

## British Museum Index (in the Bible)

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<a href="#">Babylonians</a>	56 Mesopotamia 6000-1500 ( <a href="#">The Standard of Ur</a> ) 55 Mesopotamia 1500-539 ( <a href="#">The Flood Tablet</a> ; <a href="#">Babylonian Chronicle</a> ; <a href="#">Cylinder of Nabonidus</a> )	2 King 24:10-17 - fall of Jerusalem (“city of Judah”) Dan 5:1,29 - Nabonidus “king” (actually co-regent)
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\* Description text from [BritishMuseum.org](http://BritishMuseum.org)

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### Amorites

The Amorites were the indigenous people of central inland and northern Syria. They spoke a Semitic language related to modern Hebrew. During the Early Bronze Age (3200-2000 BC), they developed powerful states such as those centred on Ebla, Carchemish and Aleppo. Enclosed behind large fortification walls, these cities had elaborate palace and temple buildings. The Amorites maintained close diplomatic and trading relations with cities in Mesopotamia to the east and south. This contact is reflected in their art and architecture which is often influenced by that of Mesopotamia. The cuneiform writing system was also adopted from southern Mesopotamia to write the local Semitic languages. In addition, however, the Amorite city-states maintained trading links with Canaan and Egypt.

Many cities in Syria, including Ebla were destroyed around 2300 BC, possibly as part of the military expansion of the kings of Akkad from southern Mesopotamia. Recovery was swift, however, and by the end of this period many Amorites had moved southwards along the Euphrates river and settled throughout Mesopotamia. By 1900 BC dynasties of Amorite rulers had come to control many important cities in this region, including Mari and Babylon, whose most famous king was Hammurabi (1792-1750 BC).

During the second millennium, the Amorite population of Syria fell under the control of the Hittite Empire, and only when this empire collapsed in the twelfth century BC, did the Amorites re-emerge as a vibrant and energetic people, known as the Aramaeans.

### Ancient Egypt

Towards the end of the fourth millennium BC several independent city-states were unified to form a single state, marking the beginning of over 3,000 years of pharaonic civilisation in the Nile Valley. Fertile earth left behind after the yearly Nile flood provided the basis for Egypt's agricultural prosperity, a key factor in the longevity of the civilisation. Impressive monuments were erected in the name of kings, from monumental temples for the gods to the pyramids marking the burials of rulers.

EGYPT	<b>Ramses II (the Great)</b> 1279-1213
	● Likely Pharaoh of Exodus
	<b>Merenptah</b> 1213-1203
● Stela in Cairo Museum celebrating triumph over "Israel" 1208	
<b>Shishak (or Sheshonk) I</b> 945-924	
● Against Rehoboam (1 K 14:25); Jeroboam (Megiddo stele) 925	

The British Museum collection includes statuary and decorated architecture from throughout pharaonic history, often inscribed with hieroglyphs. Many other aspects of ancient Egyptian culture are represented: coffins and mummies of individuals, but also furniture, fine jewelry and other burial goods. These reflect the practice of lavish burials for the wealthy, which included the royal family, government officials and the priesthood. Texts preserved on papyrus help reveal the complex administration of the country, but also include magical, medical and mathematical works and poetry. Pottery vessels and a variety of tools and agricultural equipment hint at the day-to-day lives of ancient Egyptians.

At certain periods, Egypt's empire extended over neighbouring areas, from Upper Nubia to the Euphrates river. But Egypt was also linked to other countries through trade, and many foreigners came to reside in Egypt, producing a cosmopolitan society. Egypt did endure several periods of foreign domination, by Palestinian, Nubian, Persian, Greek and Roman rulers. Yet throughout, temples to the Egyptian gods continued to be built in the traditional style and aspects of Egyptian religion spread throughout the ancient world.

By the fourth century AD, Christianity had become the dominant religion along the Nile, with Islam first introduced in the seventh century AD.

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### Canaanites

The Canaanites were the indigenous people of the ancient Levant (modern Israel, Palestine, Transjordan, Lebanon and coastal Syria). They spoke a Semitic language related to Hebrew. During the Early Bronze Age, as trade with Egypt increased, strongly defended cities developed throughout the region which formed the centres of independent states. Egyptian campaigns were occasionally launched against some Canaanite cities but relations were normally maintained through trade.

Starting around 2000 BC, Canaanites began to infiltrate the Egyptian Delta, and their donkey caravans can be seen on a number of Egyptian tomb paintings. By 1700 BC they had seized control of the Delta and established a local dynasty known as the *Hyksos* or “Shepherd Kings”. This period (1700-1480) saw the development of a rich and imaginative artistic style, and it was at this time too that the Canaanites developed an alphabetic writing system that was passed on to the Phoenicians.

Around 1550 BC the Hyksos were driven from Egypt by the energetic kings of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and Tuthmosis III (1504-1450 BC) put the entire Canaanite region under direct imperial control. Throughout the period of the Egyptian Empire, disaffected and dispossessed Canaanites, known to the Egyptians as *Habiru* migrated to the hill country regions. This *Habiru* population formed the kernel of what was to become historical Israel, and it was referred to as such by the pharaoh Merneptah (reigned 1236-1223 BC) on a victory stele now in the Cairo Museum.

### Israelites

The Israelites represent a branch of Canaanite society. During the period that Egypt dominated the land of Canaan (c.1480-1150 BC), disaffected and dispossessed Canaanites, known to the Egyptians as *Habiru* migrated to the less accessible hill country regions. This *Habiru* or “Hebrew” population formed the kernel of what was to become historical Israel, and is referred to as such by the pharaoh Merneptah (reigned 1236-1223 BC) on a victory stela now in the Cairo Museum. Following the withdrawal of the Egyptian Empire around 1150 BC, the Israelites were able to extend their territory by gradually and slowly re-integrating with their Canaanite counterparts. This expansion was initially held in check by battles with the Philistines, people of Aegean origin, who had settled on the southern Canaanite coast during the time of Ramses III (1198-1166 BC).

