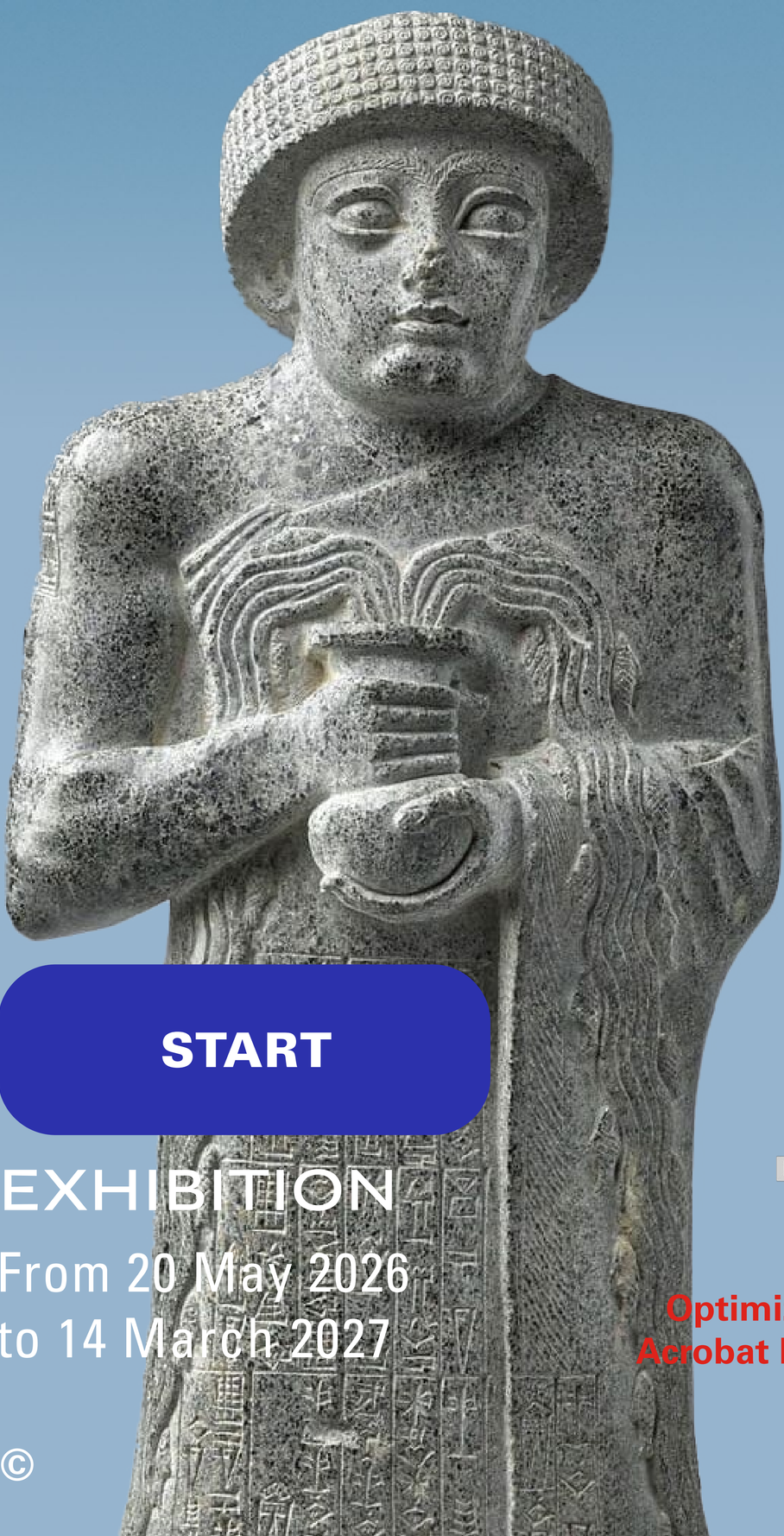
LOUVRE

PRIMEVAL WATERS

LESSONS FROM MESOPOTAMIA



START

EXHIBITION

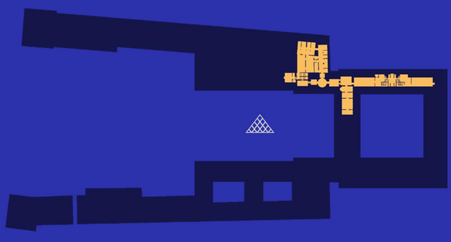
From 20 May 2026
to 14 March 2027

PDF

Optimized for
Acrobat Reader

Dedicated to the fundamental importance of water in Mesopotamia, the ancient land where irrigation was invented, the exhibition in room 230 unfolds throughout the galleries of Ancient Near Eastern Antiquities.
A selection of works invites a reinterpretation of the museum's Near Eastern antiquities, focusing on this essential resource, and prompting environmental reflection on these vestiges of the past and their contemporary echoes.

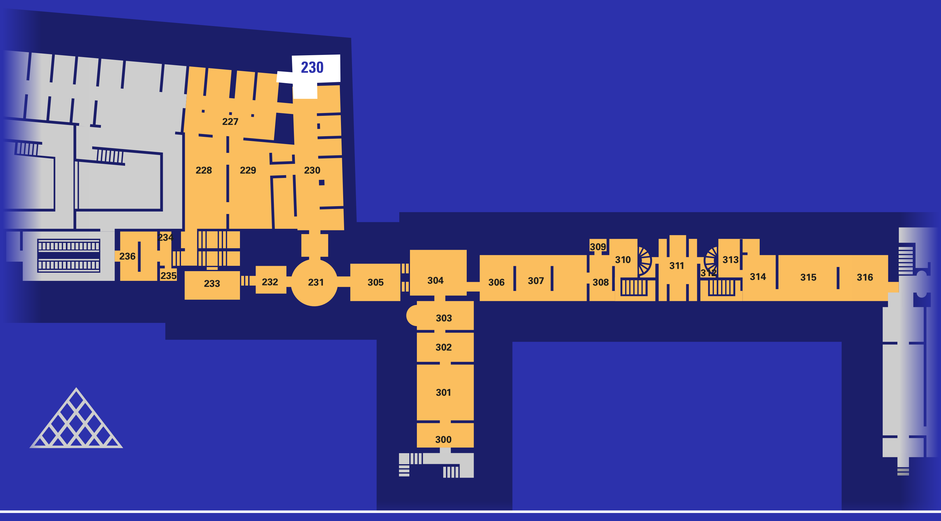
SEE THE TRAIL



RICHELIEU WING (LEVEL 0)

