

(Attachment)

Supplementary info of "The Wonders of Ancient Mesopotamia" exhibition

During the third millennium BC, the southern Mesopotamia was distinguished by two regions - Sumer and Akkad. However, for much of the time between 3000 and 2000 BC southern Mesopotamia was united by a common 'Sumerian' culture with shared beliefs and artistic traditions. The first city was developed in Sumer before 3500 BC, one of the major cities in Sumer was Uruk, which grew until it covered over five square kilometers. These cities owed a complex social system where people cultivated crops, managed herds and flocks, manufactured goods and established trade network.

Besides, writing proper also began in ancient Mesopotamia. The earliest writing is found in clay tablets discovered in a temple in the city of Uruk dating to around 3300 BC. At first the Sumerians wrote by drawing pictographs of animals or objects. Later they pressed a specially cut reed into the moist clay. This technique produced the wedge-shaped impressions that give the writing its modern name - cuneiform. Visitors will be able to see at the Sumer section of the exhibition, the early administrative tablet from 3300 to 3000 BC, and other significant relics such as a delicate gold drinking cup found in the death pit of the Queen's grave which was designed to filter the sediment of beer, and a wide range of cylinder seals made of exotic stones bearing mythical images.

The name Assyria derives from the ancient city of Ashur, located on the Tigris River in northern Iraq. At the heart of the Assyrian empire were the cities of Ashur, Nimrud, Nineveh and Khorsabad and magnificent palaces were built in these cities by the Assyrian kings. The interiors of some rooms in Assyrian palaces of the ninth to seventh centuries BC were lined with large slabs of local gypsum stone carved in low relief. The main purpose of these wall reliefs was to glorify the king and empire and to impress and intimidate visitors. They show an idealised world in which the Assyrians defeat and punish their enemies and the king is a fearless hunter.

King Ashurbanipal (668 BC-631 BC) was an unusually literate and scholarly king. He created a major royal library in his palace at Nineveh containing an unrivalled collection of specialist knowledge and literature. Among the thousands of tablets are copies of some of the greatest Mesopotamian literary works such as the Epic of Gilgamesh. In addition the library contained writings on a wide variety of subjects including medicine, mathematics, astronomy and divination. Artefacts on display at the Assyria section of the exhibition date from the time

of the Assyrian empire at its height. Highlight exhibits include the wall relief describing the battle of Til-Tuba, the largest exhibit in the exhibition, measuring two-metre high and five-metre wide. Another significant relief is entitled "Dying Lion", in which the dying lion was portrayed by the sculptor with great realism and attention to detail, representing a high level of craftsmanship of the time. Visitors will also be given a rare opportunity to view the tablet VI of the Epic of Gilgamesh, which tells a universal story of one man's heroic quest for immortality and through the narrative of his journey, deals with issues of life and death which concern us all.

The ancient city of Babylon is located on the Euphrates River in what is now central Iraq. During King Nebuchadnezzar's long reign (605 BC-562 BC), Babylon achieved its greatest glory and was the largest, most important city in the world. There were rich legacies and fantastic tales in Babylon including the renovation and enlargement of the ziggurat named "Etemenanki" by King Nebuchadnezzar, which was the inspiration for the biblical Tower of Babel; and the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

The extinction of Babylon is also a mystery. The kingdom did not suffer a sudden and dramatic 'Fall' with the Persian conquest in 539 BC. The city became a Persian capital, then the capital of Alexander the Great. Babylon slowly faded over centuries but the vision of a sudden and catastrophic end has left a great legacy in art and culture. The highlight exhibits in the Babylon section of the exhibition include a stone monument of the record of Nebuchadnezzar's success, and drawings on the Tower of Babel.

Alongside with the ancient relics, additional coverage is given in this exhibition to provide background on the archaeological discovery since the 19th century and to address modern issues and recent efforts in preserving or salvaging the heritage in the region.

Ends