Eventually, however, towards the end of the tenth century BC, the Israelites, established a kingdom with its capital at Samaria. Some time later, in the eighth century BC, as this kingdom weakened under pressure from the advancing Assyrians, a second kingdom of Judah emerged with its capital at Jerusalem. In 722 BC Israel was conquered and absorbed into the Assyrian Empire. Judah maintained an uneasy independence but was eventually incorporated into the Neo-Babylonian empire when it was conquered by the armies of king Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC. Some of the population was deported to cities in Babylonia, beginning the period known as “the Exile”. It was during the Exile that the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) was mostly compiled and written.

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### Assyrians

Although Assyrian civilization, centred in the fertile Tigris valley of northern Iraq, can be traced back to at least the third millennium BC, some of its most spectacular remains date to the first millennium BC when Assyria dominated the Middle East.

The Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) established Nimrud as his capital. Many of the principal rooms and courtyards of his palace were decorated with gypsum slabs carved in relief with images of the king as high priest and as victorious hunter and warrior. Many of these are displayed in the British Museum.

Later kings continued to embellish Nimrud, including Ashurnasirpal II's son, Shalmaneser III who erected the Black Obelisk depicting the presentation of tribute from Israel.

During the eighth and seventh centuries BC Assyrian kings conquered the region from the Persian Gulf to the borders of Egypt. The most ambitious building of this period was the palace of king Sennacherib (704-681 BC) at Nineveh. The reliefs from Nineveh in the British Museum include a depiction of the siege and capture of Lachish in Judah.

The finest carvings, however, are the famous lion hunt reliefs from the North Palace at Nineveh belonging to Ashurbanipal (668-631 BC). This king is also renowned for the vast library he created at Nineveh.

Copies of some of the greatest literary works from ancient Iraq, including the "Epic of Gilgamesh" as well as writings on divination, astrology, medicine and mathematics, are among the thousands of tablets now in the British Museum.

ASSYRIA	
<b>Shalmaneser III</b>	<b>858-824</b>
● Battle of Qarqar; Monolith Inscription	853
● Tribute from Jehu; Black Obelisk	841
<b>Tiglath-Pileser III</b>	<b>744-727</b>
● Defeated Syria (2 K 16:9) & much of northern Israel (2 K 15:29)	732
<b>Shalmaneser V</b>	<b>727-723</b>
● Hoshea paid tribute; 3 yr siege of Samaria (2 K 17:5, 18:9-10)	725-23
<b>Sargon II</b>	<b>722-705</b>
● Took credit for destruction of Samaria (2 K 17:6, 24; 2 K 18:9-12)	722
<b>Sennacherib</b>	<b>705-681</b>
● Siege Jerusalem, Hezekiah (2 K 18:17-19:37); clay prism	701
● Established Nineveh as capital	
<b>Esarhaddon</b>	<b>681-669</b>
2 Kings 19:37	
● Rebuilt Babylon - resided, held court there often	
● Likely captor of Manasseh (2 Chr 33:11) - implies battle at Jerusalem	
<b>Ashurbanipal</b>	<b>669-626?</b>
● Possibly "Osnappar" or "Asnapper" in Ezra 4:10	
● Established great library in Nineveh	

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### Babylonians

The city of Babylon on the River Euphrates in southern Iraq first came to prominence as the royal city of king Hammurabi (about 1790-1750 BC). He established his control over many other kingdoms stretching from the Persian Gulf to Syria. The British Museum holds one of the iconic artworks of this period, the so-called “Queen of the Night”.

From around 1500 BC a dynasty of Kassite kings took control in Babylon and unified southern Iraq into the kingdom of Babylonia. The Babylonian cities were the centres of great scribal learning and produced writings on divination, astrology, medicine and mathematics. The Kassite kings corresponded with the Egyptian Pharaohs as revealed by cuneiform letters found at Amarna in Egypt, now in the British Museum.

Babylonia had an uneasy relationship with its northern neighbour Assyria and opposed its military expansion. In 689 BC Babylon was sacked by the Assyrians but as the city was highly regarded it was restored to its former status soon after. Other Babylonian cities also flourished; scribes in the city of Sippar probably produced the famous “Map of the World”.

After 612 BC the Babylonian kings Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar II were able to claim much of the Assyrian empire and rebuilt Babylon on a grand scale. However, the last Babylonian king Nabonidus (555-539 BC) was defeated by Cyrus II of Persia and the country was incorporated into the vast Achaemenid Persian Empire.

### Phoenicians

The Phoenicians were the direct descendents of the Canaanites of the south Syrian and Lebanese coast who, at the end of the second millennium BC, became isolated by population and political changes in the regions surrounding them. The name derives from the Greek, *Phoinikes*, referring to the purple coloured dye which the Phoenicians extracted from the murex shell, and with which they produced highly prized textiles.

The major Phoenician cities were Tyre, Sidon, Byblos and Arwad. These cities represented a confederation of fiercely independent maritime traders. By the late eighth century BC, the Phoenicians had founded trading posts and colonies around the entire Mediterranean, the greatest of which was Carthage on the north coast of Africa (present day Tunisia). Explorers and traders from Carthage even ventured beyond the Straits of Gibraltar as far as Britain in search of tin.

Phoenician craftsmen and artists perpetuated the purest ideals of their Canaanite ancestors into the first millennium and transmitted them throughout the Mediterranean world. They were extremely skilled in metalworking, ivory carving, jewellery manufacture and glass-making. One of the most significant contributions of the Phoenicians was in developing the alphabet invented by the Canaanites and passing it to the Greeks: it is the same alphabet we use today.

