

Some Biblically Related Artifacts in the British Museum

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

General Information

The British Museum was founded in 1753 to house the collection of Sir Hans Sloane which had been left to the nation. It is now among the greatest museums of the world. Photography is allowed without flash. Items are moved with some regularity as new displays are formed. Some of the items we list below may not currently be exhibited. There is a nice book shop and an information desk. With this sheet one can know the item and the museum number. If a guard can not locate the item you are looking for then go to the information desk for help. The museum has many special exhibits relating to biblical matters from time to time. Over the years the prefix to many of the numbers have been changed from BM to WA (Western Asiatic). I have changed only those which I have personally observed. In some departments the prefix may be deleted or some other prefix used; the numbers remain unchanged. The major countries are listed alphabetically by their ancient name. The material is highly abbreviated.

Displays change and some items may not be exhibited. Some artifact may be on loan.

Assyria

Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC)

1. Human-headed winged lions which guarded the gateway to the palace at Nimrud. WA 118801, WA 118802. Illustrates composite beasts of apocalyptic literature such as Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation.
2. The smaller human-headed bull from the NW palace at Nimrud may have guarded the entrance



into the king's private apartment. WA 118872. The lion guarded the entrance into what may have been a banquet hall. WA 118873. The pair to these is in the Metropolitan Museum, New York.

Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC)

1. The Black Obelisk showing Jehu, king of Israel, bowing before the Assyrian King. BM 18885. Found at Calah (now Nimrud) by Henry Layard in 1846. The only known Israelite king whose "picture" is available.
2. Monolith of Shalmaneser III from Kurkh. Mentions Ahab the Israelite. Says he provided 2000 chariots and 10,000 foot soldiers to a confederacy that fought against Assyria. BM 118884.
3. Bronze Gate from Balawat. Notice band 13. The upper part depicts the Assyrian assault on a town in Hamath (possibly Qarqar). On the bottom part shows charioteers and a line of female captives.
4. Statue of Shalmaneser III as a seated figure. BM 118886.

Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) (745-727 BC)

1. One tablet contains an account of the building programs and military campaigns for the first 17 years of his reign. It states that he received tribute from "Jehoahaz of Judah." This is the full name of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:7). There are also references to the kings of Ammon, Moab, Ashkelon, Edom, Gaza, and Tyre. WAK 3751.
2. Invaded Palestine in days of Pekah, king of Israel (2 Kings 15:29).
3. See limestone relief from Nimrud showing capture of Astartu (may be Ashtaroth of Dt. 1:4; Josh. 9:10) in Gilead by Tiglath-Pileser III. Astartu is shown as a walled city on a tell. WA 118908.
4. See scribes recording the booty taken by Tiglath-Pileser III. WA 118882.

Shalmaneser V (726-722 BC)

Captured Samaria (2 Kings 17:3ff.). The Babylonian Chronicle states that he “destroyed Samaria” (cf. Lewis 39). Sargon claims to have taken Samaria. He probably finished the job.

Sargon II (721-705 BC)

1. Claims to have taken Samaria. 22505. The *Nimrud Prism*, chronicling the expedition of Sargon II against Babylon, Medians, Syria, and Palestine. Mentions conquest of Samaria, “the land of the house of Omri,” in 721 BC. From Khorsabad, 8th cent. BC.
2. Only mentioned in Isaiah 20:1. Once questioned. Palace found by Paul Emile Botta at Khorsabad in 1843. See Sargon receiving his minister. WA 118822.
3. Groom leading horses, from Palace in Khorsabad. WA 118828.
4. Fragment of pavement inscription from palace at Khorsabad describing building of palace. BM 135206.
5. The largest of the winged bulls on display are from Khorsabad, 710 BC. WA 118808-9.
6. Several other Sargon II remains. One letter reports to Sargon about preparations for war in Urartu. WA Sm 760.

Sennacherib (704-681 BC)

1. Took 46 cities of Judah in the days of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13), 701 BC. WA 118815.
2. He left limestone relief of siege of Lachish in Palace at Nineveh (See Lachish Room, BM 124911, et al.). Also see sling stones, olive pits, bone and iron arrowheads from siege of Lachish. Terra cotta foundation document from Nineveh gives an account of Sennacherib’s campaigns and of his rebuilding of Nineveh, 694 BC. His account of the siege of Lachish (701 BC) is given in column 3, lines 38-81. WA 103000. Men of Lachish in royal guard. WA 124900-1.
3. Stele of Sennacherib commemorating building of royal road through Nineveh. BM124800.
4. In the Taylor Prism, found at Nineveh, he admits that Hezekiah did not submit to his yoke, but was “shut up in Jerusalem” like a caged bird. WA 91032. See 2 Kings 18:13-16. Hezekiah is also mentioned in BM 118815.
5. A cuneiform tablet (very small) from the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh describes the tribute of the kingdom of Judah. WA K1295.

