

Biblically Related Artifacts in the Musee du Louvre

Prepared by Ferrell Jenkins
Retired Chair, Biblical Studies, Florida College

GENERAL INFORMATION

The French were the first to excavate in Egypt and Mesopotamia. For years they had exclusive rights to excavate in Persia and Syria. The collection from these countries is exceptionally rich.

The Louvre is closed on Tuesday. Hours other days: 9:45 a.m. to 8 p.m. Not all departments are open every day. I like to plan to be in the Louvre parts of three days in order to catch all of departments open. Purchase an English plan of the museum. Photography without flash is permitted. High speed film (1000) works nicely, but digital cameras are best for this photography, especially items behind glass.

The Louvre has a nice web site with pages in English. It is a good idea to buy tickets in advance in order to avoid the long lines at the ticket counter.

The Louvre is housed in a former palace dating back to the 12th century. The collections are divided into seven departments. The departments of interest for this study are as follows:

1. Greek and Roman antiquities (Antiquites grecques et romaines).
2. Egyptian antiquities (Antiquites egyptiennes).
3. Oriental antiquities (Antiquites orientales). This includes Mesopotamia (Sumerian, Akkadian, Assyrian, Babylonian), Persia and the Levant (Syria and Palestine). There is also a nice collection from Cyprus (Chypriote) (5th century B.C.).

Some of the listings below are by empire (Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, Roman, etc.) and other listings are by location (Syria, Palestine, etc.). In some cases I have included the French term for the artifact. Some of the museum identification numbers are given.

EARLY MESOPOTAMIA

Mesopotamia is often referred to as the cradle of civilization. Much helpful information comes from Sumer and Akkad. The Louvre has material from cities such as



Esarhaddon. Bronze relief shows the king of Assyria with his mother, Naqi'a, the widow of Sennacherib. Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament*, 78.

Lagash, Ur, and Uruk. There is a small statue of Gudea of Lagash from 2150 B.C.

BABYLONIAN EMPIRES

Code of Hammurabi

The Code of Hammurabi was discovered in Shushan, 1901/1902, where it had been carried by the Elamites. It was originally erected in Babylon by Hammurabi, the king of Babylon, 18th/17th century B.C. (c. 1760 B.C.).

The stele is a round pillar of black polished diorite, 7 ½ feet high. The top panel shows Hammurabi standing before the sun god Shamash. The inscription is in Old Babylonian cuneiform. The code consists of a prologue, 282 laws, and an epilogue, and is the longest Babylonian inscription which has survived (*New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology* 227). Many of the laws are similar to civil laws of the Law

of Moses. There are several clay tablets containing portions of the Code.

A **head** identified possibly as that of Hammurabi is displayed along with a small image which may show **Hammurabi in prayer**.

Lions from Babylon

A few examples of lions made of multicolored tiles are on display. These come from the procession street of ancient Babylon. Daniel was in Babylon during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562) and Nabonidus. The best collection of Babylonian artifacts can be seen in Berlin.

Nabonidus (556-539 B.C.)

The last ruler of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. His son, Belshazzar, seems to have been co-regent with him (Dan. 5; 7:1; 8:1). Clay barrel-cylinder on display. Nabonide: AO6444.

ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

Shalmanesser III (858-824 B.C.)

Shalmanesser is not named in the Bible, but he defeated Ahab at the battle of Qarqar. Some items from Tell Ahmar, ancient Barsip, are displayed.

Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) (745-727 B.C.)

1. He is called Pul in the Bible (1 Chron. 5:26).
2. Invaded Palestine in days of Pekah, king of Israel (2 Kings 15:29). Menahem had paid tribute to him earlier (2 Kings 15:19-20).
3. See relief: Le roi Teglatphalasar III.
4. Stone bulls from his palace at ancient Hadatu.
5. Ivories. A collection of ivories from the mound of Arslan Tash (ancient Hadatu) are displayed. These ivories "had formerly belonged to Hazael, Aramaean king of Damascus and oppressor of Israel, one piece even bearing his name" (Kitchen, *NIDBA* 224). These ivories date to the 8th century B.C. and are similar to those found at **Samaria** (1 Kings 22:39; Amos 3:15). Some images may help in understanding the **cherubim** of the Old Testament (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; Ps. 99:1; Ezek. 10). The ivory bearing the name of **Hazael** is displayed with items from Syria.

