

Breath of Heaven, Breath of Earth:
Ancient Near Eastern Art from American Collections
Hallie Ford Museum of Art at Willamette University
August 31 – December 22, 2013

Teachers Guide

This guide is to help teachers prepare students for a field trip to the exhibition, *Breath of Heaven, Breath of Earth: Ancient Near Eastern Art from American Collections*; propose ideas to reinforce the gallery experience and broaden curriculum concepts; and offer ways to lead their own tours/activities. Teachers, however, will need to consider the level and needs of their students in adapting these materials and lessons.

Goals

- ❑ To introduce students to the geography and different cultures of the ancient Near East
- ❑ To introduce students to the major themes found in the exhibition: The Divine Realm, The Animal Realm and The Human Realm
- ❑ To introduce students to the materials and techniques used in the art of the ancient Near East

Objectives

Students will be able to

- ❑ Identify characteristics of the art of the ancient Near East
- ❑ Discuss how individual objects relate to the major themes found in the exhibition
- ❑ Discuss how the art of the ancient Near East communicates the values, beliefs, and ideas of the cultures that created it
- ❑ Identify a variety of materials and techniques used in the art of the ancient Near East
- ❑ Theorize about use and meaning of objects through observation and inference
- ❑ Identify similarities and differences between objects from different cultures and time periods in the ancient Near East
- ❑ Discuss the role of archaeology in learning more about the objects in the exhibition

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BEFORE THE MUSEUM VISIT

- If possible, visit the exhibition on your own beforehand.
- Use the images and suggested discussion and activities to introduce students to the art of the ancient Near East.
- Make sure students are aware of gallery etiquette.

AT THE MUSEUM

- Review with students what is expected – their task and museum behavior.
- Be selective – don't try to look at or talk about everything in the exhibition.
- Focus on the works of art. Encourage students to look closely at each work of art and consider beginning with the visual scanning they used in the classroom as well as the suggested "At the Museum" discussions:
 - Describe what you see here.
 - How has the artist used the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis)?
 - What materials and techniques were used?
 - How was the object used? If unknown, what can we learn from the object about its purpose or meaning?
 - What does the object communicate to the viewer about the culture that created it?

INTRODUCTION:

Breath of Heaven, Breath of Earth: Ancient Near Eastern Art from American Collections

“Enlil uttered ‘Breath of Heaven, Breath of Earth,’
...vegetation, coming out of the earth, rises up.”

The recreation of the world after the flood,
Sumerian Deluge Epic, ca. 2150 BCE, lines 251ff

The civilizations of the ancient Near East date to the dawn of recorded history and gave Western civilization such concepts as cities, writing, literature, schools, laws, poetry, philosophy, medicine, economics, and metallurgy, as well as two of the world’s great religions—Judaism and Christianity. While we often look to ancient Greece and Rome as the birthplace of Western civilization, it is to the even older peoples and cultures that emerged in the lands of the Fertile Crescent—Sumerians, Akkadians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Phoenicians, Canaanites, Israelites, and Persians—to whom we owe an equally important cultural debt.

Breath of Heaven, Breath of Earth: Ancient Near Eastern Art from American Collections features sixty-four objects on loan from some of the most distinguished public and private collections in the United States, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, and the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, among many others. The title of the exhibition comes from a verse in the Sumerian flood story where Enlil, a leading deity of the Sumerian pantheon, remakes the world using that phrase.

The exhibition encompasses the geographic regions of Mesopotamia, Syria and the Levant, Anatolia, and Iran, and explores several broad themes found in the art of the ancient Near East: the divine realm (gods and goddesses); the human realm (kings, warriors, hunters, and the elite); and the animal realm (domesticated and wild animals). These images reveal a wealth of information about the people and cultures that produced them: their mythology, religious beliefs, concepts of kingship, social structure, and daily life.

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BACKGROUND

The Ancient Near East
By Trudy S. Kawami

The Land

The land of the ancient Near East encompasses a rich and varied landscape, presenting a panorama with few neat boundaries (see Map, page 24). Its geographical features like rivers and mountain ranges do not necessarily conform to modern national borders, and often run through them. Using the old geographical terms for the various regions (since they carry a lighter political burden than the nation-state labels of the twenty-first century), the central area of our concern is Mesopotamia, the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. It is a relatively flat, easily irrigated plain that rolls from Syria in the north to the subtropical marshes at the head of the Persian Gulf.

The area we refer to today as Mesopotamia roughly corresponds to modern Iraq. This once fertile land is rich in clay, which was an important medium of early artistic expression. The Tigris and Euphrates Rivers themselves rise far to the north in the mountainous uplands of Anatolia, modern Turkey. In antiquity Anatolia produced many kinds of metallic ores that yielded gold, silver, electrum, copper, tin, and iron. It was also a source of lumber and wool.

To the south of Anatolia, the rocky rim of the eastern Mediterranean forms the western edge of Syria and the Levant, modern Lebanon, Israel, Gaza, the West Bank, and Jordan. This habitable environment includes mountains with cedar forests as well as pleasant valleys and fertile river plains. Parts of the region could easily be connected via coastal sailing, even reaching more distant cultures like Cyprus to the west and especially Egypt to the south. The Mediterranean Sea defines the western edge of the area we call the Levant, but its eastern edge is less precise. The open, rolling, and sometimes arid eastern portions of Syria and Jordan merge into the northern plains of Mesopotamia with no clear demarcation. In antiquity the important cities in this transitional region reflected a mixture of the cultures of Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Egypt.