MAP OF THE TRAIL IN THE NEAR EASTERN ANTIQUITIES ROOMS

RICHELIEU WING (LEVEL 0)



Room 227

Room 228

Room 229

Room 230

Exhibition Room 230

Room 231

Room 232

Room 235

Room 236

Room 300

Room 301

Room 302

Room 303

Room 304

Room 305

Room 306

Room 309

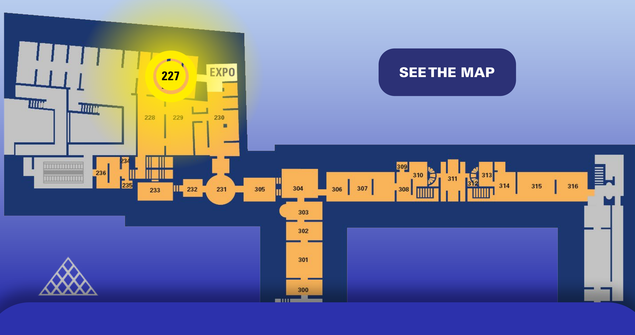
Room 311

Room 314

Room 315

Room 316

BACK



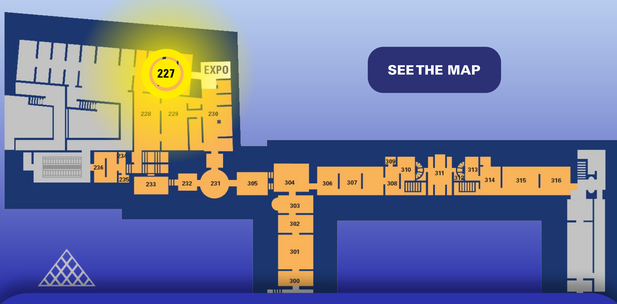
The Code of Hammurabi: the Origins of Water Law

While not the oldest, the *Code of Hammurabi* is the most exhaustive surviving Mesopotamian legal code. After a prologue glorifying the Babylonian king Hammurabi, it enumerates legal judgements relating to a number of aspects of Babylonian life, including property, family, agricultural activity and enslavement. It comprises the earliest seeds of water law: every man had to maintain dykes and canals, or be forced to compensate neighbours in the event of flooding.

And today?

Access to clean, safe water has been recognised as a basic human right by the United Nations since 2010. Many experts nevertheless view this recognition as insufficient: they denounce the ecological deterioration of waterways, and endorse granting rivers legal personhood in order to better protect them, following examples set in Canada, Peru and New Zealand. While the motivations differ, this approach somewhat echoes the sacred personification of water in ancient Mesopotamia.

ALSO
IN THIS ROOM



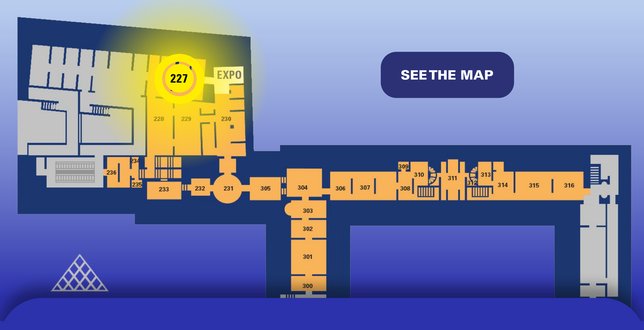
Gilgamesh and the Issue of Deforestation

This figurine illustrates an episode from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, one of the oldest known works of literature. The hero Gilgamesh slays the terrifying demon Humbaba, guardian of the Cedar Forest, in order to be able to cut down its trees. This episode of a heroic victory over a powerful demon also conveys a relationship of domination over nature, which can be viewed in the light of the massive deforestation undertaken in the ancient Near East.

And today?

In antiquity as today, deforestation responds to the need for wood (particularly for heating purposes) and land for agriculture and livestock farming. It profoundly alters ecosystems and reduces carbon capture. Directly leading to reduced precipitation and groundwater supplies, deforestation transforms local climates and contributes to drought.

ALSO
IN THIS ROOM



A world above the underground waters

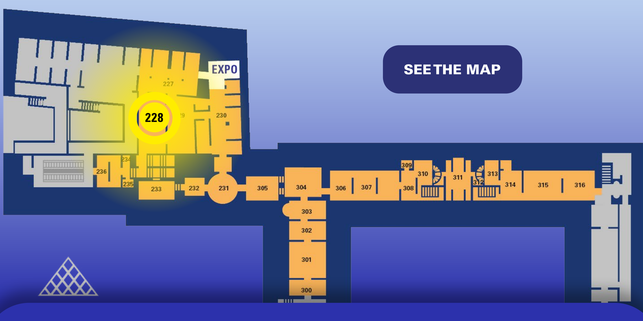
This kudurru – or land grant stela – is unfinished because it has not been inscribed, although a space has been left to add an inscription. It is decorated with several superimposed registers (levels) of imagery, which likely represent the cosmos. Around the base of this monument lies a horned serpent. In the Mesopotamian world, this was a creature frequently associated with primordial underground waters, and, in particular, with Apsu, the freshwater ocean upon which the human world was believed to rest. The walls and crenellated towers visible above the reptile symbolise the human world. At the top of the kudurru, a series of deities and divine symbols complete this representation of the cosmos.

The serpent is the embodiment of these primordial waters, which were viewed as being both essential for life but also volatile and a potential threat. These waters must be controlled by the gods in order to maintain the cosmic balance of the world.

Kudurru or boundary stone

Two faces of this stela depict the crenellated walls of a city and a boat decorated with the heads of mushhushshu dragons, the symbolic animal of Marduk, the supreme god of the city of Babylon. The boat depicted may represent the god leaving his temple on the banks of the Euphrates during the New Year ceremonies in Babylon.

EXHIBITION ROOM 230



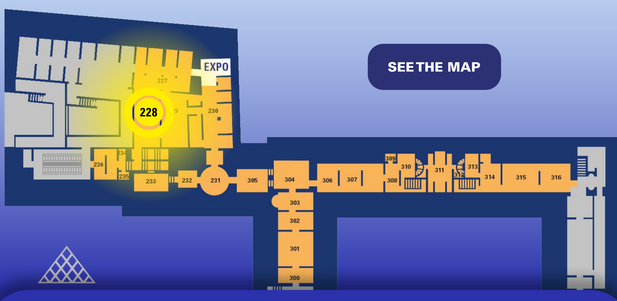
The Land of Sumer: Once-Ubiquitous Sacred Water, Now Vanished

The longest known Sumerian text is inscribed on these Gudea cylinders. It relates the construction of a temple in the city of Girsu (modern-day Tello, Iraq) during the reign of Gudea around 2120 BC. Water, at the time ubiquitous in this small kingdom, played a major role in temple rituals, serving as an offering to the deities or to purify the sites.

