know about.

I think for the most part talking about where the tombs were, under what circumstances they were found, their significance, and the conclusions they drew from the tomb, were quite good.

Enough to pique your curiosity and drive your interest for more information elsewhere.

However, it should be noted that some visitors took exception to parts of the archaeological narrative. For example, one interviewee indicated that she did not believe the facts offered provided evidence for the assertions made:

There were several things in there that made logical leaps that don't have evidence. For example, the silver diadems on servants; just because you find silver diadems on servants doesn't mean that they're just for funerals. It could be that super fancy people wanted to put super fancy things on their servants' heads while they were alive. You have no way to know that they are just for funerals. There were a lot of little things like that where I was like "Ah, I need some more evidence before I believe that claim." I thought that for some of the interpretations I would have liked to have seen more evidence.

The size of the text used for the labels as well as the contrast between the text and its background and the lighting produced a mix of responses – eliciting both praise and criticism:

The labels were very helpful to me. I actually forgot my glasses. (I wear reading glasses, and I had forgotten them.) Sometimes labels are very hard to read. These labels were actually quite good. They were also very good in terms of content. I thought they provided a fair amount of information. One of the things I was left wondering was, "Were most of the gold objects created from pouring into molds or were they created by pounding?"

Lighting is perennially a problem, in this museum and in most museums. Low contrast, low light levels, I had to bend way over to read the labels. People of a certain age, whose eyesight is not as good as it once was, have a real difficult time. That is a problem throughout, not just at the Smithsonian. Curators get caught up with their own design, but it's not practical. A lot more contrast and a lot more lighting would be very helpful.

Exhibition Design

Visitors, by and large, were impressed by the exhibition design. The spacing of the artworks within the displays was particularly lauded:

The spacing...you could get up close and really take a look at things.

I liked the fact that they were not closely packed. I think it is very nicely done.

Yeah I liked it... It was just very flowing; I didn't notice I guess because, well, I suppose that's the way it should be. You don't want to have the surroundings look more important than what is being shown.

Everything is nicely spaced. The museum has always done a wonderful job of not trying to push too much into a space. I know sometimes there is so much to see,

so this is really a nice layout. You can appreciate all of that. Frequently after I go through these exhibits I tell some of my relatives to come down and take a look. I have nothing but compliments!

I think it's wonderful. It's really well lit, and it's just amazing to see [the objects] up close. Everything was separate enough and each piece was highlighted where you could see how well it was made. Things were put together in a way so that like pieces were near each other. I thought the composition was really nice. ... I kind of just walked through. It's not all clustered together so you don't get confused. I thought it was really nicely laid out.

Also noteworthy to visitors were the cases filled with suspended jewelry which allowed visitors to view the objects from all angles:

I thought it was really nicely laid out. The way they displayed the jewelry, you see the jewelry; you don't necessarily look at how it's being hung. But then you realize it's actually suspended in a very ingenious way so that you are seeing only the jewelry.

The ornaments were in sort of a floating exhibition. You can actually see the backside where as in normal exhibitions you don't see the backs of the ornaments or necklaces so you have no idea how it used to sit on humans.

I think it was a pretty good display. I liked it compared to some other museums. It really caught my attention, and we were able to clearly see each piece of the jewelry, what it was used for and what tomb it came out of, so I really like that. It was really good.

I thought how all the jewelry that was set up in the cases was done really well.

The design is fine; it's very beautiful. One of the nice things about it was the cases were placed in such a way that people could stand all around on every side to see what was inside. I thought that was well done.

What a job it was to put it together. I'm sure you just had all those gold objects and you had to figure out how to display them. I thought they were very nicely displayed.

Of particular significance to one visitor, a mother guiding her children through the exhibition, was how the displays and the height of the cases allowed both her and her young son to see the artworks:

I thought it was spectacular. I can't focus on wall text when all I can do is work with the children to engage them. I enjoyed seeing the jewelry from multiple angles. And he could see quite a bit, because [the objects] were low.

