
Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art Newsletter

Spring, 2017 Volume 1

Greetings from the Department
of Ancient Near Eastern Art at
The Metropolitan Museum of Art!

We thought we would try something
new—a newsletter. We hope it will
be an engaging way for us to share
information about the Department's
exciting activities, and a fun way
to stay in touch as we build on existing
projects and embark on a series of
new and ambitious initiatives.

The Department of Ancient Near
Eastern Art presents works of art from
around 8000 B.C. to the advent of Islam
in the seventh century A.D. and from
across the entire Middle East, Iran, the
Caucasus, and Central Asia. We are
passionate about the culture of this
vital and vibrant region of the world
and work to promote and to preserve its
foundational and irreplaceable heritage.

In addition to its staff, the Department
benefits from the expertise of visiting
research Fellows and a dedicated team
of volunteer guides, as well as the
invaluable support and guidance of its
Visiting Committee and its Friends.

This is a time of real challenge for
our field both in the United States and
in the Middle East. We are deeply
grateful to our community and to all
who support and promote the art and
culture of the ancient Near East. This
work has never been more important.

Please join us for what promises to be
a busy and stimulating year ahead!

THE
MET



View of the Raymond and Beverley Sackler Assyrian Sculpture Court

Renovation of the Permanent Galleries

Central to our upcoming activities is the renovation of our permanent galleries. At the Director's request, Kim Benzel began several years ago to rethink the display of The Met's holdings of ancient Near Eastern art in order to better present the compelling stories to be told through these works. Now all four of the Department's curators—Sarah Graff, Yelena Rakic, Michael Seymour, and Kim—are working with Zoe Florence of the Design Department to transform the existing space with new casework, graphics, and digital media displays that will enhance the public's understanding of the collection in its various geographical, architectural, and broader cultural contexts and highlight the role of archaeology in revealing our collective past. The planned gallery reorganization will shift from a first focus on chronology and geography to a first focus on themes that celebrate the relevance of the ancient Near East as one of the birthplaces of culture and civilization, among other contributions. These new galleries will not only provide our increasingly diverse and numerous visitors with a richer and more captivating storytelling experience but will also more safely and effectively preserve these invaluable and fragile objects. The galleries were last renovated in 1985; since then greatly improved conservation and installation materials have become the standard. We expect to enter the feasibility study phase of the project within the next few months and will, of course, keep you informed about the timing of this transformational project.

Collections

Collections Management Project

For over a year now, Yelena Rakic has focused her work in the Department primarily on the permanent collection, specifically developing and managing the Ancient Near Eastern Art collection cataloguing and documentation initiative, coordinating the efforts of our curators, researchers, fellows, and interns. The initiative is an integral part of The Met's five year strategy to better share our collection and expertise, and in keeping with the larger goals of the museum we have been working hard to expand the online presentation of the ANE collection. The Met's Collection Online (metmuseum.org/art/collection) serves as a place to share with the public cataloguing information about objects as well as supplemental information such as provenance, references, and exhibition history. All ANE objects on the Collection Online have basic cataloguing information and most have images. We have significantly increased the supplemental information provided (thanks in great part to the work of Anne-Elizabeth Dunn-Vaturi and Daira Szostak) and are also working to include brief explanatory texts which aim to contextualize and describe objects.

Another aspect of the cataloguing and documentation project has been to consider ways to better document and present information about objects that entered the collection through archaeological excavations supported

by The Met. Caitlin Chaves Yates, an archaeologist, has joined us this year as Mellon Curatorial Research/Collections Fellow and is working closely with Yelena to develop a plan for this part of the ANE collection that includes integrating archival material into the cataloguing process and exploring possibilities for its integrated digital presentation. We were also fortunate to have Lillian Kustec, a Met MuSe intern, assist us with the project over the summer. Lilly, who also gave public tours and worked at the Great Hall information desk as part of her internship program, was a delight to have in the Department and her work was greatly appreciated.