To the east of Mesopotamia a series of rocky ridges rise up like a wall, culminating in the Zagros Mountains, which form a distinct boundary between Mesopotamia and the Iranian plateau. These mountains, and their broad verdant valleys, run somewhat to the southeast, so that the lowlands of southwestern Iran merge with no clear boundary into the plains and marshes of southern Mesopotamia. The land of the ancient Near East was as varied as the art that sprang from it and the people who produced that art.

The People

Many peoples populated the Near East in antiquity, but without records of their writing we cannot tell what languages the inhabitants spoke nor what they believed. It is only in the third millennium BCE, with the spread of cuneiform, a writing system using wedge-shaped marks on clay or stone, that we begin to see the varied ethnic and linguistic groups across the region. Sumerians, whose distinctive language was related to no other, lived in southern Mesopotamia, but *toponyms*, the names of cities and places, suggest an older non-Sumerian population. People speaking and writing various Semitic languages like Akkadian, Eblaite, and Amorite, were scattered across Syria and the Levant and into northern Mesopotamia. Elamite, another language neither Semitic nor Indo-European, may have prevailed in the adjacent regions of southwestern Iran, but our understanding of their early writing system and the language it represented is still poor. The linguistic mix was such that Shulgi, a Sumerian king who ruled

a good portion of Mesopotamia and southwestern Iran from about 2094 to 2047 BCE, claimed that he could speak five languages.

By the second millennium BCE, when writing was commonly used in Anatolia, we can identify Indo-European-speaking newcomers like the Hittites, who spoke and wrote Luwian and related languages, as well as what seems to be a small group speaking and writing Hattic. Hurrians, who spoke a language possibly related to those of the Caucasus, are known in northern Mesopotamia. The Kassites, whose little-documented language is known only from personal names, stand alone as an isolated group that ruled for a time in the south. While the later language variants of Akkadian, Assyrian, and Babylonian became widespread across large areas, many scribes, along with merchants and officials, were bi- or trilingual. By the earlier years of the first millennium BCE, the Assyrian empire was using at least two Semitic languages, Standard Assyrian and Aramaic, which originated in Northern Syria, in its well-developed bureaucracy. The Assyrians could also communicate with those Luwian speakers living in Syria, the Urartians of eastern Anatolia with whom they fought, and speakers of various West Semitic dialects in the Levant like Hebrew, Aramaic, Phoenician, and early Arabic. The Indo-European speaking Achaemenid Persians, military and political successors to the Assyrians, used Semitic Aramaic, Old Persian, and local Elamite in their official records. In addition to these ethnic and linguistic complexities, the basic lifeways of urban traders, rural farmers, and transient herders ranged across all ethnic and linguistic groups. The ancient Near East at any period was a rich blend of many varied peoples.

The Arts

The major art forms of architecture, painting, and sculpture in clay, plaster, ivory, and stone already had a long tradition in the Near East by the end of the Neolithic Period (the New Stone Age, from the eighth through the sixth millennia BCE). Art bloomed in the Neolithic Period although scattered earlier examples are known. Even before the ceramic arts were fully developed, societies formed in the Levant, Syria, and Anatolia that supported craftspeople who made clay, stone, and ivory sculptures displaying remarkable skill and beauty.

In the subsequent millennia, the emergence of creativity, paralleling the growth of the population, shifted from the mountainous rims of Anatolia and the Levant to the flat plains of Mesopotamia. Here the development of large-scale irrigation gave rise to extensive agriculture, and to judge from what has survived, the artistic impulses of this period focused on ceramics. Agriculture in turn supported extensive, complex, and hierarchical societies whose elite by the late fourth millennium BCE supported the production of art on a large scale.

The American Discovery of the Ancient Near East
By John Olbrantz

The European exploration of the Middle East began in the eighteenth century with the Danish explorer Carsten Niebuhr. He was soon followed by diplomats and archaeologists like Claudius Rich, Henry Creswicke Rawlinson, Paul-Émile Botta, and Austen Henry Layard, who took a keen interest in the art and history of the region. Often brilliant linguists and **Orientalists**, these British and French adventurers were for the most part amateur archaeologists, smitten with the romance and allure of the Middle East and propelled by a powerful curiosity. Over time, they would expand our knowledge of the ancient civilizations of the Middle East in their race to secure art treasures for their nations. Americans would enter the race late, and while they would make their own contributions to scholarship in the field, the first American travelers were Protestant missionaries from New England, keen on “promoting the spread of Christianity in heathen lands.”

The first American-sponsored excavation in the Middle East was the University of Pennsylvania’s expedition to the holy city of Nippur, in southern Mesopotamia, from 1889 to 1900. During the early 1900s, the University of Chicago and Harvard University would mount expeditions to Bismaya in Mesopotamia and Samaria in Palestine, respectively. In the 1920s and 1930s, with the support of philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, Jr., the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago would maintain dozens of excavations and surveys in Mesopotamia, Syria and the Levant, Anatolia, and Iran. At the same time, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology and the British Museum would jointly sponsor the excavation of the ancient city of Ur “of the Chaldees,” an important city in southern Mesopotamia in the third millennium BCE and the legendary birthplace of the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 11:27–29).

As the University of Chicago and University of Pennsylvania were mounting major expeditions to the Middle East during the first half of the twentieth century, shipping back thousands and thousands of objects to fill their respective galleries and storerooms, a number of other collections of ancient Near Eastern art were being formed at this time. The Metropolitan Museum of Art began to acquire ancient Near Eastern art at the end of the nineteenth century, and during the first half of the twentieth century major collections were being formed at Yale University, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Field Museum of Natural History, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, among others. In recent years, significant collections have emerged at the Freer Sackler Gallery in Washington, DC, the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Seattle Art Museum.