And today?

Some 4,000 years ago, the city of Girsu (modern-day Tello) was close to the sea and surrounded by marshland. The Persian Gulf coastline subsequently receded due to the accumulation of mud transported by rivers, and Tello now lies far from the coast. Despite the efforts of several Sumerian cities to continue to supply water for their ports, many were ultimately abandoned or submerged.

ALSO
IN THIS ROOM



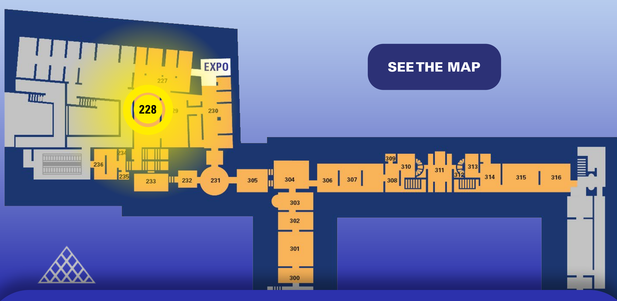
The Pillar of Gudea and Clay: a Material Spanning Past and Future

Mud bricks, like those of this pillar, were the primary building material in the ancient Near East. There are two types. The most common, made of unfired clay, can be infinitely recycled. Fired bricks, like the ones used here, cannot be recycled, but can be re-used for other structures. In the ancient Near East, new buildings were constructed over old ones, gradually raising the elevation of cities and villages. The artificial mounds formed by the accumulated layers of successive settlements are known as tells – the term from which the name of Tello, where this pillar was found, is derived.

And today?

Most of the materials used for construction today cannot be re-used or recycled. This makes the construction sector hugely polluting: the production of cement, a key ingredient in concrete, is the source of over 5% of global greenhouse gas emissions, in addition to consuming a great deal of water and discharging polluted water. As was customary in the ancient Near East, the use of more natural materials such as clay and wood is a solution for reducing emissions and pollution.

ALSO
IN THIS ROOM



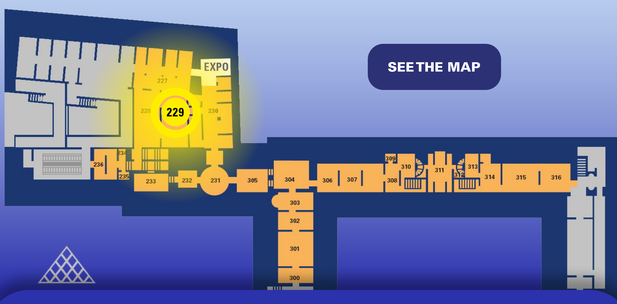
Mountains: Strategic Territories and Water Reservoirs

This stela celebrates a military victory by Naram-Sin, king of Akkad, over the Lullubi, a rebellious people of the Zagros Mountains (modern-day Iran) in the 23rd century BC. He is depicted triumphant on a mountaintop, his deification symbolised by his horned helmet. This monument is a remarkable illustration of the numerous royal campaigns to attack mountain regions, which provided strategic routes and a range of resources, including water.

And today?

Mountains have always served as natural water towers. The Mesopotamian plain depended on the Tigris and the Euphrates, two rivers originating in the neighbouring mountains of Turkey. But today, mountain water is becoming scarcer, and rivers are shrinking to dangerously low levels. Factors contributing to this include hydroelectric dams and diversions, decreasing precipitation and water evaporation caused by rising temperatures.

SEE THE MAP



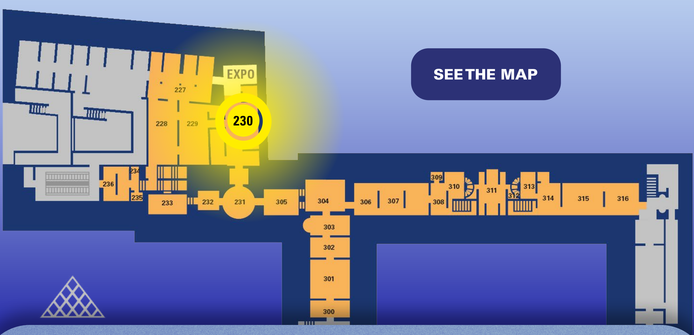
The Transportation of Assyrian Wood and Marine Biodiversity

This relief from the palace of King Sargon II (721–705 BC) shows the expedition involving large numbers of soldiers who cut down trees and transported their trunks by boat to Khorsabad for the construction of the royal palace. In the central scene, soldiers are depicted navigating at sea off the coast of fortified cities that may be Tyre and Arwad, respectively on the coasts of modern-day Lebanon and Syria. The waters teem with fish and fantastical creatures.

And today?

The Mediterranean is not home to the human-fish hybrids or winged bulls featured on this relief, but numerous non-native invasive species have been introduced since antiquity, and at a higher rate in the 20th century. Today, these species (both flora and fauna) have disrupted biodiversity to such an extent that they are linked to half of all known extinctions. In the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, over 900 species brought by boat or introduced via aquaculture have been surveyed, including jellyfish, algae and oysters.

EXHIBITION ROOM 230



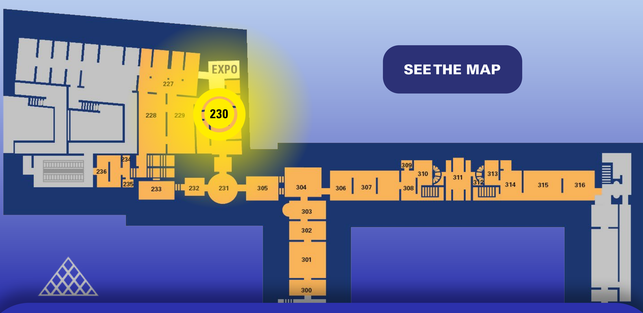
PRIMEVAL WATERS

Exhibition room 230

Crossed by the Tigris and the Euphrates, Mesopotamia encompassed a wide range of ecosystems, in which water ranged from scarce to abundant. Both creator and destroyer, water here was sacred. It was also a key issue in terms of royal policies, as a source of power and driver of conflict.