The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History (metmuseum.org/toah/) is another important place to share information about the ANE collection. This past year Yelena formed an ANE Timeline group in the Department with the goal of better representing ANE topics and objects on the Timeline. The group meets regularly to discuss Timeline content, especially new and expanded essays that aim to closely integrate the collection. It has been particularly rewarding to see so many ANE essays added to the Timeline this past year written by Michael Seymour, Elizabeth Knott, and Blair Fowlkes-Childs. Please keep your eyes out for more to come and new authors! We would also love feedback and welcome any suggestions regarding the ANE collection and its online presentation.

THE MET

Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

ESSAYS | WORKS OF ART | CHRONOLOGY

Ctesiphon

For more than 800 years, Ctesiphon flourished as a royal capital of the last two ancient Near Eastern dynasties, the Parthians and the Sasanians, until Muslim armies conquered the city in 637 A.D. Located on the east bank of the Tigris River, approximately 20 miles (30 km) southeast of modern Baghdad in Iraq, Ctesiphon's strategic location as well as its political importance made the city

RELATED

— PRIMARY ESSAYS

Babylon

Ernst Emil Herzfeld (1879–1948) in Samarra

See works of art >

One of the new essays posted on The Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History

Provenance and Archival Research: The Brummer Gallery



Head of a ruler. Copper alloy. Iran or Mesopotamia. Early Bronze Age, ca. 2300–2000 B.C. Rogers Fund, 1947 (47.100.80). Acquired by the Museum in 1947, purchased from the estate of Joseph Brummer, New York

Renowned art dealer Joseph Brummer (1883–1947), with assistance from his brothers Imre (1889–1928) and Ernest (1891–1964), became one of the most successful dealers of his day, working in areas ranging from Classical antiquity to modern art, during the first half of the twentieth century. Their first gallery was established in Paris in 1906. In 1914, Joseph moved to New York and founded a gallery, with Ernest joining him at the outbreak of World War II. The Brummers played a significant role in the formation of American institutional and private collections.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, among many institutions that maintained a long-term relationship with the Brummer Gallery, houses the largest and foremost collection of works of art with Brummer provenances in any collection in the world, with approximately 500 works. While The Met’s acquisitions from the Brummer collection were primarily in the field of medieval art, several other areas benefitted from this significant

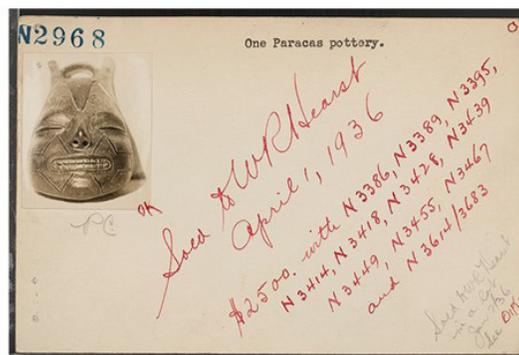
addition to the Museum’s collection. The Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art holds 50 objects previously owned by the Brummer brothers, seven of which are currently listed as ANE Highlights on The Met’s website. The objects range in origin from the Indus Valley to the Iberian Peninsula, and from the Transcaucasus region to South Arabia, but the bulk of the collection is from Mesopotamia and Iran. Anne-Elizabeth Dunn-Vaturi has been researching the history of these works and contributing to the broader Brummer Gallery project.

In 1981, The Metropolitan Museum of Art received the business papers of the Brummer Gallery in New York. Now located at The Cloisters Library and Archives, the Brummer records include correspondence, photographs, and account records. More importantly, they contain accession cards recording the transaction of over 14,000 art objects that made their way through the gallery between 1914 and 1947. The Brummer Gallery records are a valuable resource for provenance research, especially since 2013 with most of this material available through the Thomas J. Watson Library’s Digital Collections.