Over the past two centuries, Americans have played an important role in the discovery of the ancient Near East. While American missionaries initially traveled to the Middle East to bring Christianity to the region, they were soon replaced by archaeologists and scholars who sought to scientifically unravel the origins and history of the ancient Near East. Over the past one hundred fifty years, American archaeologists have unearthed the ancient civilizations of the Near East and have brought to light the people and places of the Old Testament. American philologists have studied the wedge-shaped marks on cuneiform tablets and seals unearthed at these archaeological sites and, through painstaking research and scholarship, have brought to light the lives, hopes, dreams, and aspirations of these ancient peoples. American collectors have acquired stunning examples of ancient Near Eastern art and have helped preserve them for future generations, while American curators and others have helped make these once remote and obscure civilizations accessible to a general audience through collections, special exhibitions, and popular writings. Indeed, the American impact on the study and interpretation of the ancient Near East has been both significant and profound.

WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

The art of the ancient Near East displays a great variety of forms and styles, yet reflects the shared impulse to depict, and therefore understand, the relationships between and within the divine and earthly realms. Spiritual, religious and political beliefs and messages were primarily communicated visually through images (even when inscriptions were included) rather than through text alone.

The craftspeople who created the objects are unknown to us today but we do know through texts that they were valued and respected for their skills and techniques. Innovation and creativity were not prized; visual conventions were followed and works were often created as part of a ritual. For example, statues would be vivified, or brought to life, through certain ceremonies where the craftsman would finish the details of the eyes or the mouth.

1.



Eye Idol
Syria, excavated from Tell Brak, Middle Uruk Period, 3700-3500 BCE
Gypseous alabaster
2 1/8 x 1 3/8" (5.3 x 3.5 cm)
Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of the Institute of Archaeology,
University College, London, 1951, 51.59.10

This simple stone form with a thick, stalk-like neck has two round “eyes” incised at the top. A shallow, V-shaped cut at the base of the neck and a second diagonal incision near it suggest the neckline of a cloak wrapped around the body. Typically forms like this are called “eye idols,” and this is one of more than a thousand similar figures – along with beads, stamp and cylinder seals, and small carved stones – embedded in the platform of the Gray Eye Temple, whose mud bricks were gray and easily distinguished from the red mud bricks of the temple beneath it and the white-plastered surfaces of the temple above it.

These items were either buried as **votive** offerings at the time of construction or were deposited to make room for more offerings in the new temple. Since writing was not yet developed in this period we have no way of knowing exactly what these little stone forms meant. Nonetheless their human-like shape and prominent eyes evoke the inlaid eyes of later sculptures and suggest that the works were made with the intention of having human qualities.

Suggested Discussion

- Describe what you see here.
- Discuss the use of the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis)? How are they used to suggest the human form?
- Why do you think the eyes are emphasized?
- Discuss how and where the “eye idol” was discovered. Combined with the way the object looks – its features, size, material – what possible meaning and use can be inferred?

At the Museum:

Compare and contrast other abstract objects that suggest the human form. What features are emphasized and why? What possible meaning and use can be inferred from these objects?

2.



Cylinder seal with the goddess Ishtar
Iraq, Old Babylonian Period, ca. 1800 BCE
Hematite
1 3/16 x 3/4 x 3/4" (3 x 1.9 x 1.9 cm)
Ackland Art Museum, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ackland Fund, 72.53.3

Carved cylinder-shaped seals were used to create a “signature” for documents. The person responsible would roll the cylinder on clay tablets or tablet cases while still pliable to create an impression. This impression served to identify the owner as well as protect documents from being opened without authorization. Cylinder seals were hollowed like a bead to be worn as a protective talisman or as jewelry.

This cylinder seal’s modern impression shows the goddess **Ishtar**, modeled with great naturalism; she is facing the viewer, her form clearly indicated beneath her robe. Her long hair falls along her shoulders in a fine strand ending in a curl on either side. The goddess wears the horned miter, a tall tapered hat with horns wrapped around the front, as a symbol of her divinity. She is fully armed with a scimitar-like sword in her lowered left hand and a multiheaded mace, a symbol of authority, in her extended right hand. She carries two quivers of arrows on her back, their bands forming a V-like neckline across her chest, and she stands with one bare leg braced against a tiny snarling lion. A well-dressed and perhaps royal figure, wearing a round-brimmed cap and a long fringed mantel, bears a small sacrificial goat. He is followed by a second goddess who stands with her hands raised in either prayer or approval. The elegant proportions of the figures and the delicate details of their garments, set against a spacious empty ground, give them a corporeality rarely found on such small seals. While the scene shows the meeting of a worshiper and the deity, the viewer is also a part of this **tableau**, as the goddess looks out directly at us. Worship scenes like this were very popular in the Old Babylonian Period, and some examples are known in which the scene was completely carved except for a blank panel that was left for whatever **cuneiform** inscription the owner wished to add.

Inscription:

Line 1 ^dNISABA

Line 2 ^dEZINU(!)

Translation: “

(deity) Nisaba, (deity) Ashnan”

Here, the superscripted “d” takes the place of the starlike first character of each line; it is a modern convention for indicating the Sumerian logogram DINGIR, indicating a divinity. It was not spoken. The exclamation point is another convention used to indicate a sign that was miswritten by the original scribe; this translation has been amended by a modern editor.

Nisaba is the Sumerian goddess of writing, accounting and grain rationing/measuring, Ashnan is a goddess whose name means grain. It is not uncommon for the inscription on a seal to mention a deity that is not depicted on it.

The Old Babylonian Period (2000-1600 BCE) in southern Mesopotamia was rich in literary activity; scribes composed and recorded poetry, and religious and scientific works in Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform.