The 3,000 years of Mesopotamian history witnessed the invention of the earliest hydraulic infrastructure, and shed light on the importance given to water and its management, echoing current environmental issues.

ROOM 230



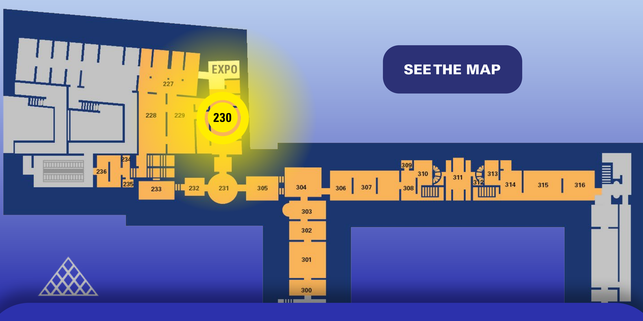
Bahrain, an Ancient Paradise of Springs

The Kingdom of Bahrain, an archipelago lying between modern-day Saudi Arabia and Qatar, corresponds to the ancient land of Dilmun, mentioned in 3300 BC in Sumerian texts. With sheltered harbours and plentiful freshwater springs, it was regarded as a paradise at the time. Some of the springs were driven to the surface on both land and seabed by pressure. Several myths recount that Enki, the god of fresh water, endowed Dilmun with its remarkable springs.

And today?

From antiquity all the way to the 1990s, Bahrain's freshwater supply came from a spring-fed subterranean reservoir under pressure, with ancient waters that were extremely slow to be replenished. Today, many of these springs have dried up due to excessive groundwater pumping. Bahrain receives low precipitation, and must now seek out deeper groundwater resources and use seawater desalination plants.

ALSO IN THIS ROOM



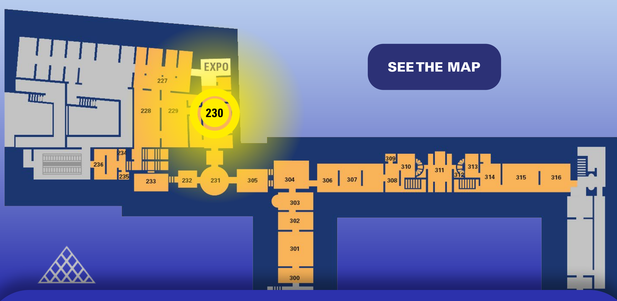
The Plaque of the Underworld and Water Contamination

This plaque has an incantation intended to send the demon Lamashtu back to the Underworld. In Mesopotamian mythology, Lamashtu was responsible for numerous evils, from poisoning water to provoking illnesses and miscarriages and kidnapping children. At the centre of the plaque, two priests in fish costume carry out an exorcism ritual above an unwell, bedridden figure, in order to force the demon to liberate the body she is possessing.

And today?

In ancient Mesopotamia, water contamination was a veritable scourge. Numerous infectious diseases spread through water, particularly via canals. Today, biological water contamination is uncommon in properly maintained networks, as opposed to chemical contamination, which has become more prevalent and causes numerous diseases, including cancer. In 2025, traces of toxic chemical products were found in 92% of samples taken from water in France.

ALSO IN THIS ROOM



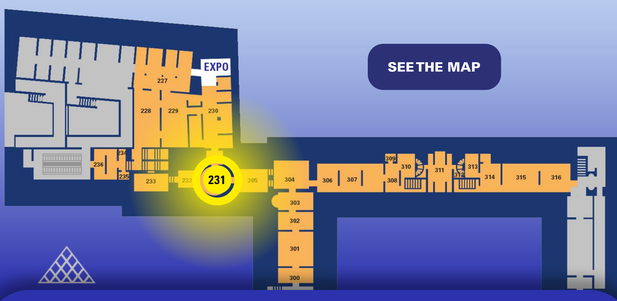
Mesopotamian Cities and the Future of the Urban Model

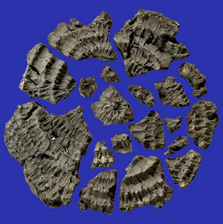
The world's first cities were in Mesopotamia. The earliest true urban systems, dating to the 4th millennium BC, often emerged in ancient villages, and have since developed more or less continuously for over 6,000 years. Nineveh, for instance, was home to up to 80,000 inhabitants, and is where this relief depicting another city, Arbela (Erbil, modern-day Iraq), was found. These cities were political, religious and trading centres, largely driven by waterways (here, tributaries of the Tigris).

And today?

Like the already-urban world of Mesopotamia, around 55% of the global population now lives in cities – a figure that will only rise in the future. Urban densification could be a factor for mitigating climate change, as inhabitants of dense cities can lower their carbon footprint through the use of public transport rather than personal vehicles. As in the ancient megalopolises of Nineveh and Babylon, the adaptation of cities and their water infrastructure will shape their future.

SEE THE MAP





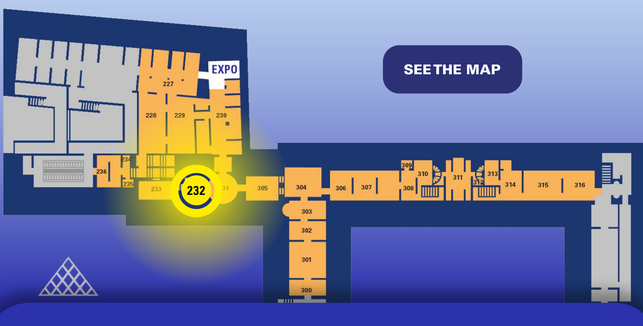
Bitumen: a Coveted Resource

These objects are entirely or partially made of bitumen, a material similar to what coats our roads today. In the ancient Near East, bitumen was used for many purposes: to seal the bottom of boats, vessels and baskets, as seen here; to make small objects and jewellery; to serve as mortar between bricks or as glue, etc. Bitumen was extracted from deposits, few in number but well-known, in Iran and Mesopotamia.

And today?

Like petroleum, the bitumen used to pave our roads today is a non-renewable material that cannot be produced by humans, and whose importance sparked numerous conflicts in antiquity: in the 18th century BC, for instance, kings Hammurabi of Babylon and Zimri-Lim of Mari clashed over this valuable resource, which they both needed for boats, in particular.