Sargon II (721-705 B.C.)

1. Claims to have taken Samaria.
2. Only mentioned in Isaiah 20:1. His existence was once questioned. Palace found by Paul Emile Botta at Khorsabad in 1843.
3. Winged bulls from gateway.

4. Interesting reliefs: Several panels show boats transporting logs of cedars of Lebanon for use in the palace of Sargon. Photo in *The Biblical World* 588.

Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.)

1. Took 46 cities of Judah in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13).
2. A fragment of one of the annals from the reign of Sennacherib tells of his campaign against the Chaldean, Merodach-Baladan, who ruled Babylon. (Some translations, including the NASB, follow the Masoretic Text and translate the name as Bero-dach-Baladan.) See 2 Kings 20:12; Isa. 39:1-8. AO7747.

Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.)

1. Came to the throne after the assassination of his father Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:37; Isa. 37:38). See also Ezra 4:2.
2. Prism. AO 7736.
3. A bronze relief commemorates the restoration of Babylon by Esarhaddon. This relief shows Esarhaddon with his mother Naqi'a, the widow of Sennacherib. She is thought to have exercised considerable power. See Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament* 77. AO 29185.

Ashurbanipal (668-631 B.C.)

1. Possibly he Osnappar of Ezra 4:10 who relocated foreigners to Samaria.
2. Clay prism. AO19939.
3. Relief showing soldiers leading away prisoners of war. Photo in *The Biblical World* 420.

SYRIA

Baal

1. Stele found at Ras Shamra (ancient Ugarit). Baal was the chief god of the Canaanites and was responsible for fertility (the crops), storms and thundershowers.
2. Several small bronze images are displayed.
3. Numerous examples of the teraphim (cf. household idols, Gen. 31:19) are on display.

Ugarit

1. Ugarit was the ancient name for Ras Shamra on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. Excavations were begun in 1929 by C. F. A. Schaeffer who spent 28 seasons working at the tell.
2. An ivory plaque of the Cretan-Mycenaean fertility goddess was discovered from Minet el Beida, the port of Ugarit. Schaeffer described it this way: "On her head the goddess wears a graceful Asiatic head-

dress. Her torso is nude. From hips to feet falls a much-pleated skirt with many ruffles. This is the most beautiful ivory relief that has been preserved from this remote age.”

3. Clay tablets in alphabetic cuneiform script. These include administrative texts, and correspondence between Ugarit and other nations. The language of Ugarit belongs to the Northwest Semitic family, and is a close relative of biblical Hebrew. A complete abecedary of 30 letters was found and is now displayed in the Damascus Archaeological Museum. A fragment is displayed in the Louvre.
4. These items illustrate the idolatrous and immoral conditions of at least some of the Canaanites during the 14th and 13th centuries B.C. Baal, Anath, Ashtart, and Dagon were all gods and goddesses of Ugarit. The Baal mythological poem, composed of six large tablets, has been called the “Canaanite Bible.” This mythology provided the substance of faith for many people of the ancient Levant.
5. One tablet is described as the Legend of Aqhat, son of Dan’el (c. 1400 B.C.). Ezekiel (14:14, 20) mentions a famous person named Dani’el, and some scholars think it is this Daniel that Ezekiel had in mind. AO17323. The Hebrew name of the Daniel of the book of Daniel is Daniyye’l. See Taylor, *Ezekiel* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries) for more information.

Hazael (841-798 B.C.)

1. A high official of Benhadad, king of Syria. Hazael killed Benhadad and seized the throne for himself (2 Kings 8:7-15).
2. Some ivories from the palace of Hazael, including one containing his name, are on display. These were discovered at Arslan Tash, ancient Hadatu. AO 11489.