Suggested Activity and Discussion:

- Describe what you see here.
- Discuss the use of the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis)?
- Discuss the use of cylinder seals and its importance in the ancient Near East. Do we use similar objects today? How would you use a cylinder seal?
- Discuss the theme of the cylinder seal and the characters depicted and referred to in the cuneiform text. Why do you think the individual figures were represented in this way? What might the cylinder seal tell us about its owner?
- Discuss the *intaglio* technique of carving into the surface of the stone cylinder to create a raised impression when rolled on clay.
 - What design and compositional considerations must be considered? (the image must be carved “backwards” to create the readable impression; only parts of the design or “scene” may be seen when the cylinder is rolled only part of the way to accommodate a smaller surface; the design may repeat when the cylinder is rolled on a larger surface)
- Create your own cylinder seal (see page 18)
- Write your name in cuneiform: <http://www.penn.museum/cgi/cuneiform.cgi>

For younger audiences:

- Create your own cuneiform tablet:
http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/young_explorers/create/cuneiform_tablet.aspx

At the Museum:

- Compare and contrast the many cylinder seals in the exhibition, noting the various materials, themes, compositions, depictions of the human figure and animals, and the use of inscription.
- While major gods and goddesses like Ishtar are easily identifiable to modern viewers by their attributes and inscriptions, it is more difficult to identify lesser or local deities. Although they would have been readily recognized then, they are unknown to us today by name. However, we can get a general idea of the kind of deity they are. Look for the *plaque with a standing goddess holding jars* and the *relief fragment with a water goddess* in the first gallery. What tells us they are deities? What can we infer about them from their dress and attributes?

- Compare and contrast the depictions of the divine from the different regions and cultures. How are they alike? How are they different? What might account for their similarities and differences?
- Compare and contrast the depictions of deities with depictions of humans. How are they alike? How are they different? What might account for their similarities and differences?

3.



Plaque with the demon Humbaba
Iraq, Old Babylonian Period, 1800-1600 BCE
Clay
4 x 3 ¾' (10.1 x 9.7 cm)
Yale University Babylonian Collection, New Haven, YBC 2238

Humbaba is a major figure in Tablet II of the **Gilgamesh epic**. There he is described as the monstrous guardian of the Cedar Forest (presumably in Lebanon) where Gilgamesh and his best friend Enkidu travel to secure timber. Humbaba is killed by Enkidu (or Gilgamesh and Enkidu together in another version) and the timber is taken. But Humbaba was not an inherently evil character, merely a strange and powerful one. He was appointed forest guardian by Enlil, one of the supreme Mesopotamian gods, and after Humbaba's death the god Enlil distributed his terrible auras or radiances to various natural elements like fields, rivers, reed beds, and wild animals. Humbaba was always depicted with a broad frontal face, thick features, and a wide, often grinning mouth with bared teeth. Frequently his face was caricatured as a pile of animal entrails and because of this he was later called Guardian of the Fortress of the Intestines. Even when depicting a monster, the desire for a human form asserted itself in the art of the ancient Near East.

Suggested Activities and Discussion:

- Describe the features of the image of Humbaba. How do they reflect his character?
- Discuss the use of the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis)?
- Read the story of Gilgamesh and his friend Enkidu's encounter with Humbaba (see bibliography, page 21).
- Discuss the idea that Humbaba, as a servant of the gods and the guardian of the Cedar Forest, was not an inherently evil character. How might he be a metaphor for nature, or the natural elements?

To view an image of Humbaba as Guardian of the Fortress of the Intestines, go to http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/c/clay_mask_of_the_demon_huwawa.aspx

At the Museum:

- Look for other supernatural figures in the exhibition; anthropomorphic, animal, or both. What characteristics do they have that suggest they are supernatural? What might they represent? How do their depictions compare to those of humans and/or deities?

4.



Sherd with stags

Turkey, excavated from Alishar Hüyük, 800-700 BCE

Ceramic with slip

6 x 7 3/8" (15.3 x 18.8 cm)

The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, A10266

The Phrygian-speaking people of central Anatolia continued the tradition of painted pottery after many adjacent cultures ceased to treat ceramics as fine art. Their work was characterized by a strong design sense that used geometric forms to animate the surface of the vessels. This Alishar Hüyük fragment depicts red deer stags, long a favorite animal in the art of Anatolia, framed in a rectangular panel on the side of what was once a large open jar. The delicate abstraction of the constantly curving line shows a level of visual sophistication rarely seen in the ceramic arts of the first millennium BCE. Although the stags are stationary, the curves that form their bodies and slender legs, the extended ears, and their elongated muzzles echo the sweep of the antlers, producing a sensation of imminent motion. The dotted double circles that evenly fill the ground of the panel evoke falling snow for the modern viewer, though we cannot say that this was the intention of the ancient painter.

This fragment belonged to a type of large, open-mouthed jar whose broad shoulders were painted with panels of stags, occasional does, and sometimes horned wild goats. Found in residential or domestic contexts at Alishar, they were called storage jars by the excavators. But their wide openings and exuberant decoration suggest a more public and perhaps ceremonial function.

Suggested Discussion

- Describe what you see here.
- Discuss the use of the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis)?
- What about the animal figure suggests a stag?
- How has the potter created a sense of imminent motion in the design— almost as if the stags are travelling through a landscape?
- Imagine the design of this sherd (or shard) continuing around an intact jar. Compare what you can see of the design on the top band to the design in the center band. How are they similar? How are they different? Why do you think the bottom band is left undecorated?
- What suggests that the original jar would have been used in a public or ceremonial function rather than as a storage jar in a home?