BABYLON	<b>Nabopolassar</b> <i>Chaldean Dynasty</i> <b>?-605</b>
	● Defeated Sennacherib, Nineveh in alliance with Medes <b>612</b>
	<b>Nebuchadnezzar II</b> <i>Daniel 1-4</i> <b>605-562</b>
	● Josiah dies at hands of Necho (Egypt) on way to help Assyria <b>605</b>
	● Defeated Egypt and Assyria at Battle of Carchemish <b>605, 597, 586</b>
	● Destroys Jerusalem, Temple, deports people <b>582-575</b>
● No decrees - his seven years of madness (Dan 4)	
<b>Evil-Merodach</b> <b>562-560</b>	
● Releases King Jehoiachin from 37 yrs of prison (2 K 25:27-30)	
<b>Nergalsharezer</b> <i>Jeremiah 39:3</i> <b>559-556</b>	
<b>Nabonidas</b> <i>Daniel 5, 7-8</i> <b>556-539</b>	
● Dead Sea Scroll – ‘Prayer of Nabonidas’; an exile called an exorcist	
● Belshazzar, his son, was co-ruler	

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### Persia

The Medes were closely related to the Persians and were located around the area of modern Hamadan (ancient Ecbatana). The Assyrian records of the time list the Medes among many population groups. In 614 BC a Median king, Cyaxares, gathered sufficient forces to sack some of the great Assyrian cities (Ashur and Tarbisu) and with the Babylonians Nineveh in 612 BC. In 550 BC Cyrus of Persia fought off an attack by Cyaxares' son Astyages and took over the Median state which spread from western Iran through the former kingdom of Urartu (in eastern Anatolia) into what is now central Turkey.

### Hittites

Between 1400 and 1200 BC the Hittites established one of the great empires of the ancient Middle East. At its height, the empire encompassed central Turkey, north western Syria, and Upper Mesopotamia (north eastern Syria and northern Iraq).

Although they spoke an Indo-European language, the Hittites adopted many of the traditions of Mesopotamia, including the cuneiform writing system. At the capital, Hattusa, Archaeologists have excavated royal archives written in cuneiform on clay tablets.

The Hittites were famous for their skill in building and using chariots. They also pioneered the manufacture and use of iron.

By 1300 the Hittite Empire bordered on Egypt and both powers vied for control of wealthy cities on the Mediterranean coast. This led to the Battle of Kadesh with Rameses II (1274 BC.) On Rameses II's monuments, the battle was commemorated as a great victory for Egypt, but the Hittite account, found at Hattusas, suggests that the battle was closer fought.

Civil war and rivalling claims to the throne, combined with external threats weakened the Hittites and by 1160 BC, the Empire had collapsed. Hittite culture survived in parts of Syria such as Carchemish which had once been under their power. These Neo-Hittites wrote Luwian, a language related to Hittite, using a hieroglyphic script. Many modern city names in Turkey are derived from their Hittite name, for example Sinop or Adana, showing the impact of Hittite culture in Anatolia.

PERSIA	
<b>Cyrus the Great, II</b>	<i>Daniel 6, 9-11, Ezra 1-4</i> 559-530
● Defeated Medes, Babylonians	
● Decree allowing Zerubbabel to return (1st exiles); Cyrus Cylinder	539
● Darius the Mede (Daniel 5:31, 6, 9, 11)	
• Another name for Cyrus (11:1 in Septuagint reads Cyrus), or	
• A governor of Cyrus, also named Gobryus	
<b>Cambyses III</b>	<i>Ezra 4:6</i> 530-522
● Ahasnerus in Ez 4:6; work on the Temple stopped	
<b>Magian priest Gomates</b>	<i>Ezra 4:7-22</i> 522
● Ahasuerus (Ez 4:6); work on the Temple stopped	
<b>Darius I</b>	<i>Ezra 5-6, Haggai, Zech.</i> 521-486
● Temple completed after 14 year hiatus	515
● Battle of Marathon (Athens and Sparta)	490
<b>Xerxes</b>	<i>Esther</i> 486-465
● Battle of Thermopylae (300 Spartans)	480
● Defeated by Greeks in Salamis (Themistocles); Marries Esther	480
<b>Artaxerxes I</b>	<i>Ezra 7-10, Nehemiah</i> 464-424
● Decree allowing Ezra to return (2nd exiles)	458
● Letters allowing Nehemiah to return to rebuild the wall (3rd exiles)	444
● Nehemiah returns to Jerusalem a second time (Neh 13:6)	433
<b>Darius II</b>	423-404
● Possibly 'Darius the Persian' in Nehemiah 12:22	
<b>Artaxerxes II</b>	404-359
<b>Darius III</b>	336-330
● Defeated by Alexander the Great	
● Probably the fourth king of Persia (Dan 11:2)	

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### Sumerians

The ancient Sumerians, the 'black-headed ones,' lived in the southern part of what is now Iraq. The heartland of Sumer lay between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, in what the Greeks later called Mesopotamia. This territory, once skilfully irrigated, proved very fertile, and major cities had long been in existence before the period when archaeologists can identify the Sumerian people themselves.

The Sumerians were characteristically inventive, and are likely to have been responsible for the development of the first writing. Well before 3000 BC Sumerians were recording their language using simple pictures. They wrote on tablets of clay, later evolving the script that to us is known as cuneiform, or 'wedge-shaped.'

They were energetic farmers, traders and sailors. Their religion recognised many gods, whose feats and escapades were described in stories that were often preserved for generations. Rituals as well as parties were enlivened by skilful harpists and singers, and Sumerian musical instruments have even been excavated by modern archaeologists.

Book-keeping was a feature of Sumerian life, and very detailed records on clay tablets of offerings, rations, taxes and agricultural work have come down to us. Their favourite board game achieved popularity throughout the whole Middle Eastern world. Imported lapis lazuli and carnelian was much prized for inlays and jewellery.

Archaeology has shown that in about 2500 BC the ruling elite in the city of Ur went to their final resting place surrounded by their wealth and the attendant bodies of their court personnel.

### Bronze figure of Baal



Canaanite, about 1400-1200 BC From Syria

The god Baal with raised right arm

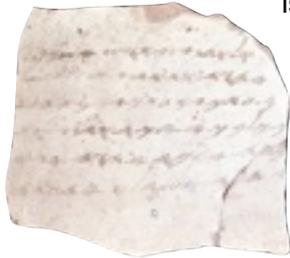
This figure is typical of bronzes from Syria in the second half of the second millennium BC. Although clearly broken, his pointed cap and raised right arm suggest that this is a representation of the god Baal, one of the major deities of the Canaanites. He would usually be wielding a club, but this example may have held a smaller object, perhaps a thunderbolt. The eyes were originally inlaid and the dowel and hole are modern.