While very few children went through the exhibition, three in a family were clearly engaged. One of the daughters noted:

I drew earrings for a very small girl, probably in Egypt or something – and a necklace, and a crown.

Suggested Enhancements

The study team was interested in hearing about how visitors would have improved the exhibition. Many interviewees mentioned enhancements that would have expanded the amount of historical context provided:

Well, in terms of the art I think it's terrific. If you are someone like me and very much interested in history and international things, I think it could have had more about the history and the culture of Georgia. You kind of just get a brief introduction.

Maybe I wasn't reading all of the labels in there, but possibly a little bit more information about the reason for burying people with all the goods. Obviously you could take it with you, somehow.

I know quite a bit about Colchis, Jason, Medea, and the Greeks, and I have great interest in Georgia. I [would have liked it] if they had expanded this exhibit; on the website we see pictures of Georgia, it would have been nice to see that here – at least I would have loved it.

I am coming at it from more of a historical standpoint. What was happening over the rest of the world while this stuff was happening? Put it in a timeline!

Other visitors suggested additional, larger and better placed maps of the tombs and the surrounding region:

Regarding the display on the golden jewelry that kept referring to the tombs and the numbers of tomb, visitors didn't see the layout of the architectural site until they got to the very end. So [the museum] should have had a larger diagram of the tombs as visitors entered. (Note: This visitor, like many others, entered through the exit.)

I thought it would be nice to have a larger map on the wall where people could picture [the location of] the tombs. I went back several times to the wall to try to locate where a particular hall was situated.

Just a little more direction. Maybe a big map in the beginning and one in each room to show what areas they buried people in – a geographical sense of where people are buried in Vani.

It would be nice to kind of have modern cities' or countries' relationships to Georgia because I am familiar with the Black Sea, but I'm not sure where Vani falls. I mean that might give an idea of where they actually dug the tombs.

Or a map of the exhibition:

I got confused about what I was seeing. I think if I had to walk through it again, I would want to look at a map and see if there is a rhyme or reason to the time periods, and how I should enter the exhibit. Am I going from older to newer? I just stumbled in here, there was no plan...a map would have been nice.

Another concern many visitors voiced was the difficulty of seeing the intricate craftsmanship on some of the objects. Several interviewees suggested magnifying glasses or large photographic images to assist visitors admiring the workmanship:

There were a couple of places in the exhibit where I wanted to put something under a magnifying glass, to get a better look at a particular item. But I think it's an above average exhibit.

I thought the belt was really interesting ... it just has all of these different scenes. Actually, I would have liked a magnifying glass and more explanations about what the guy was wearing because I bet it would have made some of the other stuff make more sense.

On the website, we saw a really good close up of the turtle necklace and I was surprised at how small it was. I don't know if there is any way to help us see detail; some of it is extraordinary. Maybe they could place the objects at a different angle, but I have no idea how to do that. My only suggestion [would be] if there were a way to see better – maybe a big picture on the wall or maybe behind the cases for the things that are really extraordinary. They could put a blow up of what is on display so people could examine it. You can't have a magnifying glass because people have to get too close. I have a pair of binoculars which is wonderful. That would be the advantage of having a catalogue. People can take it and really examine the objects.

With regard to his inability to find a catalogue, the visitor in the previous quote went on to add:

It's a wonderful exhibit – it's so exciting to see these beautiful, incredible objects. I only wish there was a catalogue with pictures where we could study them after we view the exhibit.

Another interviewee had a similar thought about providing a handout to visitors:

I wish there was something I could take home with me, just some little thing to remind me.

Two visitors wondered about a lack of advertising for the exhibition:

I haven't seen very many ads for the exhibit. And also clear signage that it starts over there, but, then again, that might just be me. I haven't seen any ads which is strange because I think this is really neat and really ground breaking. There is nothing else like it in the country, not even in the hemisphere; they should make a bigger deal about advertising something like this exhibition.