- Pottery is the most common art form found in the ruins of cities in the ancient Near East. What might account for this?

At the Museum:

- Compare and contrast the stags on the sherd to the deer head rhyton (drinking vessel) in this exhibition. What qualities do they share? What gives these depictions their “deer-ness”?
- Which animal in the exhibition best embodies the qualities of its species? Explain your choice.

5.



Head of a calf

Iraq, excavated from Ur, Early Dynastic II-III Periods, 2600-2400 BCE

Copper alloy and bitumen

3 ¼ x 5 5/8 x 4 ½” (8.2 x 14.2 x 11.5 cm)

In Mesopotamia, animals were usually shown realistically with age and gender clearly rendered and details specific to each species carefully noted. The wide forehead and short, broad muzzle, the large eyes, and particularly the budding horns identify this cast-copper head as a young calf, not an adult animal. The head was cast by the **lost-wax** process with bitumen – a naturally occurring asphalt – serving as the core instead of the usual clay. Only the ears were separately made and then attached. This little head came from a well-furnished grave in the so-called Royal Cemetery at Ur. Other bovine heads of gold, silver, and copper alloy made in the same manner were mounted on the sounding boxes of lyres excavated from other graves in the cemetery. The wooden parts of the lyres had perished long ago but their imprint remained in the soil. It has been speculated that the size and maturity of the animal heads somehow indicated the tone of the musical instrument. The relationship, however, remains only speculation as small gold calves’ heads also ornamented the burial cart of the Lady Pu-abu who had one of the more lavish graves at the site.

The Early Dynastic period in southern Mesopotamia (3000-2350 BCE) saw the emergence of large independent cities where life was focused on the gods who were thought to live in temples built in their name. These city-states were controlled by a king and his family: the legendary king Gilgamesh is believed to have lived during this period between 2750 and 2500 BCE.

Suggested Discussion and Activities

- Describe what you see here.
- Discuss the use of the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis).
- Learn more about the Royal Cemetery of Ur http://www.penn.museum/sites/iraq/?page_id=26

- Compare this head of a calf to the animal head found on the “Silver Lyre” in one of the graves at the Royal Cemetary of Ur. Discuss the theory that the size and maturity of the animal heads somehow indicated the tone of the musical instrument.
http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/s/silver_lyre.aspx
- Game boards were among the objects discovered in the graves of the Royal Cemetary at Ur. Learn about the Royal Game of Ur and play (online) one of the most popular games in the ancient world.
http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/me/t/the_royal_game_of_ur.aspx

At The Museum

- Animals in ancient Near Eastern art were never depicted for their own sake. Rather they served as companion or sacrificial animals to the deities or symbols of secular power, well-being, strength or sustenance.
 - Find at least three examples of the above in depictions of animals throughout the exhibition. Explain your choice.
- Compare depictions of animals to those of humans, noting the degree of naturalism. Which appear to be portrayed more naturalistically and why?

6.



Relief fragment with a battle scene

Iraq, from Nineveh, excavated by William Kennet Loftus in August, 1854, Southwest Palace of Sennacherib, Neo-Assyrian Period, reign of Sennacherib, 705-681 BCE

Limestone or gypseous alabaster

10 x 8 ½” (25.4 x 21.5 cm)

Seattle Art Museum, Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection and Hagop Kevorkian, 46.49

This fragment is part of a relief scene that itself was part of the overall decorative scheme of the Southwest Palace of Sennacherib, which featured depictions of the king as a great warrior, hunter and high priest. Originally, these reliefs were colorful and often life-like in scale, with numerous figures crowded together and detailed backgrounds, many indicating specific places.

The fragment, which was cut from a larger wall relief in the nineteenth century, shows a pair of Assyrian soldiers in identical garb. One is an archer; the other wields a spear and with a large curving shield that protects both fighters. This is not a random pairing but reflects Assyrian military practice featuring specialized combatants who work in concert with others. On the right side of the fragment, the remains of the raised elbow of another archer indicate that the full relief showed a line of similar warriors. They would all have been part of a standard siege scene. The small bit of rippling water at the lower left would have been part of the landscape, indicating where this action took place. Unfortunately not enough details remain to link it to a particular room in the palace.

This fragment still bears on its reverse a handwritten note in nineteenth-century penmanship (page X):

This fragment was exhumed from the
Palace of Ashurbanipal II in the centre of
The mound called Koyunjik at Nineveh,
Aug 1854. Dated about 670 BC

Presented to Th. Radford Esq.
By his affectionate friend
The discoverer
Nov. 29. 1856 Wm. Kennet Loftus

Loftus was a naturalist, geologist, and explorer who worked at Uruk, Nimrud, and Nineveh for the Assyrian Exploration fund from 1853 to 1856. At Nineveh he dug briefly at both the North Palace of Ashurbanipal, and the Southwest Palace built by Sennacherib that was later remodeled in part by Ashurbanipal. Hence the confusion as to which king was responsible for which relief in the early days of Assyriology. Thomas Radford was the fifth son of Thomas Radford, Esq. of Smalley Hall, Derbyshire. Loftus died on the voyage back to Britain in 1858 at the age of thirty-eight.

This relief would appear to be the only Assyrian relief in North America that still bears its gifting inscription. How the piece moved from the original owner to the great dealer-collector Hagop Kervorkian is unknown.

The Neo-Assyrian Period (1000-605 BCE) in northern Mesopotamia saw Assyria's domination of the ancient Near East. In addition to the ancient and religious capital in Ashur, Assyrian kings established capitals in Nimrud, Khorsabad, and Nineveh, where Sennacherib (r. 704-681 BCE) built the "Palace without Rival." The Assyrian empire eventually collapsed under continued assaults from Babylonians from southern Mesopotamia as well as Medes from Iran.