SEE THE MAP



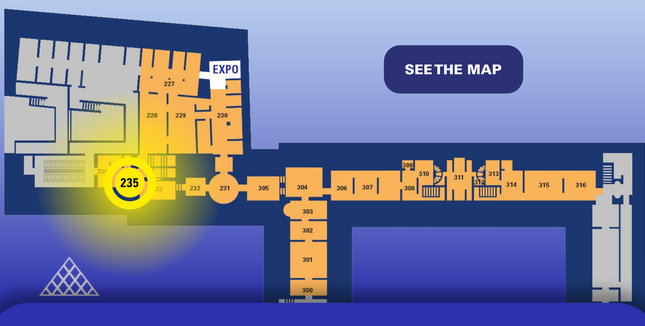
The First Village of Susa and the Relationship to Nature

In Susa, Iran, in the 5th and 4th millennia BC, ceramics, statuary and seals largely drew inspiration from local fauna, featuring depictions of numerous animal species. In this room devoted to the pre-urban world, much of the wild fauna of this period can be seen (fish, birds, ibex, dogs, boars, etc.). There are snakes as well, which remained a common motif in Iran, closely associated with water.

And today?

In their time, the first villagers of Susa depicted all of the animal species of their region. While the importance of animal representation endured long thereafter, the sheer diversity of the animals they painted, engraved and modelled is extraordinary. It reveals their deep connection with wild fauna and extensive knowledge of their environment – less prevalent in subsequent periods and today.

SEE THE MAP



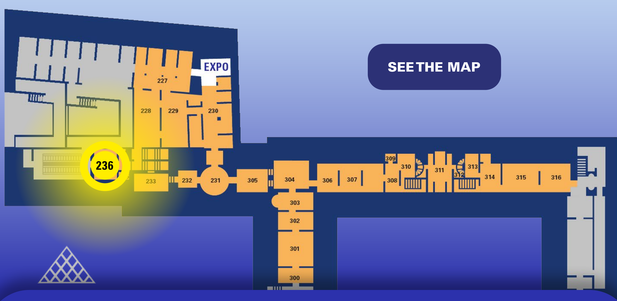
River Transport at the Heart of Mesopotamian Trade

In antiquity, numerous boats transported goods and people along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, making commercial trade between cities possible. River transport in Mesopotamia was far more prevalent than land transport, performed by donkey or by ox-drawn chariot.

And today?

Today, the trend has been entirely reversed around the world. Road transport pollutes a great deal, but is by far the leading mode of domestic goods transport. River transport, which emits three to five times fewer greenhouse gases on average, is largely underdeveloped, particularly in Europe.

SEE THE MAP



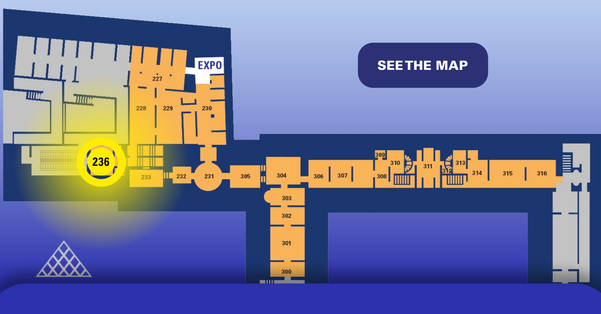
The Stela of the Vultures: the First Water War?

This stela is the oldest known monument using text and images to recount an established historical event: the victory, around 2450 BC, of King Eannatum of Lagash over neighbouring Umma for control of the territory of the Gu'edena, a strategic water source lying between the two city-states. Lagash and Umma had disputed this area for at least 150 years. This conflict, documented throughout its course, this was the best-known of the numerous clashes over rights to land and water in Mesopotamia.

And today?

This conflict pitting Lagash against Umma, largely driven by access to water and more fertile land, may have been the earliest water war. Today, tensions over water are increasingly fuelling conflicts at the local, national and international level. Cooperative efforts nonetheless exist for the sharing of this common resource, following the example of ancient Mesopotamian rules for collective water management.

ALSO IN THIS ROOM



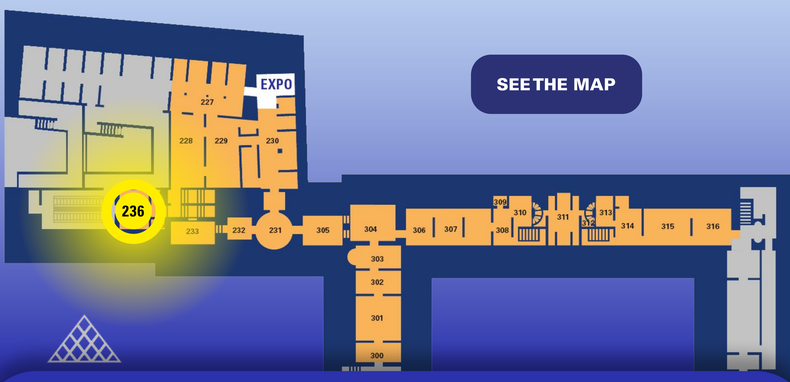
Mesopotamia and the Invention of Irrigation

Very early on, the inhabitants of Mesopotamia invented and developed water irrigation and retention systems in order to handle both overabundance and scarcity of water, as well as insufficient rain levels in southern regions. Invented in the 7th millennium BC, the first known irrigation system was gravity-based, no doubt favoured by the fact that the Tigris and Euphrates lay about three metres above the Mesopotamian plain. This system of gravity-based irrigation enabled the development of thriving agricultural villages cultivating cereals and legumes. The display case opposite presents a selection of their vestiges, dating particularly from the Ubaid period. Irrigation canals were also used for navigation and for monitoring water levels during flooding. These trade routes in turn contributed to the expansion of these villages into the first cities, such as Uruk. Their growth and needs led to increasingly sophisticated hydraulic infrastructure and techniques over time.

And today?

Today, some 70% of water extracted worldwide is for agricultural use. While irrigation turns barren land fertile, overly intensive practices can lead to soil salinisation, or the accumulation of salts in the soil. This can lower agricultural yields and even result in land that cannot be cultivated. A problem already faced by ancient Mesopotamians, it now affects numerous countries, with 11% of global land impacted.