The god Baal embodied royal power and authority. Much of our knowledge about Canaanite gods comes from the local Canaanite literature, particularly from the archive of cuneiform tablets from the site of Ugarit. The Canaanite gods and goddesses continued to be worshipped during the first millennium BC, though some of their functions changed. They were worshipped wherever the Canaanites (Phoenicians) established trading colonies across the Mediterranean.

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### Lachish Letter II



Israelite, 586 BC; From Lachish (modern Tell ed-Duweir), Israel

A letter written on a piece of pottery

This is one of a group of letters written on *ostraka* (pot sherds) found near the main gate of ancient Lachish in a burnt layer which archaeologists have associated with the destruction of the city by the Babylonians in 586 BC. It is written in ink in alphabetic Hebrew. The letters are a poignant record of the city's last days.

In 598 BC Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, invaded Judah after it had rebelled against him. He captured Jerusalem and took the royal family captive. He installed Zedekiah, the former king's uncle, as his choice of ruler. However, rebellion broke out again. Nebuchadnezzar showed no mercy this time and in 587 BC he besieged and then destroyed Jerusalem.

This was the period at which this letter was written. It came from an officer named Hoshai who was in charge of a military outpost. He was writing to Jaiciah, military commander at Lachish, as the situation worsened. 'To my lord Jaiciah. May Yahweh cause my lord to hear the news of peace, even now, even now. Who is your servant but a dog that my lord should remember his servant?'

Peace was not to be. Nebuchadnezzar moved on to Lachish and nearby Azekah, the last two major cities of Judah to be subdued by the Babylonians. There followed a large-scale deportation of a part of Judah's population. Thus began the exile, a period of great significance for the Jews spiritually, and one which would profoundly influence later religious ideology and teaching.

### Cuneiform tablet telling the Epic of Creation



Neo-Assyrian, 7th century BC; From Nineveh, northern Iraq

Part of the library of King Ashurbanipal (reigned 669-631 BC)

This is one of a series of tall narrow cuneiform tablets that tell the story of the creation of the gods Apsu and Tiamat out of primordial waters. This particular tablet relates the episode in which the god Anshar summons the gods to celebrate Marduk's appointment as champion following his defeat of Tiamat.

The younger gods disturb Tiamat, and Apsu, her husband, decides to destroy them. However, before he can act, he is killed by the gods. Tiamat is enraged and gathers an army of monsters and demons and marches in revenge. The gods, gathered in assembly, at first are unable to face Tiamat. Eventually Marduk, a young god, steps forward and offers to fight Tiamat, in return for the throne of heaven. The gods agree and Marduk gathers his weapons. Tiamat's army is defeated and she is killed. From her body Marduk creates the heavens and earth and, from the blood of a defeated giant, humans are created to serve the gods.

The Epic was recited on the fourth day of the New Year Festival in Babylon, which took place in April. On this day the king's right to rule was symbolically renewed by the gods. The story probably has its origin in the second millennium BC, but was still known in the fifth to sixth centuries AD.

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### The Taylor Prism



Neo-Assyrian, 691 BC; From Nineveh, northern Iraq

Recording the first eight campaigns of King Sennacherib (704-681 BC)

This six-sided baked clay document (or prism) was discovered at the Assyrian capital Nineveh, in an area known today as Nebi Yunus. It was acquired by Colonel R. Taylor, British Consul General at Baghdad, in 1830, after whom it is named. The British Museum purchased it from Taylor's widow in 1855.

As one of the first major Assyrian documents found, this document played an important part in the decipherment of the cuneiform script.

The prism is a foundation record, intended to preserve King Sennacherib's achievements for posterity and the gods. The record of his account of his third campaign (701 BC) is particularly interesting to scholars. It involved the destruction of forty-six cities of the state of Judah and the deportation of 200,150 people. Hezekiah, king of Judah, is said to have sent tribute to Sennacherib. This event is described from another point of view in the Old Testament books of 2 Kings and Isaiah. Interestingly, the text on the prism makes no mention of the siege of Lachish which took place during the same campaign and is illustrated in a series of panels from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.

### Statue of Idrimi



Late Bronze Age / Syrian, 16th century BC; From Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh), modern Turkey

A statue of a king of Alalakh, covered with his biography in cuneiform

This extraordinary statue represents Idrimi, a king of Alalakh. It was discovered by the excavator Leonard Woolley in the ruins of a temple at the site of Tell Atchana (ancient Alalakh). The statue had been toppled from its stone throne, presumably at the time of the final destruction of the city, around 1100 BC. Its head, with inlaid glass eyes, and its feet had broken off. The eyebrows and eyelids had originally been inlaid and the marks of a tubular drill can be seen, probably part of the process of manufacture.

The statue is inscribed in faulty Akkadian, using a poor cuneiform script, with an autobiography of Idrimi. It is a unique type of text signed by the scribe who wrote it. Idrimi was one of the sons of the royal house of Aleppo, which was subject to the powerful kingdom of Mitanni. The territory of Aleppo included the smaller city state of Alalakh. Following a failed revolt, Idrimi and some of his family fled to Emar (now Meskene) on the Euphrates, which was ruled by his mother's family. From there he went south to live among nomads in Canaan (the earliest known reference to this land). Here he gathered troops and received popular support and help from his family. In time he made overtures to Parattarna, the king of Mitanni, who recognized his control of Alalakh. The inscription states that he had been ruling for thirty years when he had the statue inscribed, though it has been suggested that the text was actually added to the statue about three hundred years after Idrimi. The inscription ends with curses on anyone who would destroy the statue.