Suggested Discussion

- Describe what you see here.
- Discuss the use of the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis).
- An artistic or stylistic convention describes a trait or characteristic that is consistent and shows no change within the culture or the style of a work of art. It is as if all the artists and/or craftsmen agreed upon a certain way of depiction. A notable example is found in Egyptian art which shows, with little exception, no change (or originality) from one work to the next.

- Discuss some of the artistic or stylistic conventions used by Assyrian craftsmen in the carved relief.
 - Note the mixed perspective of the figures, with the eyes, torso and shoulder shown frontally while the head and legs are shown in profile. While physically improbable, this allows the viewer to see more details.
 - Note the string on the bow carried by the archer. The bottom half of the bowstring is shown in front of the body as it would actually be seen. The top half of the bowstring is shown behind the head – another physical improbability. This allows the viewer to see the face unobstructed by the bowstring which would logically cross it in the front.
- What is the value of artistic conventions to a society and/or culture? What is the detriment of artistic conventions to a society and/or culture?

At the Museum:

- Find the other example of an Assyrian relief in the exhibition. What themes and artistic conventions do the two reliefs share? Compare the figure of the soldier to the figure of the horse in the second relief. Which is more naturalistic and why?
- Look for other examples in the exhibition of figures in profile. Compare and contrast.
- Go into the Sponenburgh Gallery upstairs to view the Egyptian tomb relief in the museum's permanent collection. Compare and contrast the Egyptian profile to the Assyrian profile. What might account for the similarities between the two works?

7.



Relief fragment with a Persian guard
 Iran, from Persepolis, Achaemenid Period, reign of Xerxes, 486-465 BCE
 Limestone
 10 ½ x 9" (26.6 x 22.8 cm)
 Brooklyn Museum, gift of the Hagop Kervorkian Foundation in memory of
 Hagop Kervorkian, 65.195

This relief shows the head and upper torso of an Achaemenid Persian wearing a tall fluted headdress on his curly cropped hair. He grips the inner handle of a shield with his left hand and supports what was probably an upright spear with his now-missing right hand. Behind him is part of the right hand, spear shaft, and curved shield edge of a following figure. The subtle modeling of the arm beneath his smooth robe is elegant, but what is more significant, in art historical terms, is the fact that his shoulder is shown in true profile. The long Near Eastern tradition of human representation featured the shoulders shown frontally, and the Persian change from this may well reflect the presence of Greek craftsmen, who have been documented in Persian sources as working on Achaemenid projects. Rows of identical armed Persians in long robes decorated the stone terraces and stairs of several buildings at Persepolis. Yet Persians carrying shields and spears are known only from the main stairs of the Central Building (often called the Council Hall). Even so, their size differs from that in the relief in the exhibition and may have come from another structure. From the eighteenth century on it was not uncommon for visitors to Persepolis to hack off a souvenir from the many reliefs at the site, making it difficult to identify the original location of a small piece.

The Achaemenid Period (559–330 BCE), centered in southwestern Iran, saw the Achaemenid Persian empire at its height extend from Anatolia and Egypt across western Asia to northern India and Central Asia. Xerxes (r. 486–465 BCE), the son of Darius I and grandson of the empire’s founder, Cyrus the Great, is known for an unsuccessful attempt to bring mainland Greece under Persian power. The Achaemenid Persian empire came to an end in 330 BCE when it was claimed by Alexander the Great. Contemporary Greek sources and later classical writers provided much of our knowledge of Persian history.

- Describe what you see here.
- Discuss the use of the elements of art (lines, color, shape, form, texture, space, etc.) and the principles of art (the way it is organized, i.e., pattern, contrast, balance, proportion, unity, rhythm, variety, emphasis).
- Compare and contrast the Assyrian relief (fig. 6) with the Achaemenid Persian relief (fig. 7). How are they similar? How are they different?
- Discuss the role of palace and other state building reliefs in displaying the power of the king. What would visitors (including emissaries from subjugated peoples) experience as they passed the reliefs? Do we have an equivalent today?
- Discuss the importance of objects such as the Assyrian relief and the Achaemenid Persian relief in learning about the material culture and customs of ancient cultures.
- View a reconstruction of the Persian palaces at Persepolis (includes a relief fragment with a Persian guard similar to the one in the exhibition): <http://www.lacma.org/art/collection/art-ancient-near-east>

CYLINDER SEAL ACTIVITY

by Sonia Allen

SUPPLIES: copy paper
pencils
Sharpie markers (fine point)
table covers: cheap plastic tablecloths
paper plates OR clean foam meat trays (may be donated by grocery store)
chunky sidewalk chalk, broken into approximately 2" pieces
clay carving tools or nut picks
soft non-drying clay
ink pads
hand wipes

PROCEDURE:

1. DETERMINE THE DESIGN AREA of your chalk piece. Three ways to do this:
 - a. Wrap a piece of paper around the chalk, cutting it to the size of the chalk.
 - b. On copy paper, trace the outline of the chalk shape as you roll it to establish the design area.
 - c. Calculate dimensions and draw the rectangular design area:
 - (1) Measure the height of the chalk and its radius (half the diameter of the circular end).
 - (2) Plug those numbers into this formula:
$$2\pi rh$$
 (twice π times radius times height) = lateral surface area of chalk cylinder
 - (3) Divide the surface area by the height you measured = length of design rectangle.
 - (4) On copy paper, draw a rectangle using the height and length values you obtained.
2. Within the design area, DRAW a simple design.
 - a. Bear in mind the tip size of your carving tools.
 - b. Don't design something impossibly small to carve or make shapes too close together.
 - c. Avoid letters, words, numbers, or symbols that must be read in a specific orientation.
 - d. If your design shows sequential action, make sure to draw it from right to left so it will print properly.
 - e. Color in the shapes of your design so they are easy to identify.
3. DECIDE what space you will carve:
 - a. the positive space (what you drew) OR
 - b. the negative space (what you did not draw)
4. Carving away the positive design will create the design below the surface of the cylinder. This will result in a raised design when pressed into clay, and will cause the background to print in color if inked.
5. Carving away the negative space will pop the design in relief. This will make a recessed design when the cylinder is pressed into clay, and will print in color if inked.