Advertise it more! Nobody in town knows about it.

Notwithstanding the above thoughts on improvement, visitors shared their appreciation for the exhibition. For example:

This exhibition, as well as others I have seen here, is always outstanding, nothing short of outstanding. Every time I come here I learn something.

I thought it was fantastic. I am just so happy that [the Sackler] was able to arrange this with the museum of Georgia and put this show on.

I'm already thinking of somebody I can email and say you got to come see this exhibit.

Appendix A: Questionnaire for *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani* Survey

4752273763

Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani
Sackler Gallery, Winter 2007/2008

How many times have you visited *this museum*, the Sackler Gallery, in the past year? This is my first visit in the past year
 I have visited times in the past year

Which best describes your visit *today*? [Mark one or more] I came to see this exhibition, *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice*
 I came to see the Freer/Sackler Galleries
 I came on a general Smithsonian visit

From where did you find out about this exhibition, *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani*? [Mark one or more] Visiting the museum today Newspaper article/ad
 Friends/family/colleagues Website
 Poster/billboard Other: _____

Please rate your experience in *this exhibition*. Poor Fair Good Excellent Superior

How did *this exhibition* compare with what you *expected*? Not as good About as expected Better

Which experiences did you find especially satisfying in *this exhibition*? [Mark one or more] Seeing rare/uncommon/valuable things
 Learning about a culture other than my own
 Enriching my understanding
 Seeing intricate craftsmanship
 Reflecting on the meaning of what I'm looking at
 Being moved by beauty
 Imagining other times/places
 Gaining information/knowledge

Thinking about the labels in *this exhibition*, with which of the following do you agree? [Mark one or more] Type size was too small
 Not enough contrast between text and background
 Not enough lighting to read text
 Too little information
 Too much information
 Just the right amount of information

Which of the following would have enhanced your visit to *this exhibition*? [Mark one or more] Additional contextual information (e.g., history of Vani and Georgia)
 Additional information about individual objects
 Additional information on craftsmanship
 Illustrations showing the wardrobes of the time period
 More/larger maps of the tomb site
 More/larger maps of the country and geographic area
 Audio tour
 No changes needed

For each statement, please mark whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree.	Strongly			Strongly		Not Sure
	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Disagree	Disagree	
<i>Wine likely originated in ancient Vani</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<i>Ancient Vani was influenced by the Greeks</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<i>Ancient Vani was influenced by the Persian Empire</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>					
<i>Colchis was located in Georgia</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Where do you live? United States. Specify zipcode:
 Other country. Specify: _____

What is your age?

What is your sex? Male Female

How many people are you visiting with today? I am alone I am with: Adults 18 and over
 Youth/children under 18

How interested are you in...	Not Interested	Somewhat Interested	Very Interested
<i>Asian art</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Asian cultures</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Art from lesser known geographical areas</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Archaeological discoveries</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Jewelry</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Contemporary art</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- - - - -

 1 2 3 C R L I

Thank you for your time!

Appendix B: Frequencies of Responses to the *Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani* Survey