6. WA22502 contains the account of two campaigns against Marduk-apal-iddina II (the biblical Merodach-Baladan, king of Babylon, Isa. 39:1-8) and against the Medes, and other eastern forces. Also describes building activities at Nineveh, 702 BC. This item is called the Bellino Cylinder.

Esarhaddon (680-649 BC)

1. Son and successor of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:37). Stone slab inscribed with the name, titles, and genealogy of Esarhaddon. WA 22465. There is a reference to the Assyrian occupation of Egypt in 671 BC. Manasseh, king of Judah, is mentioned as paying tribute to the Assyrians (cf. 2 Kings 21; 2 Chron. 33). Isa. 37:38; Ezra 4:2. See also WA 132548.
2. The head of a human-headed winged bull from the unfinished NW palace at Nimrud. WA 118893.
3. Black basalt memorial stone inscribed in archaic Babylonian characters with an account of the restoration of the walls and temples of Babylon. 91027. See also WA K 2801.

Ashurbanipal (668-626 BC)

His royal library of more than 20,000 tablets found at Nineveh in 1852-53. Many tablets are on display.

1. Mentioned once under corrupted name of Osnapper in Ezra 4:9-10. He was the “king of Assyria” who brought foreigners into the region of Samaria (2 Kings 17:24).
2. Destroyed Thebes in 663 BC. Cf. Nahum 3:8.
3. See reliefs from Ashurbanipal’s palace at Nineveh (Assyrian Saloon).
4. A ten-sided clay prism tells of his early years. BM 91026.

Other Assyrian Items

1. Tablet telling creation story. BM 930177. There are other tablets relating to the creation.
2. Epic of Gilgamesh. This fragment from Nineveh records the Babylonian account of the flood. K3375.
3. Assyrian scenes from campaign in hill country. BM 124777, 124775.
4. Winged Bulls — gateway from Khorsabad (at one entrance to Assyrian Basement).

5. Collection of building blocks from various Assyrian and Babylonian kings. [This was not exhibited the past few times I have been there.]
6. Armor and weapons of warfare in Assyrian Basement. Even a bathtub.
7. Assyrian officers and men of Lachish in the Royal Guard. WA 124900-1.
8. Clay model of sheep's lung (used to teach divination). WA Rm 620.

Babylon

Nabopolassar (c. 626-605 BC)

The Babylonian Chronicle for the years 615-609 BC tells of the fall of Nineveh. BM 21901. See the book of Nahum. This chronicle records that the army of Egypt had come to help Assyria [at the battle of Carchemish]. The Bible tells us that Pharaoh Neco was going up to fight along side Assyria when Josiah went to Megiddo to cut him off. This proved to be a fatal mistake for Josiah (2 Kings 23:29).

Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC)

1. Captured and destroyed Jerusalem. 606, 597, 586 BC (Dan. 1; 2 Kings 24-25).
2. Building block with name of Nebuchadnezzar. WA 90081. Another block, called the East India House Inscription, gives a general account of the many buildings in Babylon including temples, city walls, and royal palaces. BM 129397.
3. Babylonian Chronicle (605-594 BC). Read by Donald J. Wiseman, 1955. Tells of capture of Jerusalem on March 16, 597 BC, removal of Jehoiachin and others to Babylon, and appointment of [Zedekiah] as king. BM 21946. (Other related tablets in Berlin Museum.) Daily rations (Jer. 52:31-34).
4. Part of ornamental bronze threshold with a dedicatory inscription from temple of Nabu, Borsippa. WA 90851.
5. Clay model of sheep's liver, inscribed as a guide to diviners. From S. Babylonia, c. 1700 BC. WA 92668. Nebuchadnezzar "looked into the liver" when he came against Jerusalem (Ezek. 21:21).
6. A map of the world inscribed on clay showing Babylon in the center. WA 92687.

Lachish Letters

These letters, written on ostraca, relate to the invasion of Palestine by the Babylonians. A few of these

are in the British Museum. Jewish names are on BM 125701. One ostracon has name of Jehovah (YHWH) on it. WA 125705. Also see 125714. Cf. Jer. 34:7. Others in Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem.