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### The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III



Neo-Assyrian, 858-824 BC; From Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), northern Iraq

The military achievements of an Assyrian king

The archaeologist Henry Layard discovered this black limestone obelisk in 1846 during his excavations of the site of Kalhu, the ancient Assyrian capital. It was erected as a public monument in 825 BC at a time of civil war. The relief sculptures glorify the achievements of King Shalmaneser III (reigned 858-824 BC) and his chief minister. It lists their military campaigns of thirty-one years and the tribute they exacted from their neighbours: including camels, monkeys, an elephant and a rhinoceros. Assyrian kings often collected exotic animals and plants as an expression of their power.

There are five scenes of tribute, each of which occupies four panels round the face of the obelisk and is identified by a line of cuneiform script above the panel. From top to bottom they are:

- Sua of Gilzanu (in north-west Iran)
- Jehu of Bit Omri (ancient northern Israel)
- An unnamed ruler of Musri (probably Egypt)
- Marduk-apil-usur of Suhi (middle Euphrates, Syria and Iraq)
- Qalparunda of Patin (Antakya region of Turkey)

The second register from the top includes the earliest surviving picture of an Israelite: the Biblical Jehu, king of Israel, brought or sent his tribute in around 841 BC. Ahab, son of Omri, king of Israel, had lost his life in battle a few years previously, fighting against the king of Damascus at Ramoth-Gilead (I Kings xxii. 29-36). His second son (Joram) was succeeded by Jehu, a usurper, who broke the alliances with Phoenicia and Judah, and submitted to Assyria. The caption above the scene, written in Assyrian cuneiform, can be translated

The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king [and] spears.

### Stone relief from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II



Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), northern Iraq; Neo-Assyrian, 870–860 BC

The Neo-Assyrian King Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) built his magnificent Northwest Palace at Nimrud (now in northern Iraq). Its interior decoration featured a series of remarkable carved stone panels.

The detailed reliefs on display in Rooms 7-8 originally stood in the palace throne-room and in other royal apartments. They depict the king and his subjects engaged in a variety of activities. Ashurnasirpal is shown leading military campaigns against his enemies, engaging in ritual scenes with protective demons and hunting, a royal sport in ancient Mesopotamia.

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This Assyrian relief comes from the throne room of the so-called North-West Palace of Ashurnasirpal II (reigned 883-859 BC) at Nimrud in northern Iraq. It was originally positioned behind the king's throne.

Ashurnasirpal himself appears twice, shown from two sides, dressed in ritual robes and holding a mace symbolising his authority. The figure of the king on the right makes a gesture of worship to a god in a winged disk in the top centre of the relief. The god, who is the source of the king's power, may be Ashur, the national god, or Shamash, the god of the sun and justice. He holds a ring in one hand, an ancient Mesopotamian symbol of god-given kingship. The figure of the king on the left appears to gesture towards a so-called Sacred Tree which dominates the centre of the relief. This balanced combination of steams and foliage is a symbol of fertility and abundance given by the gods.

Behind the king, on either side of the relief, is a winged protective spirit who blesses and purifies Ashurnasirpal using a cone-shaped object to sprinkle liquid from a ritual bucket. The relief thus summarises visually the main ideas of Assyrian kingship; he is the source of abundance provided by the gods.

Ancient visitors approaching the enthroned king would have thus seen three royal figures, the living king facing them, and, either side of him, two carved images showing Ashurnasirpal's relationship with the gods. Emerging from behind the king himself would be the Sacred-Tree.

There was another almost identical relief opposite the main door of the throne room, and similar scenes occupied prominent positions in other Assyrian palaces. They were also embroidered on the royal clothes.

### Assyria: Siege of Lachish (Room 10b)



710 –700 – 692 BC

Lachish was one of the chief cities of the kingdom of Judah in the southern Levant and in 701 BC it was captured by the Assyrian King Sennacherib (704-681 BC). The siege followed the refusal of Lachish to pay tribute to the Assyrian Empire (based in modern northern Iraq) and is mentioned in the Bible.

Many of the relief sculptures on display in Room 10b depict the capture of the city, alongside a selection of items and weaponry used in the siege. A "prism" inscribed with an Assyrian account of the campaign is also on show.

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### Assyria: Khorsabad (Room 10c)



The city and palace at Khorsabad (in modern northern Iraq), was built for the Assyrian King Sargon II (721-705 BC). The palace entrances were originally dominated by pairs of colossal human-headed winged bulls, which were intended as guardians, accompanied by protective spirits with magical powers.

Two of these impressive statues now stand in Room 10c, along with carvings depicting the king and crown prince, royal courtiers and hunting scenes. Inscriptions on display in the gallery come from a similar winged bull from the palace of Sennacherib (704-681 BC) at nearby Nineveh and were badly burnt when the city was destroyed in 612 BC.

### Stone prism of Esarhaddon



Neo-Assyrian, 680-669 BC; From Mesopotamia

This small stone monument records the restoration of the walls and the temples of the city of Babylon by King Esarhaddon (reigned 680-669 BC). The cuneiform inscription is written in archaic characters to suggest antiquity and authenticity. The top of the stone is covered with symbols of the gods, and other elements designed to protect and authorize the message.

Babylon had been destroyed in 689 BC by Esarhaddon's father Sennacherib (reigned 704-681 BC) after he had tried for years to govern this politically divided region. The statue of Marduk, the supreme god of Babylon, was removed to Assyria. From that time, local records considered the region to be kingless. The concept of kingship was so tightly intertwined with the appropriate care for the gods that the great festivals and regular daily cult acts, which involved many of the citizens and around which so much civic activity revolved, ceased.

Although Sennacherib claims to have destroyed the entire city and turned it into a meadow, this must have been exaggeration, and it is possible that he began to restore the buildings towards the end of his reign. Under Esarhaddon the ancient rights and privileges of Babylon's citizens were restored and an efficient administration established. This policy was continued by his son Ashurbanipal (reigned 669-631 BC) who returned the statue of Marduk.

### Ramesses II, King of Egypt (1279-1213 BC)



Ramesses II ascended the throne as the third king of the Nineteenth Dynasty at the age of twenty-five. In his sixty-seven year reign he probably built more temples and sired more children than any other Egyptian king. Today, he is popularly known as Ramesses 'the great'.