6. TRANSFER THE DESIGN to the chalk:

- a. Using a Sharpie marker, draw the design onto the chalk's surface.
- b. Make sure that you orient the design so it will print properly when rolled. If the action or picture must "read" from left to right, you must draw it from right to left.
- c. You may instead choose to tape your design to the chalk and trace firmly over it with a sharp pencil to lightly dent the chalk with the design. Then go over it with Sharpie.

7. CARVE:

- a. Dip chalk once in water.
- b. Hold the chalk over the tray so excess chalk falls into tray.
- c. Dig away the areas you wish to remove. Start small and go over an area to carve more.
- d. Small pointed tools will make sharp lines. Broad tips make wider carved spaces.

8. PRINT:

- a. Brush away loose chalk from design.
- b. Press and roll cylinder seal into soft clay.
- c. Roll cylinder seal onto ink pad, or pat ink pad onto cylinder seal. Print onto paper.

VOCABULARY

Attribute an object closely associated with and/or identifying to a specific person, thing, or office.

Cuneiform wedge-shaped strokes or characters formed by a stylus on soft clay that make up one of the earliest writing systems.

Gilgamesh epic the legendary king Gilgamesh is believed to have lived during between 2750 and 2500 BCE. The Gilgamesh epic, originally inscribed on 12 cuneiform tablets, is thought to be the world's oldest written story.

Ishtar the Babylonian goddess of love and war. She was one of the most popular deities in Mesopotamia (she was known as Inanna in ancient Sumer and Astarte in ancient Syria and the Levant) and had many temples and art objects devoted to her. When represented in her military aspect, she is usually depicted in action with her long split skirt accommodating her stride, a quiver on her back and carrying weapons in both hands. Her companion animal is the lion.

Lost-wax a casting method in which the sculptor makes an original sculpture in clay, covers it with wax and then several layers of clay to form an outer mold. When heated, the wax melts away and molten metal is poured between the space left, reproducing the original sculpture. When the metal cools, the outer mold is broken and the metal sculpture is revealed.

Orientalist a scholar who studies the culture, language and peoples of the Middle East and East Asia.

Tableau an artistic grouping or arrangement, a scene.

Votive offered, dedicated or acted in fulfillment of a vow or in gratitude or devotion.

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Breath of Heaven, Breath of Earth: Ancient Near Eastern Art from American Collection, Trudy S. Kawami and John Olbrantz, Hallie Ford Museum of Art, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2013.

Art of the Ancient Near East: A Resource for Educators, Kim Benzel, Sarah B. Graff, Yelena Rakic, and Edith W. Watts, Metropolitan Museum of Art. <http://www.metmuseum.org/learn/for-educators/publications-for-educators/the-art-of-the-ancient-near-east>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Available through Chemeketa Cooperative Regional Library Service

The Epic of Gilgamesh, translated and edited by Benjamin R. Foster, WW Norton and Company, New York, 2001

In narrative poem format

For Younger Readers:

The Ancient Near Eastern World, Amanda H. Podany and Marni McGee, from The World in Ancient Times series, Oxford University Press, New York, 2005 (8th grade and up)

The Hero King Gilgamesh, from *Looking at Mesopotamian Myths and Legends*, Irving Finkel, NTC Publishing Group, Chicago, 1998 (4-8)

He Who Saw Everything: The Epic of Gilgamesh, retold by Anita Feagles, Young Scott Books, New York, 1966 (4-8)

Gilgamesh the Hero, retold by Geraldine McCaughrean and illustrated by David Parkins, Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, Grand Rapids, MI, 2003 (9-12)

Gilgamesh: Man's First Story, retold and illustrated by Bernarda Bryson, Holt, Rinehart & Winston, New York (12 and up)

Online Resource:

A short prose adaptation of *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

<http://www.tri-c.edu/enrichment/arts/ProjectGilgamesh/Documents/Gilgamesh%20Short%20Forms.pdf>

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The suggested discussions and activities included in this guide can be used to support the following Common Core State Standards developed by the Oregon Department of Education. For specific grade standards go to <http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/real/standards/sbd.aspx>

The Arts

Aesthetics and Criticism

- Use knowledge of technical, organizational and aesthetic elements to describe and analyze one's own art and the art of others.
- Respond to works of art, giving reasons for preferences.

Historical and Cultural Perspectives

- Identify both common and unique characteristics found in works of art from various time periods and cultures.
- Understand that the arts have a historical connection.
- Explain how a work of art reflects the artist's personal experience in a society or culture.
- Understand how the arts serve a variety of personal, professional, practical and cultural needs.

Create, Present, and Perform

- Apply artistic elements and technical skills to create, present and/or perform works of art for a variety of audiences and purposes.
- Communicate verbally and in writing, using knowledge of the arts to describe and/or evaluate one's own artwork.
- Express ideas, moods and feelings through various art forms.