<p>How many times have you visited <i>this museum</i>, the Sackler Gallery, in the past year?</p>	<p>56% This is my first visit in the past year 44% I have visited ___ times in the past year</p>					
	<p><i>1 time: 56%</i> <i>2-4 times: 21%</i> <i>5+ times: 24%</i></p>					
<p>Which best describes your visit <i>today</i>? [Mark one or more]</p>	<p>53% I came to see this exhibition, <i>Wine, Worship and Sacrifice</i> 37% I came to see the Freer/Sackler Galleries 18% I came on a general Smithsonian visit</p>					
<p>From where did you find out about this exhibition, <i>Wine, Worship and Sacrifice: The Golden Graves of Ancient Vani</i>? [Mark one or more]</p>	<p>32% Visiting the museum today 30% Newspaper article/ad 27% Friends / family / colleagues 11% Website 1% Poster / billboard 11% Other: _____</p>					
<p>Please rate your experience in <i>this exhibition</i>.</p>	<p>0% Poor 2% Fair 17% Good 57% Excellent 23% Superior</p>					
<p>How did <i>this exhibition</i> compare with what you expected?</p>	<p>2% Not as good 45% About as expected 54% Better</p>					
<p>Which experiences did you find especially satisfying in <i>this exhibition</i>? [Mark one or more]</p>	<p>65% Seeing rare / uncommon / valuable things 55% Learning about a culture other than my own 38% Enriching my understanding 72% Seeing intricate craftsmanship 18% Reflecting on the meaning of what I'm looking at 41% Being moved by beauty 50% Imagining other times / places 53% Gaining information / knowledge</p>					
<p>Thinking about the labels in this exhibition, with which of the following do you agree? [Mark one or more]</p>	<p>9% Type size was too small 5% Not enough contrast between text and background 6% Not enough lighting to read text 20% Too little information 3% Too much information 70% Just the right amount of information</p>					
<p>Which of the following would have enhanced your visit to <i>this exhibition</i>? [Mark one or more]</p>	<p>46% Additional contextual information (e.g., history of Vani and Georgia) 19% Additional information about individual objects 25% Additional information on craftsmanship 33% Illustrations showing the wardrobes of the time period 28% More/larger maps of the tomb site 31% More/larger maps of the country and geographic area 16% Audio tour 13% No changes needed</p>					
<p>For each statement, please mark whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree</p>	<table border="0" style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">Strongly Agree</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Agree</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Disagree</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Strongly Disagree</td> <td style="width: 15%;">Don't Know</td> </tr> </table>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know		
<p><i>Wine likely originated in ancient Vani</i></p>	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">20%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">42%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">6%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">30%</td> </tr> </table>	20%	42%	6%	2%	30%
20%	42%	6%	2%	30%		
<p><i>Ancient Vani was influenced by the Greeks</i></p>	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">38%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">47%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">3%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">0%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">12%</td> </tr> </table>	38%	47%	3%	0%	12%
38%	47%	3%	0%	12%		
<p><i>Ancient Vani was influenced by the Persian Empire</i></p>	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">29%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">46%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">2%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">0%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">23%</td> </tr> </table>	29%	46%	2%	0%	23%
29%	46%	2%	0%	23%		
<p><i>Colchis was located in modern day Georgia</i></p>	<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%;">41%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">38%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">1%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">1%</td> <td style="width: 15%;">20%</td> </tr> </table>	41%	38%	1%	1%	20%
41%	38%	1%	1%	20%		

Where do you live? 94% United States.
6% Other country:

Washington DC Metro: 40%

What is your age? *Average: 50*
Median: 53

WWII (Born 1901-1924): 1%
Postwar (Born 1925-1945): 28%
Leading Edge Boomers (Born 1946-1955): 27%
Trailing Edge Boomers (Born 1956-1964): 15%
Generation X (Born 1965-1981): 16%
Generation Y (Born 1982-2001): 14%

What is your sex? 42% Male 58% Female

How many people are you visiting with today? 32% I am alone 68% I am with: ___ Adults 18 and over
___ Youth/children under 18

Adult visiting alone: 32%
Two adults: 39%
Three or more adults: 20%

Group with at least one member under 18: 9%

How interested are you in...	Not Interested	Somewhat Interested	Very Interested
<i>Asian art</i>	2%	47%	50%
<i>Asian cultures</i>	2%	43%	55%
<i>Art from lesser known geographical areas</i>	5%	40%	56%
<i>Archaeological discoveries</i>	2%	26%	72%
<i>Jewelry</i>	9%	47%	44%
<i>Contemporary art</i>	15%	46%	39%



Smithsonian Institution
Office of Policy and Analysis
Washington, DC 20560-0502
www.si.edu/opanda