He founded a new capital, Piramesse in the eastern Delta, which remained the royal residence throughout the Ramesside period. He also built a vast number of temples throughout Egypt and Nubia. The most famous of these are the rock cut temple at Abu Simbel, and his mortuary temple at Thebes, the Ramesseum. The tomb of his principal wife, Nefertari, at Thebes is one of the best preserved royal tombs. The tomb of many of his sons has also recently been found in the Valley of the Kings (KV5). Ramesses II was buried in the Valley of the Kings and his body was found in the Deir el-Bahari cache.

For Ramesses II, the most momentous event in his reign was the battle of Kadesh, fought against the Hittites. On his monuments, the battle was commemorated as a great victory. However, the Hittite account, found at their capital, Hattusas, suggests that the battle was closer fought.

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### The Flood Tablet, relating part of the Epic of Gilgamesh



From Nineveh, northern Iraq, Neo-Assyrian, 7th century BC

The most famous cuneiform tablet from Mesopotamia. The Assyrian King Ashurbanipal (reigned 669-631 BC) collected a library of thousands of cuneiform tablets in his palace at Nineveh. It included letters, legal texts, lists of people, animals and goods, and a wealth of scientific information, as well as myths and legends.

The best known of these was the story of Gilgamesh, a legendary ruler of Uruk, and his search for immortality. The Epic of Gilgamesh is a huge work, the longest piece of literature in Akkadian (the language of Babylonia and Assyria). It was known across the ancient Near East, with versions also found at Hattusas (capital of the Hittites), Emar in Syria and Megiddo in the Levant.

This, the eleventh tablet of the Epic, describes the meeting of Gilgamesh with Utnapishtim. Like Noah in the Hebrew Bible, Utnapishtim had been forewarned of a plan by the gods to send a great flood. He built a boat and loaded it with all his precious possessions, his kith and kin, domesticated and wild animals and skilled craftsmen of every kind.

Utnapishtim survived the flood for six days while mankind was destroyed, before landing on a mountain called Nimush. He released a dove and a swallow but they did not find dry land to rest on, and returned. Finally a raven that he released did not return, showing that the waters must have receded.

This Assyrian version of the Old Testament flood story was identified in 1872 by George Smith, an assistant in The British Museum. On reading the text he ... jumped up and rushed about the room in a great state of excitement, and, to the astonishment of those present, began to undress himself.'

### The Standard of Ur



From Ur, southern Iraq, about 2600-2400 BC. This object was found in one of the largest graves in the Royal Cemetery at Ur, lying in the corner of a chamber above the right shoulder of a man. Its original function is not yet understood.

Leonard Woolley, the excavator at Ur, imagined that it was carried on a pole as a standard, hence its common name. Another theory suggests that it formed the soundbox of a musical instrument.

When found, the original wooden frame for the mosaic of shell, red limestone and lapis lazuli had decayed, and the two main panels had been crushed together by the weight of the soil. The bitumen acting as glue had disintegrated and the end panels were broken. As a result, the present restoration is only a best guess as to how it originally appeared.

The main panels are known as 'War' and 'Peace'. 'War' shows one of the earliest representations of a Sumerian army. Chariots, each pulled by four donkeys, trample enemies; infantry with cloaks carry spears; enemy soldiers are killed with axes, others are paraded naked and presented to the king who holds a spear.

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The 'Peace' panel depicts animals, fish and other goods brought in procession to a banquet. Seated figures, wearing woollen fleeces or fringed skirts, drink to the accompaniment of a musician playing a lyre. Banquet scenes such as this are common on cylinder seals of the period, such as on the seal of the 'Queen' Pu-abi, also in the British Museum.

### Bronze figurine of a warrior, probably a deity



Canaanite, about 2000-1700 BC; From the Levant

A warrior god with feathered crown

This bronze figurine wears a broad belt fastened in front with a pair of ribbons, which suggests that he is a warrior. His headgear can be identified as a feathered crown. His hands are pierced and he probably originally carried weapons. He has been compared with Anatolian seals of the same period where a figure stands with a weapon in either hand before a seated god.

The figurine was probably cast in a double stone or clay mould. The channels along the back perhaps show that it was originally decorated with sheets of precious metal. Already in the third millennium BC several kinds of metal were used in the Levant for both casting and hammering. Lead, copper and bronze were generally used for solid-casting, while gold and silver were mainly hammered.

It is generally thought that human figurines such as this are images of deities. They may have served as cult idols (statues of deities to which prayers and offerings were made). It is perhaps more likely, though, that they were votive objects, given by worshippers with prayers to enlist the god's favour or help.

### Stone stela showing an Aramaean king



Aramaean, about 900-700 BC; From Tell es-Salhiyeh, Damascus

A king holding a tulip and a spear

This unusual stela was found by J.L. Porter, the British consul in Damsacus, in 1855. It depicts an Aramaean king apparently holding a tulip and grasping a staff or spear. At the time of its discovery Tell es-Salhiyeh was a prominent mound 5 miles west of Damascus. It is now a suburb of the city.

Following the demise of both the Egyptian and Hittite empires towards the end of the second millennium, new peoples moved into the power vacuum left behind in Syria. Chief amongst these were the Aramaeans, a Semitic people, whose language is closely related to Hebrew. Although some see the Aramaeans as newcomers and semi-nomadic pastoralists from the Eastern Desert, there is very little to support this view. Some element of the population might have arrived in this way, but it would seem more plausible to see the Aramaean 'culture' as a revival and resurgence of the indigenous Amorite/Hurrian population. There was no overall Aramaean kingdom, but instead a formidable confederation of city states (principally Damascus, Hamath and Aleppo), so powerful indeed that they were able to resist the advances of the Assyrian empire.

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### Cuneiform tablet with part of the Babylonian Chronicle (605-594 BC)



Neo-Babylonian, about 550-400 BC; From Babylon, southern Iraq

Nebuchadnezzar II's campaigns in the west. This tablet is one of a series that summarises the principal events of each year from 747 BC to at least 280 BC. Each entry is separated by a horizontal line and begins with a reference to the year of reign of the king in question.