The year 2017 marks the seventieth anniversary of the Museum’s historic purchase of Joseph Brummer’s estate in 1947. This timing provides a vantage point from which to evaluate the activities of the Brummer Galleries, and The Met Cloisters will host a symposium “From Antiquities to the avant-garde: The Brummer Galleries in Paris and New York” on October 13–14, 2017. This event will provide an opportunity for discussion of the important research on the permanent collections conducted by Museum staff in a number of curatorial departments during the past several years, as well as by outside scholars.



The Brummer Gallery Records



Digitized records of Brummer Gallery notecards in the Thomas J. Watson Library Digital Collections

Fellows

2016–2017 has proven an exceptionally active year for the Department in the Museum’s Fellowship Program. We are thrilled to have six Fellows working in the Department this year, conducting research on a wide range of topics. All the Fellows will be presenting their work at a Fellows Colloquium to be held on Friday March 17, 2017, from 10am in the Bonnie J. Sacerdote Lecture Hall, Uris Center for Education, at The Met Fifth Avenue.

Lamia al-Gailani Werr is a leading Iraqi archaeologist based in London, and this year holds a J. Clawson Mills Scholarship to conduct research in the Department. She is writing a history of the Iraq Museum, Baghdad, one of the most important archaeological museums in the world, and researching the history of archaeology in Iraq, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. Having previously worked for the Iraq Museum and as a field archaeologist in Iraq, Lamia has also acted as a consultant to the Ministry of Culture, and through regular visits to Iraq and the Iraq Museum has been able to assist colleagues with documentation and conservation. Her work on the Iraq Museum will represent a major contribution to the history of Mesopotamian studies.



View of the main Assyrian sculpture gallery at the Iraq Museum, Baghdad

Haider Almamori is a Markoe Fellow and an archaeologist with the Iraq State Board of Antiquities and Heritage. He is one of the excavators of the important Sumerian site of Umm al-Aqarib, approximately 300 km south of Baghdad, and this site was the subject of his doctoral thesis at Kokushikan University, Tokyo. Umm al-Aqarib was a major city in the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2900-2300 B.C.), with monumental temples, a major palace, and large areas of housing. Among the rich finds from the site is an important collection of around 65 cylinder and stamp seals, discovered in graves, in the palace, and in private houses. While at The Met he is studying Early Dynastic seals here and in other collections as comparators for the seals found at Umm al-Aqarib.



Remains of outer wall and columns of the White Temple at Umm al-Aqarib, Early Dynastic Period. The White Temple is the largest Sumerian temple yet discovered at any site

Anastasia Amrhein is an Andrew W. Mellon Fellow and a Ph.D. Candidate in the History of Art at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research during the 2016–2017 fellowship year focuses on the materiality of first millennium B.C. cylinder and stamp seals in The Met’s collection, and will constitute a section of her dissertation, which is entitled, “Multi-Media Image-Making in Assyria: Visualizations of the Numinous in Political Context.” Specifically, she is investigating how various stones—as material supports—interact symbolically, technologically, and aesthetically with the visual images of deities represented upon them.

The seal below, for example, demonstrates how depth of carving was used to articulate rank: the central figure of the god on the bull is much more deeply carved, especially in the area of his shoulder muscles, than the lesser divine bull-man behind him. The human figure facing the god is the most shallow-cut, displaying hardly any modeling. Presumably the human figure did not need to be “presenced” to the same extent since the seal owner was by definition bodily present when using his seal. The god has also been placed on a blue-grey area of the stone, which is not only more lustrous and translucent than the surrounding cream-colored areas, but also smoother. It is thus possible to identify the figure of the god readily through touch as well as sight.



Cylinder seal and modern impression. Chert. Mesopotamia. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 8th century B.C. Gift of Matilda W. Bruce, 1907 (07155.1)

Caitlin Chaves Yates is an Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Research Fellow in the Department researching the archaeological collections. She received her Ph.D. in Archaeology from Boston University in 2014. Her dissertation research focused on the spatial organization of Early Bronze Age cities in Northern Mesopotamia. Her postdoctoral research uses social network analysis to understand how cities were interrelated. At The Met, Caitlin is researching the history of the archaeological excavations sponsored by The Met. The goal of the project is to provide context for the existing object records in the collection. Currently, Caitlin is researching the archaeological records and archival material from the Met-sponsored excavations at Ctesiphon, Iraq in 1931–32.