Social Sciences

Geography

- Understand and use geographic skills and concepts to interpret contemporary and historical issues.
 - Use and evaluate maps, graphs, charts, model and databases to analyze geographic distributions in the Eastern Hemisphere.
 - Interpret maps and other geographic tools to find patterns in human and physical systems in the Eastern Hemisphere.
 - Describe the physical environment of places in the Eastern Hemisphere and how it influences trade, culture and the economy.
 - Determine and explain the interdependence of people around the world during significant eras or events.

Historical Knowledge

- Relate significant events and eras in local, state, United States, and world history to past and present issues and developments.

Historical Thinking

- Use multiple perspectives, primary sources, context, and reasoning skills to understand the significance of events, people, ideas and institutions.

Language Arts

Literature

- Listen to and read text to make connections and respond to a wide variety of literature of varying complexity.
- Literary Text: Demonstrate general understanding of grade-level literary text.
- Literary Text: Develop an interpretation of grade-level literary text.
- Literary Text: Examine content and structure of grade-level literary text.

Reading

- Listen to, read, and understand a wide variety of informational and narrative text across the subject areas at school and on own, applying comprehension strategies as needed.

Mathematics

Operations and Algebraic Thinking

- Represent and solve problems involving multiplication and division.

Measurement and Data

- Geometric measurement: understand concepts of area and relate area to multiplication and to addition.

Geometry

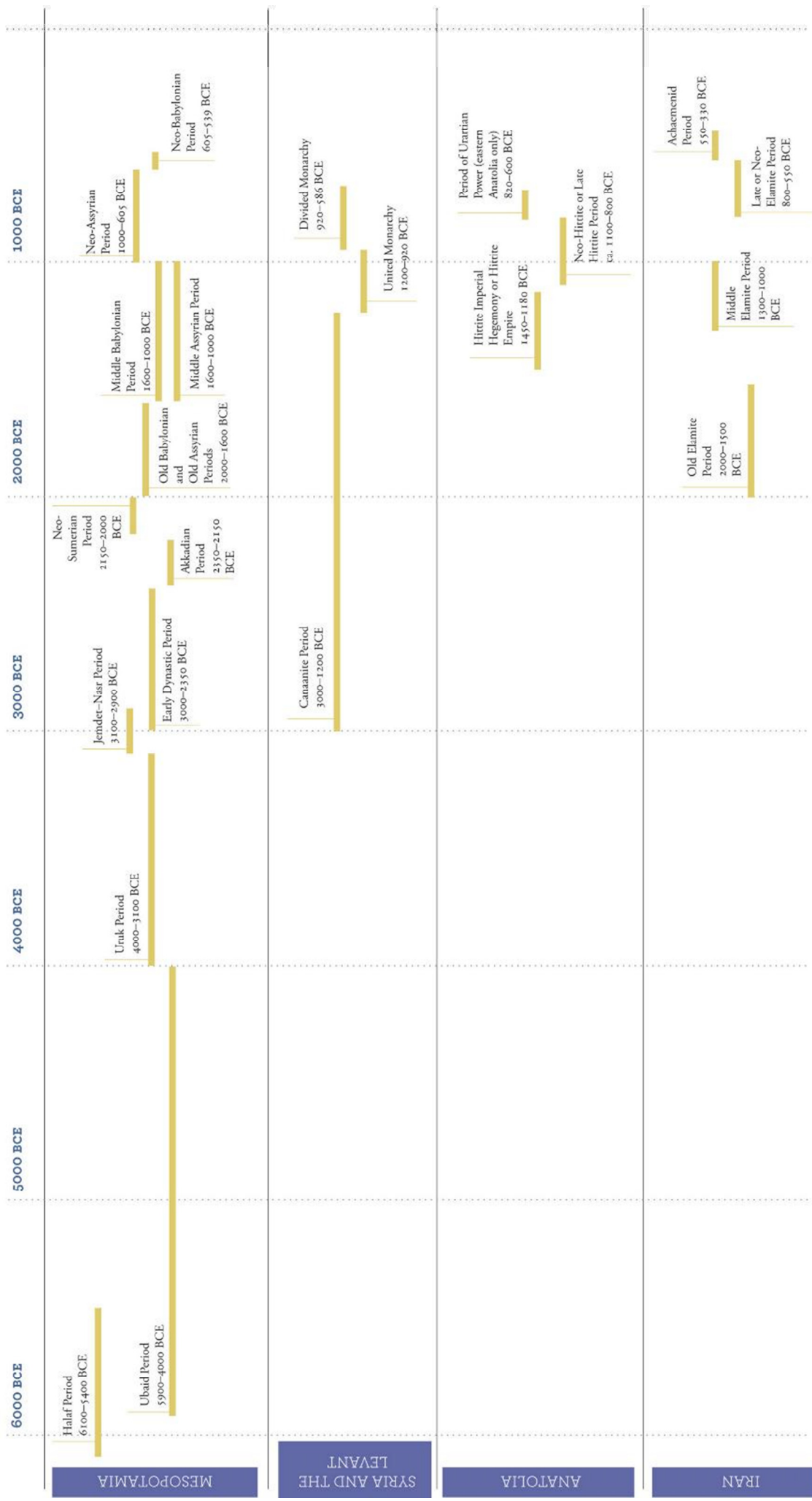
- Solve real-world and mathematical problems involving area, surface area, and volume.

Expressions and Equations

- Solve real-life and mathematical problems using numerical and algebraic expressions and equations.



Chronology of the Ancient Near East















This fragment was exhumed from the
palace of Ashur-bani-pal II in the centre
of the mound called Koyunjik at Nineveh
Aug. 1854. - Date about 670 B.C.
Presented to J^r Radford Esq^r
by his affectionate friend
the discoverer
Nov. 29. 1856 (signed) Wm Kennett Loftus.