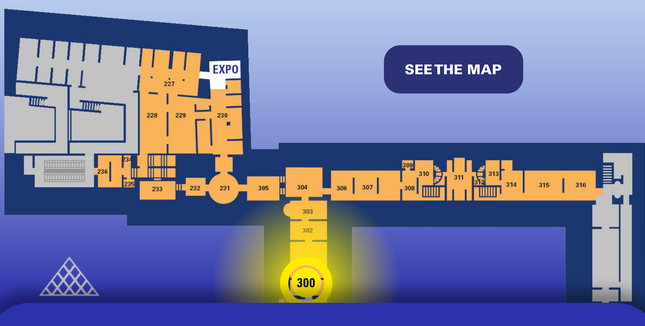
ALSO IN THIS ROOM



Votive relief given by Dudu, a priest of Ningirsu during the reign of King Enmetena of Lagash

This perforated plaque was dedicated to the god Ningirsu, the patron god of the city of Girsu, by the priest Dudu. At the top, Anzu, Ningirsu's thunderbird, clutches two lions in its claws, a reminder of the power over rain that these deities held. At the bottom, a plaited pattern may evoke the water necessary to support a healthy local economy, and particularly for raising livestock and agriculture. In the middle, the priest Dudu and a heifer are depicted.

SEE THE MAP



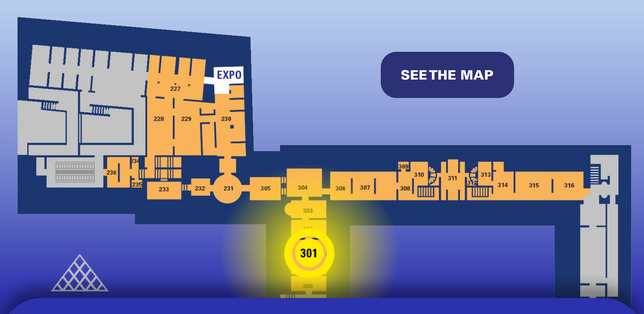
From Fishing to Overfishing

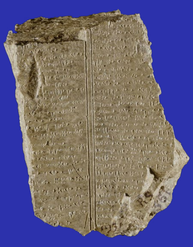
This model of a boat found in Cyprus depicts eight figures and two birds aboard what may be a coracle. This type of light boat was often made using skins stretched over a wooden frame. It was used at the time for fishing as well as navigation. If confirmed, the presence of this model in a tomb could reflect the status of the deceased as a fisherman or sailor.

And today?

Evidence of fishing in Cyprus dates back to the 7th millennium BC – particularly of bluefin tuna, caught by angling or nets in antiquity. In the early 2000s, bluefin tuna populations in the Mediterranean nearly vanished due to the massive development of industrial fishing. Today, thanks to strict quotas and boat inspections, their numbers have stabilised, but other species, such as hake in the Mediterranean and sole and mackerel in the Atlantic, are under threat from overfishing.

SEE THE MAP





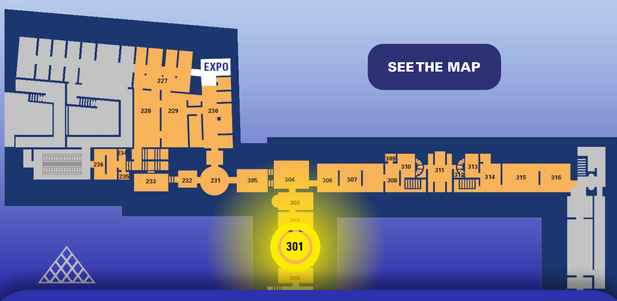
From Drought to Torrential Rains: A Mythological Interpretation of Extremes

This tablet is part of the Baal Cycle, a long mythological poem dedicated to the storm god and protector of the city of Ugarit (modern-day Syria). At the beginning of the cycle, the sea god Yam clashes with Baal to determine who will be king of the gods. Baal is victorious, but Mot, the god of the underworld, refuses to recognise him. Another battle follows in the underworld, where Baal is trapped. The earth is afflicted with a terrible drought, until Mot accepts Baal as king and liberates him.

And today?

In Ugarit, the Baal Cycle connected Mot, the god of the underworld, with drought and famine, and Baal with bountiful rainfall and fertility. Climate change is now increasing the risk of destructive storms throughout the world. With higher temperatures, the atmosphere retains more moisture, which leads to less frequent but more violent rains. These ‘water bombs’ replenish groundwater only slightly: they run off dry soil and are lost flowing into the sea.

ALSO IN THIS ROOM



SEE THE MAP

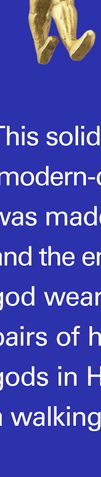
From Baal to Artificial Clouds: Controlling Rain

This stela depicts Baal, the storm and rain god, holding a club in his right hand, and a spear symbolising lightning in his left hand. Baal was the master of the city of Ugarit (in modern-day Syria), watching over the city and its king. Capable of controlling both rain and marine waters, he was associated with the fertility of the land and with maritime transport. His cult was particularly widespread in regions of dry farming (without irrigation), in Syria and Anatolia, for instance.

And today?

Invocations to the gods to bring rainfall were common in antiquity. Since the mid-20th century, geoengineering has been used for this purpose: rain cannot be produced, but through the dispersion of chemical substances into the air, precipitation can be provoked and diverted. Widely used for agriculture in particular, these practices lack a defined legal framework, and may be deeply harmful to ecosystems and elicit tensions between neighbours.

SEE THE MAP



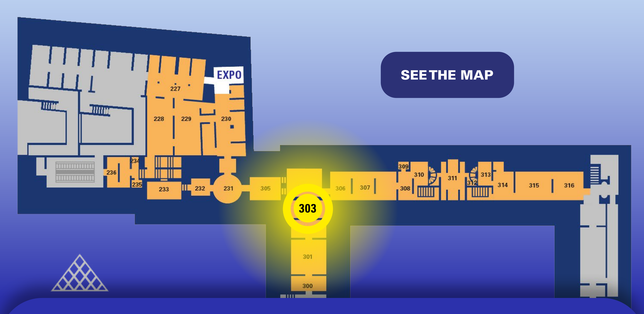
Storm and Drought Deities: The Hittite Empire Confronted with the Climate

This solid gold pendant, found not far from Hattusa (modern-day Turkey), the capital of the Hittite Empire, was made sometime between the 16th century BC and the empire's fall in 1198 BC. It depicts a beardless god wearing a conical headdress topped with two pairs of horns, which is a typical representation of gods in Hittite art. The god, wearing a tunic and in a walking pose, could be a storm god.

And today?