Excavations at Ma'aridh II, Ctesiphon, Iraq. Joint Expedition of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1931–32

Nancy Highcock is a Hagop Kevorkian Curatorial Fellow and a Ph.D. Candidate at New York University in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian Studies. During the 2016–2017 fellowship year, Nancy is researching how objects dating to the Old Assyrian Period (ca. 1950–1700 B.C.) in The Met's collection, including the corpus of cuneiform tablets from the site of Kültepe-Kanesh, played an active role in the performance of identity of the Assyrian merchants living abroad in Anatolia. This research forms a portion of her dissertation, "Community Across Distance: the Forging of Identity Between Aššur and Anatolia."

In addition to her work at NYU and The Met, Nancy is an excavation area director at the multi-period site Kınık Höyük in southern Cappadocia, Turkey, a joint project of ISAW-NYU and Pavia University under the direction of Dr. Lorenzo D'Alfonso (ISAW-NYU).



Cuneiform tablet and tablet case impressed with two cylinder seals: record of a lawsuit. Clay. Old Assyrian Trading Colony period, ca. 20th–19th century B.C. Anatolia, probably from Kültepe (Karum Kanesh). Gift of Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Klejman, 1966 (66.245.5a, b)

Miriam Said is a Frances Markoe Fellow in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art and a Ph.D. candidate in the History of Art Department at the University of California, Berkeley. Her dissertation, "Materializing Apotropaia: The Power of the Distributed Body in Neo-Assyrian Art, 9th–7th c. BCE," investigates the role of partible bodies, both living and representational, in effecting ritual action through an examination of select apotropaic objects in the Museum's collection. During her time as a Fellow, Miriam will study a collection of Lamashtu and Pazuzu amulets that form the basis of her first chapter on personal adornment and magical protection, while also developing a framework for analyzing the relationship between personal and household protection (the second part of her dissertation).



Pendant with the head of Pazuzu. Bronze. Mesopotamia. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 8th–7th century B.C. Purchase, Norbert Schimmel and Robert Haber Gifts, and funds from various donors, 1993 (1993.181)