Nabonidus (556-539 BC)

1. 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). See a basalt stele which shows him before the emblem of the moon-god Sin, the sun-god Samas, and the war and love goddess Istar. This item was obtained in Babylon in 1811, by C. J. Rich. WA 90837. A terracotta cylinder describes work on the temple of the moon god Sin at Ur by the king including a prayer for himself and his son Belshazzar. WA 91128
2. A barrel-cylinder of Nabonidus which gives an account of his restoration of the temple of Sin at Haran. WA 91109.
3. He is named in the Cyrus Cylinder as the king who was delivered into the hands of Cyrus. Also Nabonidus Chronicle in the Sackler Gallery of Latter Mesopotamia. WA 35382.

Boundary Stone

A commemorative stela from the temple of Marduk in Babylon served as a boundary stone (c. 900-800 BC). Consider the ancient landmarks of the Bible (Job 24:2; Prov. 22:28; 23:10).

Egypt

Tel el-Amarna Tablets

About 350 tablets found in Egypt in 1887. Written in Babylonian cuneiform, during reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep (Greek, Amenophis IV) c. 1380 BC. 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 the Israelites may have been included under this designation. The senders of the letters include rulers of Hazor (BM 2983), Gezer (BM 29832), Megiddo (BM 29855), Lachish (BM 29848), Shechem (BM 29844). In BM29799 the ruler of Byblos begs the Egyptian king to send soldiers to restore him to his city.

Rosetta Stone

Found by Napoleon's soldiers in Egypt in 1799. Read by Champollion in 1822, thus unlocking Egyptian hieroglyphics. BM 24. The three languages are Greek, Demotic, and Hieroglyphics. The stone was set up in 195 BC to honor Ptolemy Epiphanes.

Miscellaneous Items From Egypt

1. Apis Bull of Memphis. BM 37448. 6" high. 4th cent. BC. There are numerous examples of the Apis Bull on display.
2. Universal deities of Egypt. Small items in cases.
3. Writing: wax tablets, reed pen.
4. Mummies. cf. Jacob (Gen. 50:2-3) and Joseph (Gen. 50:25-26). Mummified animals. Some animals were considered sacred by the Egyptians.
5. Ancient wheat. BM 36190.
6. Models of brick-makers (BM63837), bread-makers, funeral barges, etc. (Illustrates type of work which might have been done by Israelites in bondage.)
7. Brick of chopped straw. BM 6020.
8. Bronze mirrors. 1300 BC. BM 22830.
9. The Wisdom of Amenemope (BM10474). The papyrus is 1.70 meters long. Similar to Prov. 22:17-23:14. c. 1000 BC.

Israel and Judah**Hezekiah (716-687 BC)**

1. See Assyria (Sennacherib).
2. Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, was an ally of Hezekiah against the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:9). See figure of Tirhakah, placed beneath protection of the god Amun, shown as a colossal recumbant ram. Found at Karnak. c. 675 BC. BM 1779. 2 feet, 1 inch grey granite. Egyptian Sculpture gallery.
3. Inscription from Hezekiah's tunnel (Siloam inscription) (2 Kings 20:20). Replica. Original in Istanbul Museum.

Ahab (841-853 BC)

1. See Assyria (Shalmaneser III).
2. Ivory fragments, probably from Ahab's palace at Samaria (1 Kings 22:39). See examples of similar work among the Nimrud Ivories.

Jehu (841-814 BC)

See Assyria (Shalmaneser III).

Ahaz (732-716 BC)

The annals of Tiglath-Pileser III mentions the tribute of "Jehoahaz of Judah." WA K 3751. See under Assyria.

Shebna

Lintel of a tomb prepared for [Shebna]-yahu, a royal steward over the house. Possibly the Shebna of Isa. 22:15-16. WA 125205. Another lintel (WA 125207), not on display in 2002, reads: "The tomb chamber in the side of the rock." Both are from Siloam, Jerusalem. c. 700 BC.

Jehoiachin (Coniah) (597 BC)

See Babylon (Nebuchadnezzar). BM 21946. cf. Jer. 52:31-34.

Gedaliah

A seal impression inscribed "Belonging to Hananiah son of Gedaliah" may be a reference to the Gedaliah who was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar to rule Judah after the fall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:22-25). Jeremiah had some dealing with Gedaliah (Jer. 39:14; 40:5-6). WA 134695.

Ancient Levant

One portion of the Ancient Near East displays is called the Ancient Levant. Levant is a term applied to the portion of the Middle East which borders the Mediterranean Sea. This includes the areas such as Israel and the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria. Here are some additional items.