Household Idols

Several examples of “household idols” (Gen. 31:19; 2 Kings 23:24) can be seen among the items from Syria. The Hebrew word is *teraphim*.

Mari

Mari is not mentioned in the Bible, but it was an important Amorite cultural center. Zimri-Lim, king of Mari, was defeated in battle by Hammurabi about 1760 B.C. Archaeologists have excavated the 300-room palace of Zimri-Lim that covered 15 acres. They also discovered an archive of over 20,000 tablets written in Akkadian. Mari is identified with Tell Hariri in south east Syria. Some scholars believe that the Amorites controlled the area of Haran at the time of Abraham (Harrison, *NIDBA* 300). A small statue of an attendant of the temple of Ishtar is displayed (2400 B.C.).

Cylinder Seals

These seals, from various sites, are similar to those in use during the patriarchal period (Gen. 38:18).

PERSIA

Model of a High Place

A bronze model of a high place from Shushan (12th century B.C.) is on display. It shows essential features of the *high places* (Hebrew, *bamah*) mentioned in the Bible (1 Kings 3:3, *et al.*): an altar, two standing stones, tree stumps representing the goddess Asherah, vessel holding water for ceremonial washings, two altars for drink offerings, two nude priests or worshipers squatting, etc.

Darius I (521-486 B.C.)

Darius I allowed the Judeans to rebuild the temple (Ezra 6:1-15). See wall coverings of multicolored tiles from the palace of Darius I at Shushan. Could this be the palace of where the banquet of Esther 1:3 took place during the reign of Xerxes? Several inscriptions of Darius are displayed.

Artaxerxes II (405-362 B.C.)

See gigantic Achaemenid capital from the top of one of the high columns of his palace at Susa, the winter resort of Persian kings (André Parrot, *Discovering Biblical Worlds*, figure 22). This is later than the kings of Persia mentioned in the Bible.

Miscellaneous Items

Gushing vases from Mesopotamia. (1st, 2nd, 3rd. millennia B.C.). Cf. Jn. 7:38. See Parrot, *Land of Christ* 97).

Rhyton. Silver drinking cup. AO3093. Nehemiah was cup bearer to Artaxerxes I (464-423 B.C.; Neh. 1:11).

PALESTINE ANTIQUITIES

Moabite Stone (La stele de Mesha)

Mesha, king of Moab, revolted against paying tribute to Israel after the death of Ahab (2 Kings 3:4-5). The Moabite Stone was found at Dibon (east of the Dead Sea; now in Jordan) in 1868, and is the only Moabite inscription of any significance yet found. It was set up by Mesha about 850 B.C. The stone mentions David, Omri, and his son (Ahab) and at least 14 places mentioned in the Bible. A piece of Moabite sculpture, depicting a warrior, is also on display.

Statue from 'Ain Ghazal

'Ain Ghazal is located in the Wadi Zarqa near Amman, Jordan. It is a Neolithic site which is said to have had four phases of occupation from 7200 B.C. to 5200 B.C. Pottery came into use in the fourth phase. The earliest phase included clay animal figurines, plastered human skulls and lime-plastered human statuettes (info from a display in the British Museum). The Louvre has one of these plastered statues on display. Others can be seen in the British Museum and in the Amman Archaeological Museum.

Artifacts from Tell el-Farah

1. Omri reigned as king of Israel at Tirzah for six years (1 Kings 16:23). Archaeologists have learned of intensive occupation at Tirzah in the 8th cent. B.C.
2. The site was excavated by Roland DeVaux of the Ecole Biblique, 1946-1960. Numerous rich private houses were discovered (Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land* 309). Some nice vases are on display.
3. Model of a sanctuary. This illustrates idolatrous worship. A small image would be placed inside the sanctuary and removed for worship. AO21689.
4. Tirzah is described as a beautiful place in the Song of Solomon 6:4.