Education

School Group Visits to ANE

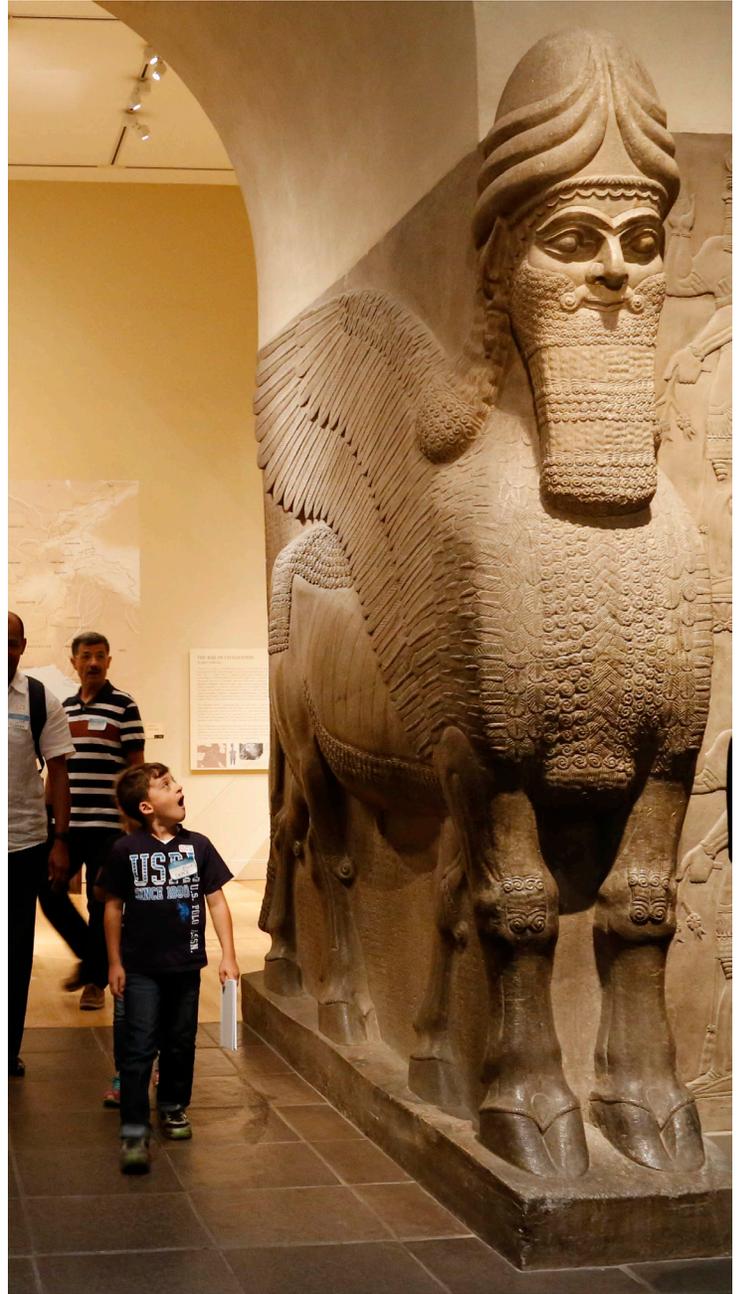
Fall is a busy season for school visits to the Ancient Near Eastern Art galleries, and staff members were delighted to welcome several of these lively groups in person. Two classes of second graders from the Dalton School met under the Babylonian lions with Sarah Graff on November 14 and 16, as part of the school's focus on New York City landmarks including The Met. Questions from the students focused on what a curator does and on the Museum as a whole. On November 16, Mellon Fellow Caitlin Chaves Yates led a remote tour and lecture of the gallery with a class from Frontier Middle School in western New York learning about ancient Mesopotamia. Caitlin was able to use Skype to talk with the students about archaeology and how we know about the past, finishing with a short virtual tour of the Assyrian galleries. Finally, on November 28, third graders from Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Catholic Academy in Forest Hills visited as part of an art appreciation course. After a Met highlights tour, they focused on the art of the ancient Near East, guided by Michael Seymour and Blair Fowlkes-Childs. We look forward to continuing to serve as perhaps the most memorable classroom in New York for many more school groups to come.

Syrian Children Visit ANE

The Ancient Near Eastern Art galleries were part of a day of art for recently resettled Syrian refugee children, organized as part of the Museum's Multicultural Audience Development Initiative (MADI) under the leadership of Donna Williams. Seven Arabic-speaking professionals volunteered their time to act as translators, and the group was welcomed at the Museum by The Met's President Daniel Weiss. The event was a great success: one volunteer organizer wrote afterwards that "Young kids to the most erudite museum administrators spent the afternoon laughing, learning, creating, bonding, and spontaneously singing in celebration . . . The day of art for refugee children turned into a day of joy for all."

Volunteers

The Department is fortunate to have the help and commitment of a highly dedicated team of volunteer guides. The volunteers have all undertaken extensive training on the collection, and use this expertise to offer free guided tours of the Ancient Near Eastern Art galleries to the visiting public every weekday and holidays through fall, winter, and spring. In addition, the volunteers offer tours requested by Visitor Services and private groups. The volunteers play a major role in the life of the Department, and through their work constantly help to



Meeting a winged bull: recently resettled Syrian refugee children visit the Ancient Near Eastern Art galleries



Constructing a collaborative poem line by line at Teens Take The Met

bring both new and knowledgeable audiences to ancient Near Eastern art and culture, and enable visitors to engage more deeply with the collections.