The Hittite Empire's abrupt end was probably accelerated by three years of severe drought around 1200 BC. Already weakened by over-exploitation, Hittite agriculture was likely unable to withstand this. Neighbouring peoples including the Assyrians survived such crises through adaptation: they replaced thirsty crops, such as wheat and peas, with crops requiring less water, such as barley and vetch. This could serve as inspiration in the current context of climate crisis.

SEE THE MAP



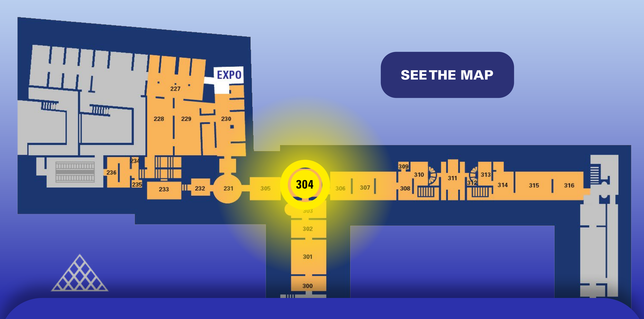
Ain Ghazal and the Human Shaping of Materials and Landscape

This statue, around 9,000 years old, was found in Ain Ghazal (modern-day Jordan), a village of farmers and livestock keepers that was highly developed around 7000 BC, becoming one of the region's biggest villages, with some 3,000 inhabitants. Originally constructed over a reed core that is now lost, this statue is made of lime plaster, the earliest processed material. It is made by heating limestone that is then ground into powder and mixed with water.

And today?

As early as antiquity, human activity led to a substantial decline in the local biodiversity of Ain Ghazal, likely due to overgrazing. Woodland and wetland areas vanished, replaced by semi-arid steppe. Modern-day Jordan has little forest (around 1% of its territory), but continues to house a unique biodiversity in its deserts, rivers and coastal areas. This is nevertheless threatened by human activity and climate change, which is leading to severe droughts.

SEE THE MAP



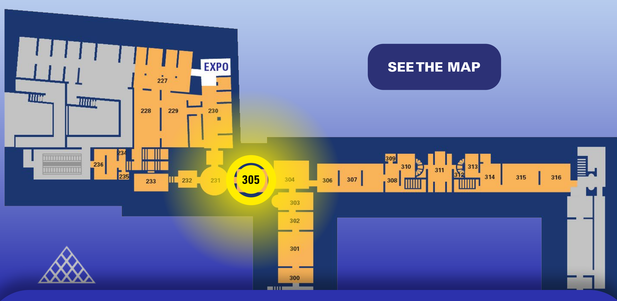
Untash Napirisha and the Importance of Water in Iran

This stela is dedicated by Untash Napirisha, who reigned over Elam (modern-day Iran) in the 14th century BC. At the top, seated on a throne, is Inshushinak, the tutelary god of the city of Susa, in a form likened to Napirisha, god of the highlands of Fars, surrounded by snakes and flowing water. Fish goddesses and mouflon-human hybrid figures heighten this symbolic depiction of water and fertility. The Elamite religion nurtured strong ties to water and nature, with gods also worshipped in open-air sanctuaries.

And today?

According to the UN, today, Iran is in a situation of water stress, and could face ‘extreme water stress’ by 2040. This water shortage due to climate change and the region’s semi-aridity is worsened by poorly regulated urbanisation and ineffective irrigation systems. Agriculture consumes 92% of the country’s water, but around half of this water is thought to be lost in transit from source to field.

SEE THE MAP



SEE THE MAP

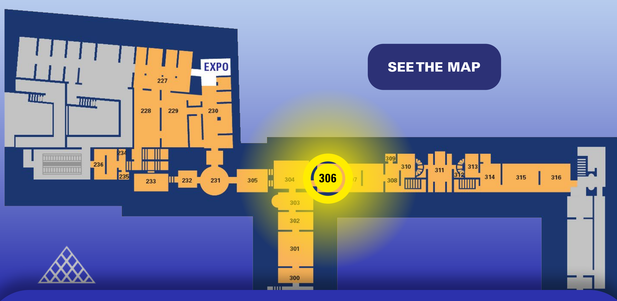
The Scarred One and Natural Water Cycles

This composite statuette depicts a half-human, half-dragon demon with a scale-covered body, commonly known as ‘the Scarred One’. In the vessel originally held under his arm, he symbolically captured torrents of water, causing the destruction of vegetation in winter. This demon was associated with a goddess of fertility. Overpowering him – and inflicting him with a ritual scar in the process – she ensured the liberation of waters in the spring and the rejuvenation of nature.

And today?

The Oxus Civilisation, from which the Scarred One hails, developed between the late 3rd and early 2nd millennium BC in Central Asia, in a semi-arid mountainous area lying between modern-day Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. Today, climate change has led to the melting of glaciers, which were a primary water source, and jeopardised agriculture, energy production and political stability throughout the region.

SEE THE MAP



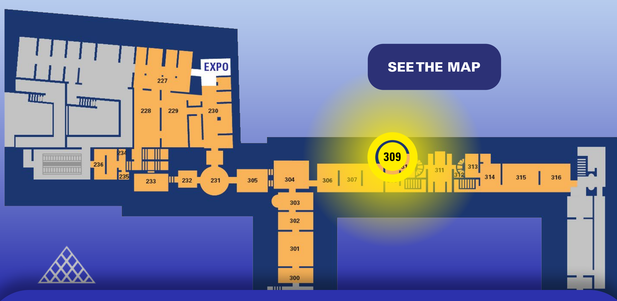
Marlik Metalworking and Nomadism in Iran

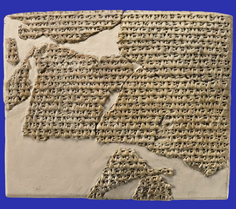
This vessel was produced in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC in northern Iranian communities that were no doubt partially nomadic, and therefore even more vulnerable to water access issues. Made of electrum, a mixture of gold and silver, it testifies to the trade in raw materials undertaken between what is known as the Marlik culture and its neighbours in southern Iran and Mesopotamia. This vessel, depicting a bull-man as master of buffalo, reveals the technical excellence and range of contacts of these populations.

And today?

At the beginning of the early 20th century, one-third of Iran's population (approximately 2.5 million people) was still nomadic. Today, around one million people are nomadic – a way of life that is gradually vanishing. Some nomads have used the same routes for thousands of years, following water sources and green pastures with the seasons. But the rampant drought drying up waterways, dust storms and the appeal of sedentary life have led to a decline in this way of life and its ecosystem.