Seals

1. There is a wonderful exhibit of seals of numerous individuals, including kings. Some of these come from Mesopotamia.
2. Ahab (king of Israel, 874-853 B.C.; 1 Kings 21:8).
3. Menahem (king of Israel, 752-742 B.C.; 2 Kings 15:17).
4. Servant of Uzziah (Ozias), king of Judah (767-740 B.C.; Isa. 6:1).

Pool of Bethesda Votive Offering

The foot of Pompeia Lucilia. Found in Jerusalem in 1866. The inscription reads, "Pompeia Lucilia dedicated (this)." This indicates that the Pool of Bethesda was considered a sacred place in Jerusalem. See John 5. I have not seen this item on display for several years.

Pottery

Examples of pottery from various biblical cities, including Jericho, Et Tell (Ai?), Tell el Hesi (Eglon?), Gezer, and Lachish, are on display.

EGYPT

Tell Amarna Tablets

About 350 tablets found at Tell Amarna in Egypt in 1887. Written in Babylonian cuneiform, during reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep (Greek, Amenophis IV), about

1380 B.C. They describe conditions in Palestine, showing that it was a well-developed country. They tell of the invasion of Palestine by a group of outsiders, called the Habiru. Some scholars think this is a reference to the Israelites. The senders of the letters include rulers of Hazor, Gezer, Megiddo, Lachish, Shechem, *et al.* A few tablets are on display in the Louvre. See AO7096 and AO7098.

- There is much interesting background material from Egypt which is not directly related to the Bible.

GREECE

1. **Alexander the Great** bust. Alexander was responsible for the spread of the Greek culture across the Mediterranean world.
2. **Seleucus Nicator** bust (358-280 B.C.). Successor to Alexander the Great in Babylon. Became King of Syria and founder of the Seleucid Empire. The Seleucids were not favorable toward the Jews. Seleucus founded Seleucia on the Tigris River and Antioch on the Orontes (Acts 11-13).
3. **Hermes**. Hermes was the messenger of the gods. Hence our word *hermeneutics*. He is considered the god of travelers, messengers, and heralds. He is identified with the Roman Mercury. Paul was called Hermes by the citizens of Lystra because he was the chief speaker (Acts 14:12).
5. The philosopher **Epicurus** (Acts 17:18).

ROMAN

Emperors. Several statues and busts

Augustus (30 B.C.– A.D. 14).

Birth of Jesus

Caligula (A.D. 37-41).

Claudius (A.D. 41-54).

Paul's journeys.

Nero (A.D. 54-68).

Death of Paul and Peter. First persecution of Christians by the Empire.

Titus (A.D. 79-81).

Destruction of Jerusalem (A.D. 70).

Trajan (A.D. 98-117).

Approved persecution of Christians in Asia Minor.

Julian the Apostate (A.D. 360-63).

Futile attempt to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

Veiled Women

There are examples of women wearing veils (cf. 1 Cor. 11). Most of these are from funerary monuments.

Hair Styles

Several busts of women illustrate the elaborate hair styles of the time (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9; 1 Pet. 3:3).

Sacrificial Scenes

Roman sacrificial scenes are shown in relief, usually on sarcophagi (coffins). One of these shows a bull and some other animals being brought for sacrifice and is reminiscent of the attempt to worship Paul and Barnabas at Lystra (Acts 14:13).

ANOTHER MUSEUM

The **Bibliothèque Nationale** has a small, but impressive, collection on display. It is definitely worth the visit.

THIS PUBLICATION

This publication has been prepared and updated over a period of many years for the personal use of the author and those who travel with him. I have spent many days in the Musee du Louvre over the past third of a century searching for and photographing the items mentioned here. Corrections or information regarding additional items will be appreciated.

NOTE: Similar publications have been prepared on the British Museum, and the museums of [East] Berlin.

Internet: From time to time I include photographs of places mentioned in the Bible on one of my web pages: **biblicalstudies.info** (especially the page on Bible Places) and **bibleworld.com**.

blguide\louvre guide.vp. Revised 02-03-2004.

© Ferrell Jenkins 2004.