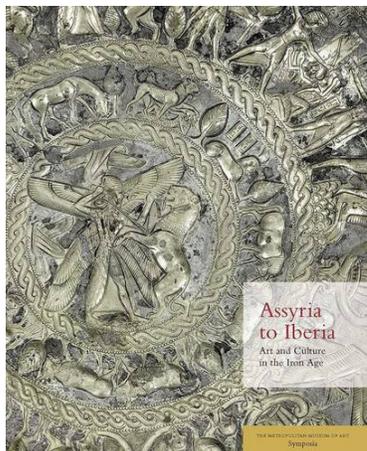
In addition to their standard tours and reading, the volunteers attend regular training sessions organized by their captain, Laura Resnikoff, and curatorial liaison Michael Seymour. This year, these have included some wonderful collaborative sessions with staff and volunteers from other departments: on ancient Near Eastern music with Ken Moore from the Department of Musical Instruments, and on organic textiles with Florica Zaharia and Kristine Kamiya from the Department of Textile Conservation. These collaborations have proven stimulating for all involved, and many more such joint training sessions are anticipated in the future.

For details of guided tours of Ancient Near Eastern Art and other galleries across the Museum please visit metmuseum.org/events/programs/met-tours/guided-tours

Teens Take The Met

On October 28th, the Department participated in a Teens Take The Met event in partnership with the New York Public Library. Teens who attended were invited to contribute a line to a collaborative poem on the theme of leadership. The activity elicited some inspired responses as facilitated by Daira Szostak. We look forward to more opportunities to engage with youth in the community in the coming year.

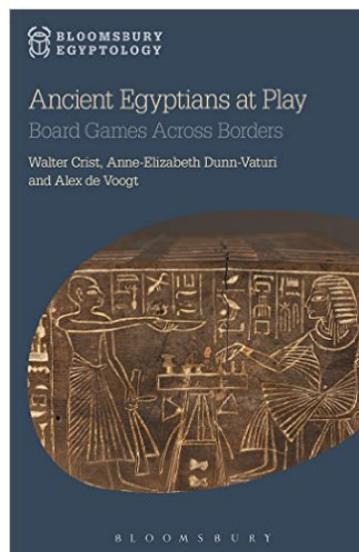
Publications



New Symposium Volume

December saw the publication of *Assyria to Iberia: Art and Culture in the Iron Age*, edited by Joan Aruz and Michael Seymour. This volume, in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia series, brings together contributions from leading scholars of ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean art, based on papers given as part of the program surrounding the major 2014–2015 exhibition *Assyria to Iberia at the Dawn of the Classical Age*. They include reports of new archeological discoveries, illuminating interpretations of material culture, and innovative investigations of literary, historical, and political aspects of the interactions that shaped art and culture in the early first millennium B.C.

The production of this Symposium volume was supported by The Adelaide Milton de Groot Fund, in memory of the de Groot and Hawley families. The *Assyria to Iberia* exhibition itself was generously supported by major donors the Hagop Kervorkian Fund, the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman, and an anonymous foundation. The Andrew W. Mellon Fund, the Hagop Kervorkian Foundation, and the A. G. Leventis Foundation supported the publication of the exhibition catalogue. Major public events at which many of the papers published in this volume were first presented included a two-day symposium and the Charles K. Wilkinson Lectures, both made possible by the many friends of Charles K. Wilkinson and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The keynote address, delivered by Jonathan N. Tubb, Keeper of the Department of the Middle East at the British Museum, was part of the Armand Brunswick Distinguished Lectures in Archaeology of The Raymond and Beverley Sackler Foundation, Inc., while the Friends of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art provided generous support for a Scholars Day, as well as contributing to the funding of the exhibition itself.