Following the defeat of the Assyrians (as described in the Chronicle for 616-609 BC), the Egyptians became the greatest threat to the Babylonians. In 605 Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian crown prince, replaced his father Nabopolassar as commander-in-chief and led the army up the Euphrates to the city of Charchemish. There he defeated the Egyptians. Later that year Nabopolassar died and Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to be crowned. Over the next few years he kept his control over Syria and extended it into Palestine. In 601 BC he marched to Egypt, but withdrew on meeting the Egyptian army. After re-equipping his army, Nebuchadnezzar marched to Syria in 599 BC. He marched westwards again, in December 598 BC, as Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, had ceased to pay tribute. Nebuchadnezzar's army besieged Jerusalem and captured it on 15/16th March 597 BC. The new king of Judah, Jehoiachin, was captured and carried off to Babylon. A series of expeditions to Syria brings this Chronicle to an end in 594 BC.

### Limestone stela with a dedication to Baal



From Carthage, north Africa (modern Tunisia); 2nd-1st century BC

Dedicated by Gaius Julius Arish, son of Adon-Baal

This stela comes from a religious precinct known as the *tophet* at Carthage. In this enclosure such grave markers were set up over burial urns containing the cremated bodies of babies, small children and animals, which had been sacrificed to the goddess Tanit and her consort Baal Hammon. The Punic (Carthaginian) script is almost identical to that of Canaanite inscriptions from the Levant. Despite the classical influence seen in the *caduceii* (curled snakes), the symbolism is Canaanite, with two representations of the goddess Tanit. The upper one is composed of a sun disc, a crescent moon and triangle. Below is an anthropomorphized (human-shaped) version of the goddess.

The Canaanites of the Levant coast (known as Phoenicians) grew rich by supplying luxury materials to Mesopotamia, Egypt and Iran. Their natural harbours became major ports for handling international shipping. Commercial contacts were expanded across the Mediterranean and resulted in the establishment of colonies. According to tradition, Carthage was founded in 814 BC, but archaeological evidence suggests the earliest occupation was in about 730 BC. Carthage rapidly became the leading Phoenician colony. The city came into conflict first with the Greeks and then with the Romans. The Romans called the Carthaginians Poeni, from which the term Punic derives.

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### Cylinder of Nabonidus



Neo-Babylonian, about 555-540 BC; From Sippar, southern Iraq

This clay cuneiform cylinder was discovered in the Temple of Shamash at Sippar. It records the pious reconstruction by Nabonidus (reigned 555-539 BC) of the temples of the moon-god Sin in Harran and of the sun-god Shamash and goddess Anunitum at Sippar. He tells us that during the work at Sippar, inscriptions of older kings Naram-Sin (2254-2218 BC) and Shagaraki-shuriash (1245-1233 BC) were discovered, and Nabonidus offers dates that considerably exaggerate their age.

Nabonidus came to the throne after the assassination of two of the successors of Nebuchadnezzar, even though he had no direct family connection with the Babylonian royal family. He was old enough to have a mature son (Bel-shar-usur, the biblical Belshezzar) and was almost certainly an experienced soldier. A number of Nabonidus' inscriptions include historical references intended to show that his irregular accession to the throne had the blessing of the gods and of earlier Babylonian kings. Linked to this concern for legitimacy are the recurring references to Nabonidus' search for earlier buildings in the course of his own reconstruction work.

Collecting ancient documents and objects was already practised, for example, at Ashurbanipal's library at his palace at Nineveh. In the ruins of the Northern Palace at Babylon a museum-like collection of 'antiquities' was found, apparently collected by Nebuchadnezzar and his successors. This was probably still visible in Persian times.

### Gold figurine of a god



Hittite, about 1400-1200 BC; From Anatolia (modern Turkey)

This tiny gold figure wears the very distinctive Hittite version of the horned headdress, the usual way of depicting deities in Mesopotamia. The curved weapon he carries could be a sword, or perhaps a hunting weapon identifying him as a god of hunting.

Thousands of tablets from the Hittite capital of Hattusa (modern Bogazköy in central Turkey) reveal that the state religion was based on the worship of natural phenomena such as weather, sun, mountains and water. These were all depicted in human form, distinguished by their horned headwear. The Hittite king played a central role in religious rituals. These included his being bathed to wash away collective sin.

The Hittites adopted many of the deities of the surrounding regions, including those of the Hurrians. As the empire expanded into Syria during the fourteenth century BC, so did the pantheon. The Hittites themselves spoke of a thousand gods, and Mesopotamian and Syrian gods were either equated with their own deities or simply added to the list. Among the most important male gods was Teshub, the Hurrian storm god, whose animal symbol was the bull. He was the husband of the goddess Hepat, and they were equated with the weather-god of Hatti and his consort, the sun-goddess of Arina.

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### Mud brick



From Thebes, Egypt; 19th Dynasty, 1250 BC; Stamped with the name of Ramesses II

From the beginning of Egyptian history mud bricks were used as a basic material for construction. In the course of the Early Dynastic Period (about 3100-2613 BC) and the Old Kingdom (about 2613-2160 BC) bricks remained the basic building material of structures for living in, whether palaces or the houses of the ordinary people. Stone was gradually introduced for temples and the tombs of the élite.

Bricks were produced in vast quantities for all sorts of projects. They were made from Nile mud mixed with sand and straw, the latter two elements giving strength to the basic material. Bricks used for specific state projects were often stamped with the name of the king for whom it was being built. This one is stamped with the name of Ramesses II (about 1279-1213 BC). The discovery of stamped bricks can often be extremely useful for dating a structure.