1. Dead sea Scroll jar from Qumran.
2. Philistine pottery and cast of head of Philistine soldier.
3. Canaanite cult figures. The fertility goddess Ashtart (Ashtoreth in O. T. – 1 Kings 11:5, 33; 2 Kings 23:13).
4. A reconstructed rock-cut tomb from Jericho (c. 2200-1950 BC). Later re-used.
5. Pottery from various periods. Notice the *La Melik* ("belonging to the king") jar handles, and other seals on jar handles.
6. Ossuaries (bone receptacles); Bronze spears; Weights (pim, 1 Sam. 13:19-21); Seals, etc.
7. Ivories from Samaria. Cf. Ahab's ivory house (1 Kings 22:39; Amos 6:4; 3:15).

8. Pottery and charred remains from various foods from Tell es-Saidiyeh (Biblical Zarethan, 1 Kings 7:46).
9. Tell Halaf is identified with Gozan. Several items on display from this tell in north-eastern Syria (2 Kings 17:6). Israelites were settled here during the Assyrian captivity.

Moabites

Mesha, king of Moab, revolted against paying tribute to Israel after death of Ahab (2 Kings 3:4-5). A facsimile of the Moabite Stone (Mesha Stone) may be displayed. Original is in the Louvre. A Moabite stamp seal inscribed with the name Chemosh-nathan was found by Wooley at Ur. Chemosh was the god of the Moabites (1 Kings 11:33). The name Chemosh-nathan means "Chemosh has given (a son)" and is parallel to such biblical names as Jonathan (YHWH has given).

Persia

Cyrus (550-530 BC)

1. Allowed the Judeans to return to Palestine (2 Chron. 36; Ezra 1). Cyrus Cylinder (BM 90920) tells of capture of Babylon without a battle. Shows he allowed captives to return to their own lands, restore temples, and serve their gods (536 BC).
2. The name and titles of Cyrus are stamped on a brick along with his claim to have established peace in the land. Cyrus Gate at Ur. BM 118362.

Darius I (521-486 BC)

1. See cylinder seal and impression of Darius I (BM 89132). He allowed Jews to rebuild the temple (Ezra 6:1-15).
2. See notebook of Henry Rawlinson, showing how he deciphered the Behistun Rock. See photo of Behistun Rock inscription in Iranian Room.
3. Clay tablet in Old Persian lists titles of Darius and his conquests. BM 82548.
4. Persian Archer from Guard of Darius. Found at Susa. On loan from the Louvre.
5. An Egyptian shrine door of wood, originally gilt and inlaid with colored glass shows Darius I as a Pharaoh. BM E37496. From Egypt, c. 500 BC (Iranian Room).

Xerxes (486-464 BC)

1. Same as Ahasuerus of book of Esther.
2. Fragment of alabaster vase inscribed with the name of Xerxes, king of Persia in four writings (Old Persian, Elamite, Babylonia cuneiform, Egyptian hieroglyphics). Persepolis. BM 88339.

Artaxerxes I (464-423 BC)

1. Ezra returned with second group of captives (458 BC). Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (444 BC). Close of Old Testament at this time.
2. Parts of two column bases inscribed in Old Persian, Babylonian, and Elamite contain the name, lineage and titles of Artaxerxes II (404-359 BC). This item also records the rebuilding of a palace at Ecbatana. Found at Ecbatana. Elamite and Babylonian (BM 90854); Babylonian and Old Persian (BM 90855).
3. Bull rhyton (drinking cup) illustrates Nehemiah as cupbearer.

Sumer (Mesopotamia)

Ur

1. Excavated by Sir Leonard Wooley (1922-1934). Illustrates culture before 2,000 BC. Some scholars, such as Cyrus Gordon, doubt that this was the home of Abraham. The Ebla tablets mention the city of Ur in the region of Haran (*Biblical Archaeology Society Newsletter*, June, 1980, 2).
2. Some important artifacts (cf. Gen. 4:16-22).
 - Jewelry from the tomb of Queen Shubad.
 - Lyre with sound box.
 - Statue of he-goat standing. BM 122200.
 - Diagram of flood deposit found by Wooley. A local flood not to be confused with the flood of Noah's day. This diagram has not been displayed for some time.
 - Royal sled.
 - Standard of Ur. BM 121201. A masterpiece of early Sumerian art, shows life at Ur c. 2500 BC. One side show military activity and the other shows domestic life.
 - Gaming boards.
 - Toys and miscellaneous household items.

Hammurabi, King of Babylon (c. 1760 BC)

Portrait of Hammurabi. BM 22454. (The Code of Hammurabi, in the Louvre, illustrates the existence of law codes prior to the law of Moses.)