Board Games Across Borders

Also in 2016, Anne-Elizabeth Dunn-Vaturi, with colleagues Walter Crist (Arizona State University) and Alex de Voogt (American Museum of Natural History) published a major co-authored volume on ancient board games in Egypt and their dissemination across the wider ancient world. The book is entitled *Ancient Egyptians at Play: Board Games Across Borders*, and is published by Bloomsbury Press. The essays in the volume introduce the major board games of ancient Egypt, their cultural contexts, and their spread beyond Egypt to regions including Mesopotamia, the Levant, Cyprus, and the Aegean. The objects featured in the volume include important game boards from The Met's own Egyptian Art collection.

With the same co-authors, Anne has also published a related article, "Facilitating Interaction: Board Games as Social Lubricants in the Ancient Near East" in the *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* (volume 35, 2016).

Palmyrenes in Rome

Blair Fowlkes-Childs has recently published an article "Palmyrenes in Transtiberim: Integration in Rome and Links to the Eastern Frontier" in the volume *Rome and the Worlds Beyond its Frontiers, Impact of Empire 21*, edited by Daniëlle Sloopjes and Michael Peachin and published by Brill. The article looks at how the monuments and inscriptions of Palmyrenes in Rome reveal both ties to their home city and their creation of new identities whilst living in the imperial capital. This work is part of a broader project as Blair prepares a revised and expanded version of her doctoral dissertation for publication as a book, under the working title *The Cults of Syrian and Phoenician Gods in Rome and Religious Connections Across the Empire*.

William Hayes Ward

Yelena Rakic wrote on the American Orientalist William Hayes Ward (1835–1916) for the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie*. The *Reallexikon* is a foundational reference work for students of the ancient Near East. William Hayes Ward played an important role in the formation of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's earliest ancient Near Eastern collections and was closely involved with early American archaeological expeditions to the Near East, directing the Catharine Lorillard Wolfe Expedition to Babylonia in 1884. Yelena has been researching Ward as part of a larger project focusing on the early history of The Met's ANE collection and considering the role museums played in the construction of ancient Near Eastern studies in the US at the end of the nineteenth century. In the spring she visited archives at Yale, the University of Pennsylvania, and Amherst whose holdings have connections to Ward after being awarded a Museum Rousseau Travel Grant.

Imagining Mari

Elizabeth Knott published an article "Imagining Mari: Jean-Claude Margueron and the Archaeology of Tell Hariri" in the *Journal of Near Eastern Archaeology* (volume 79, no. 1, March 2016). The article is both a review of Margueron's *Mari, Capital of Northern Mesopotamia in the Third Millennium: The Archaeology of Tell Hariri on the Euphrates*, newly available in English, and an engaging illustrated overview of key discoveries made by Margueron and others at this remarkable site.

Technologies of Jewelry at Ur

Kim Benzel published an article on "Technologies of Jewelry at Ur: the Physics and Metaphysics of Skilled Crafting" as part of a special supplement to the journal *Metalla* (volume 22.1, 2016) focused of the "The Royal Tombs of Ur, Mesopotamia: New Investigations, New Results from the Examination of Metal Artifacts and other Archaeological

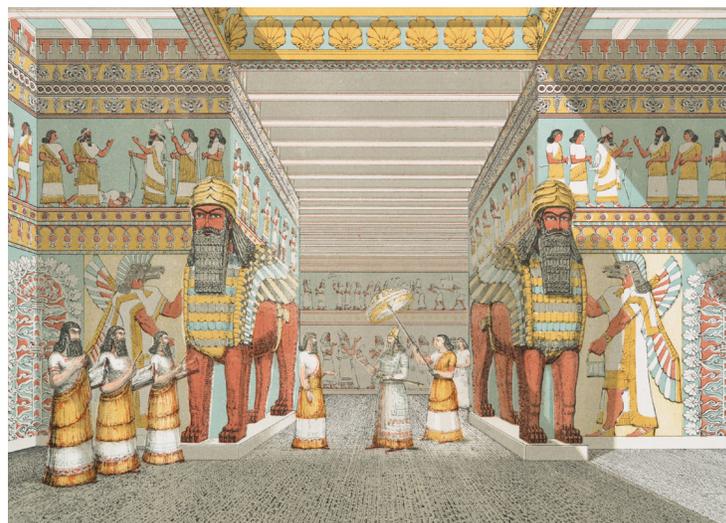


Headdress. Gold, lapis lazuli, carnelian. Mesopotamia, Ur (modern Tell al-Muqayyar). Early Dynastic IIIa, ca. 2600–2500 B.C. Dodge Fund, 1933 (33.35.3)

Finds." The supplement is the outcome of a workshop held at the Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum, May 2015, and brings together a broad range of perspectives and studies from experts working on the technological aspects of the Ur material.