### Silver lyre



From Ur, southern Iraq; about 2600-2400 BC

This lyre was found in the 'Great Death-Pit', one of the graves in the Royal Cemetery at Ur. The burial in the Great Death-Pit was accompanied by seventy-four bodies - six men and sixty-eight women - laid down in rows on the floor of the pit. Three lyres were piled one on top of another. They were all made from wood which had decayed by the time they were excavated, but two of them, of which this is one, were entirely covered in sheet silver attached by small silver nails. The plaques down the front of the sounding box are made of shell. The silver cow's head decorating the front has inlaid eyes of shell and lapis lazuli. The edges of the sound box have a narrow border of shell and lapis lazuli inlay.

When found, the lyre lay in the soil. The metal was very brittle and the uprights were squashed flat. First it was photographed, and then covered in wax and waxed cloth to hold it together for lifting. The silver on the top and back edge of the sounding box had been destroyed. Some of the silver preserved the impression of matting on which it must have originally lain. Eleven silver tubes acted as the tuning pegs.

Such instruments were probably important parts of rituals at court and temple. There are representations of lyre players and their instruments on cylinder seals, and on the Standard of Ur being played alongside a possible singer.

### Cyrus Cylinder



From Babylon, southern Iraq. Babylonian, about 539-530 BC

A declaration of good kingship.

This clay cylinder is inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform with an account by Cyrus, king of Persia (559-530 BC) of his conquest of Babylon in 539 BC and capture of Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king.

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Cyrus claims to have achieved this with the aid of Marduk, the god of Babylon. He then describes measures of relief he brought to the inhabitants of the city, and tells how he returned a number of images of gods, which Nabonidus had collected in Babylon, to their proper temples throughout Mesopotamia and western Iran. At the same time he arranged for the restoration of these temples, and organized the return to their homelands of a number of people who had been held in Babylonia by the Babylonian kings. Although the Jews are not mentioned in this document, their return to Palestine following their deportation by Nebuchadnezzar II, was part of this policy.

This cylinder has sometimes been described as the 'first charter of human rights', but it in fact reflects a long tradition in Mesopotamia where, from as early as the third millennium BC, kings began their reigns with declarations of reforms.

### Augustus Caesar, Roman emperor (31 BC - AD 14)



Octavian, as Augustus was known before becoming emperor, was adopted by Julius Caesar as his son and heir and fought to avenge Caesar after his assassination in 44 BC. After the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, Augustus became undisputed master of Rome and its territories. However, his official assumption of supreme power took over two decades and he was always careful to collaborate (or at least appear to collaborate) with the senate. He was nonetheless the first true Roman emperor, an office that was to last in the Western Empire for over four hundred years. His reign gave the Roman world a much needed period of internal stability, though the Empire's boundaries continued to expand.

By the end of Augustus' reign it was clear that the Republic would not return soon if at all, and that the imperial system with its succession by birth, rather than by the will of the Senate, was firmly established. However, the question of who would succeed Augustus remained a problem, as all his chosen successors died before him, including his trusted deputy Agrippa and his grandsons Gaius and Lucius. Finally he adopted as his son and heir Tiberius, the son of his second wife Livia, who succeeded him in AD 14. Augustus was buried in a round mausoleum at the entrance to which were inscribed in bronze the Res Gestae, or achievements of his reign.

### Marble portrait of Tiberius



Roman, about AD 4-14; A flattering portrait of the 46 year old heir to the imperial throne

The head, set into a modern bust, shows the image of the future emperor Tiberius (reigned AD 14-37). It was commissioned in AD 4 to mark his adoption as the successor of the emperor Augustus, his step-father. At the time Tiberius would have been forty-six years old, but is shown in the portrait as much younger.

The intrigues of Livia, Tiberius' mother, were probably a major factor in his rise to power, combined with the terrible health and unfortunate accidents which befell all the other potential heirs of Augustus. Tiberius was a successful general in campaigns against Persia and along the Danube and Rhine, but lacked Augustus' natural rapport with the Senate, making his period as emperor politically turbulent. His reliance upon the ambitious and brutal Sejanus, the head of the Praetorian guard (the imperial bodyguards) caused particular concern, as did the emperor's supposed sexual excesses at the Villa Iovis on the island of Capri.

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### Bronze head of the Emperor Claudius



Roman Britain, 1st century AD; The conqueror of Britain

This head, found in 1907, formed part of a life-size bronze statue of the Roman emperor Claudius (reigned AD 41-54). The conquest of Britain provided a military triumph for Claudius. He had no existing reputation as a leader, but was perceived as a retiring, scholarly person. Life-size and larger imperial statues were placed in important public and official spaces, and it is conceivable that the statue might originally have occupied such a space in the *colonia* (settlement) at Colchester.

It has been suggested that the removal of the head, and presumably the destruction of the body of the statue, might have taken place during the rebellion of the British tribal leader Boudica (in AD 61). This can be no more than a theory; there is no certain evidence even linking the statue with Colchester.

### Marble column drum from the later Temple of Artemis at Ephesos



Hellenistic Greek, about 340-320 BC; From Ephesos, modern Turkey

A fragment from one of the Seven Wonders of the World

This is the best preserved column drum from the Temple of Artemis. It has the remains of seven figures, two of which have been almost completely obliterated. The subject portrayed is disputed, but the scene is clearly presided over by the messenger god, Hermes, who gazes upwards with his *kerykeion* (winged staff) in his right hand and *petasos* (wide-brimmed sun hat) hanging behind his head. The god appears here in his guise as Hermes Psychopompos (leader of souls to the Underworld). The woman standing in front of him, whom he appears to guide, has been identified as many different tragic heroines, including Iphigenia, Alkestis or Eurydike. Other theories base the scene on the drum around the myth of Persephone. The suggestion that death is involved is supported by the presence of a winged youth with a sword who may be Thanatos, the personification of death.

The Roman author Pliny the Elder (AD 23/4-79) tells us that the famous fourth-century sculptor Skopas carved one of the thirty-six column drums of the temple. This particular drum was traditionally associated with Skopas on stylistic grounds, but it would be a remarkable coincidence if the only reasonably preserved drum should be his work. If, however, we are to believe that Skopas was involved with the sculptural programme at the Mausoleum at Halikarnassos in Karia, it is possible that he and his workshop moved on to another major commission at Ephesos.