Miscellaneous Items

Athens

See the “Elgin Marbles,” sculptures from pediment and friezes of the Parthenon. cf. Acts 17.

Baal

Bronze statuette from Tyre. 14th cent. BC. BM25096.

Early Babylonian

A map of the world incised on clay shows Babylon at the center of the universe. From time of Sargon of Agade (c. 2300 BC). 7th cent. BC. BM 92687.

Cherubim

Winged lion with woman’s head which Greeks called a sphinx. BM 118163 in Ivories Room. The cherubim of OT may have been of similar design (cf. Ex. 25:20, et al.).

Elam

Several items in Iranian room. cf. Gen. 10:22; 14:1; Jer. 25:25; Dan. 8:2; Acts 2:9, et al.

Ephesus

Many items from various temples at Ephesus. See sculptured drum of one of columns of Temple of Diana. BM Sculp. 1206. Mausoleum Room. cf. Acts 19; Eph.; Rev.2.

Hittites

Mentioned over 40 times in OT, but unknown otherwise until the discovery of their empire about 1906 in central Turkey (Anatolia). A few items are on display on the landing at the entrance to Iranian (Persian) Room. A series of clay tablets and some jewelry are displayed in the Iranian Room.

Parthia

Items on display: coins, gold, jewelry, silver dishes, terracottas (horses with riders depicts war), pottery, bronze items, a clay coffin. Jews from Parthia were present on Pentecost (Acts 2:9). Some scholars believe the white horse in the book of Revelation represents Parthian cavalrymen (Rev. 6:2; 9:13-21). The Parthians were the dreaded enemy of Rome. The Nero *redivivus* (revived) myth had it that Nero would return as leader of a Parthian army.

Roman

Numerous statues of interest are on display in the Wolfson Gallery of Classical Sculpture and Inscriptions. Includes emperors Nero, Titus, Nerva, Hadrian, Commodus, Decius, Septimius Severus. Nerva (AD 96-98) is shown wearing a diadem (BM sculpture 1404; cf. Rev. 13:1). There is a head of the poet and astronomer Aratus who is quoted by Paul in Acts 17:28. Other busts show typical hair styles, etc. See also the goat-legged Pan (BM sculpture 1668).

Thessalonica

The Gate of Vardar Inscription names six dignitaries designated as *politarchs*, the same term used by Luke in Acts 17:6, 9. BM Inscription 171. In Wolfson Gallery of Classical Sculpture and Inscriptions.

Urartia

Urartia was the ancient kingdom called Ararat in the Bible (Gen. 8:4; 2 Kings 19:37 = Isa. 37:38; Jer. 51:27). It is located in present-day eastern Turkey. Items on display include a royal inscription from Toprakkale or Van and Urartian cuneiform inscriptions (810-786 BC).

Woman at the Window

This popular Phoenician theme was often portrayed in ivory (WA 118156; cf. Jud. 5:28; 2 Sam. 6:16; 2 Kings 9:30).

Manuscripts

Manuscripts and Bibles have been moved to the new British Library, 96 Euston Road. It is located nearest the St. Pancras railway station and within walking distance of King’s Cross and Euston. Photographs are not allowed in the manuscript room.

1. Codex Sinaiticus. 4th cent. AD. (4 columns on vellum). The oldest complete manuscript of the NT. BM add. MSS 43725.
2. Codex Alexandrinus. 5th cent. AD. (2 columns on vellum).
3. Hebrew Pentateuch, 10th cent. AD.
4. Papyrus Eggerton 2 (c. AD 200). A fragment of an unknown gospel with similarities to the Gospel of John.

Bibles

See note under Manuscripts. The museum has numerous English translations but they may not all be on display at any given time. Try to see the Wycliffe Bible (1382), the Tyndale New Testament (the first printed English NT, 1525), the Coverdale Bible (the first printed English Bible, 1535), the King James Bible (1611) et al.

Sources

This work was first distributed to tour members about 1978 and has been updated at least nine times. It is based on my own numerous visits to the British Museum. Many books have been consulted over the years. The following works have proved most help-

ful: Barnett, *Illustrations of Old Testament History*; Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History*; Wiseman, *Illustrations from Biblical Archaeology* (several editions); Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum* (1988). English translations of many of the ancient documents may be found in Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* or in Thomas, *Documents from Old Testament Times*.

Similar lists have been prepared on the Louvre in Paris and the museums of [East] Berlin. If you are planning a trip to one of these cities and have an interest in this type of things, let me know. 02/03/02.

© Ferrell Jenkins 2003.
CODE:E:\tours\vpchps\BritishMuseum.vp