SEE THE MAP





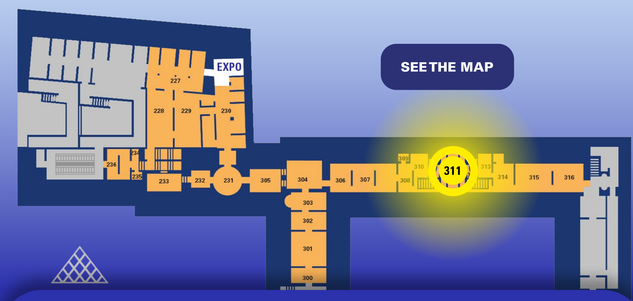
From the Charter of Darius to Globalised Trade

This trilingual foundation charter of the palace of King Darius, in Elamite, Akkadian and Old Persian, describes the materials used to construct the building and their place of origin. Hailing from distant and wide-ranging places, from Africa to the Mediterranean to South and Central Asia, they illustrate the vast cross-continental network of trade – particularly maritime trade – that already existed in antiquity, and in the Persian Empire more specifically.

And today?

Like the immense trade zone that developed in the relative peace of the Persian Empire, international commerce today links populations across different continents. It also makes products from around the globe available to consumers, mainly via maritime shipping. While their low cost is appealing, these products are nevertheless responsible for over half of our carbon emissions, as well as massive deforestation in tropical regions, referred to as ‘imported deforestation’.

SEE THE MAP



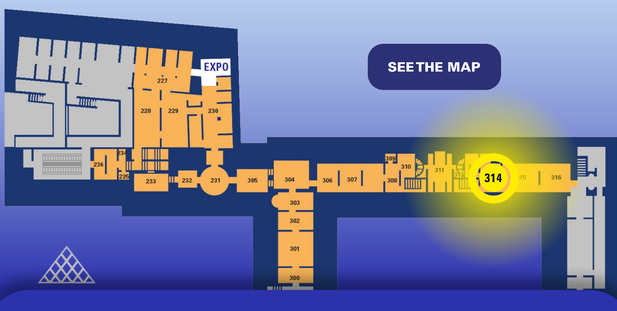
Shadrafa and Healing Water: Ancient Worship Practices and Contemporary Health Issues

This stela represents Shadrafa, the Phoenician god associated with medicine, perched on a lion. Shadrafa is thought to be a variation of the Syrian storm god Baal, which whom he shares a strong link to water. This stela may come from Laha, a port known to have existed in the 3rd and 2nd millennia, which subsequently became a marshy area conducive to water cures. Curative properties may have been attributed to the waters of the site devoted to Shadrafa, as was the case of the neighbouring sanctuary of Eshmun at Amrit, which held a basin.

And today?

Water is essential for all life forms and continues to be used for therapeutic purposes. It is impossible to survive for more than two to four days without water, and drinking too little water, or water of poor quality, can be very harmful to health. Today, it is estimated that around 10% of the global population lacks access to good-quality drinking water, leading to numerous illnesses such as cholera, which saw a resurgence in Iraq and Lebanon in 2022.

SEE THE MAP



Camel Domestication: The Key to Desert Routes

On this funerary stela, a horseman guides a camel, a key animal for the caravan trade in Arabia. Capable even in summer of going over two weeks without drinking water, this animal was indispensable for crossing the desert. At the time this stela was made, land routes linked modern-day southern Yemen, where myrrh and incense were produced, to the Mediterranean coast and Mesopotamia.

And today?

During the a process of animal domestication, only a fraction of the wild population is maintained, generally leading to a sharp decrease in genetic diversity. In the event of epidemics or environmental variations, species with low genetic diversity are substantially more vulnerable. Camels, which were likely domesticated around the 2nd millennium BC in Arabia, have nevertheless maintained a high genetic diversity, making them more resistant than other domestic species.

SEE THE MAP

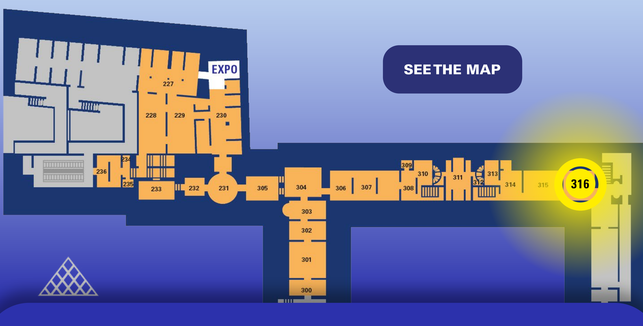
Palmyra: an Oasis Shaped by Water, Now Under Threat

The oasis of Palmyra in modern-day Syria dates to at least the 2nd millennium BC, developing at the crossroads of the caravan routes between the Mediterranean coast and the Mesopotamian plain. From left to right, this relief depicts the moon, storm and sun gods. The latter is assimilated to Iarhibol, the god of Palmyra's main spring, Eqfa. This spring sustained the oasis until it dried up at the end of the 20th century. It was replaced by wells drilled to extract groundwater.

And today?

The oasis of Palmyra lies in desert steppe at the Eqfa spring, the primary site where the extensive water table reaches the surface. In the event of low precipitation, the springs allowed for the irrigation of crops. Since 2011, the orchards have been ravaged by Daesh, the Syrian civil war and militias, endangering the entire oasis. Without trees, the soil becomes unstable and the city is more vulnerable to sandstorms, threatening the whole area with desertification..

SEE THE MAP



The Amathus Vase and Water in Cyprus

This monumental limestone vase weighs over twelve tonnes and can hold around 5,000 litres. Starting in antiquity, numerous cisterns were built to catch and store rainwater in Cyprus. This vase, much more elaborately decorated than ordinary cisterns, was likely used to store water for the cult of Aphrodite. A model found in the ancient city of Idalion in Cyprus indicates that movable stairs likely allowed worshippers to access the inside of the vase.

And today?

Water, which has always been a precious resource in Cyprus, is becoming increasingly scarce due to climate change. The island of Cyprus is now reliant on seawater desalination plants to supply potable water to its inhabitants. These plants, used in numerous countries facing drought, provide a solution to water scarcity. However, they are extremely energy-intensive and release brine that is toxic to marine biodiversity.

SEE THE MAP

Copyrights

BACK

LOUVRE

Musée du Louvre
Interpretation and Public Outreach Department
Graphic and Digital Interpretation Division