The Colors of the Past

Michael Seymour contributed to the volume *The Colours of the Past in Victorian England*, edited by Charlotte Ribeyrol (Paris-Sorbonne University), in the series "Cultural Interactions: Studies in the Relationship Between the Arts," published by Peter Lang. Michael wrote on "Polychromy in the Nineteenth-Century Rediscovery of Assyrian Art," discussing archaeologists' illustrations, the "Nineveh Court" of the Sydenham Crystal Palace in London, and the use of Assyrian art in Orientalist painting. The book, which explores multiple Victorian responses to color in ancient and exotic art, was developed from a major interdisciplinary project and seminar series in Paris, involving art historians and Classicists alongside chemists and conservators.



"Hall in an Assyrian Palace Restored," from Austen Henry Layard's *The Monuments of Nineveh* (1849)

Also on the modern reception of ancient Mesopotamia, Michael contributed an essay, "La Mésopotamie vue par les modernes" to the catalogue of the Louvre-Lens exhibition *L'histoire commence en Mésopotamie* (Musée du Louvre-Lens / Snoeck, 2016), edited by Ariane Thomas (Musée du Louvre).

Conferences and Lectures

Ancient games at the Grolier Club

Anne-Elizabeth Dunn-Vaturi gave a paper about the game of Hounds and Jackals on April 5, 2016 at the Colloquium "Some Beautiful Board Games" showcasing the great diversity and appeal of board games through the ages and across the

world. The game of Hounds and Jackals probably originated in Egypt and at the turn of the second millennium B.C. and spread to Sudan and the Near East, where it is attested until the mid-first millennium B.C. Some representations of the game seem to have gone unnoticed and were presented for the first time. Irving Finkel (British Museum) talked about new ideas concerning the Royal Game of Ur, while Alex de Voogt (American Museum of Natural History) presented on the largest mancala games known today. The rest of the afternoon was devoted to modern games. This event complemented the exhibition “The Royal Game of the Goose: 400 Years of Printed Board Games” curated by Adrian Seville at the Grolier Club of New York (February 24–May 14, 2016).

Unfinishedness in the Ancient World

Kim Benzel delivered a lecture on “Unfinishedness in the Ancient World” at *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible across Time and Cultures*, part of the Sunday at The Met Series, on May 8, 2016. The Sunday at The Met event was held in conjunction with the special exhibition *Unfinished: Thoughts Left Visible* at The Met Breuer. A recording of Kim’s lecture and the entire event is available on The Met’s website at metmuseum.org/metmedia/video/lectures/sam-unfinished-thoughts-left-visible



Unfinished Funerary Stela for a Family, Space Left Blank for Name. Limestone. Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri, Hatshepsut Hole, MMA excavations, 1922–23. New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, Joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, ca. 1479–1458 B.C. Rogers Fund, 1923 (23.3.48)

Palmyra Symposium

On May 23, 2016, the Department hosted a one-day Symposium, *Palmyra: Mirage in the Desert*. The Symposium, made possible by the Charles K. Wilkinson Lecture Series fund, brought together leading experts on Palmyra for a day of lectures and discussion. Papers included interpretations of Palmyra’s cultural and trading relationships across the Near East, studies of identity in Palmyrene funerary sculptures, detailed accounts of the destruction suffered by some of the ancient city’s major temples and other monuments, and the latest work on documenting and sharing data on

sculptures from Palmyra housed in museums worldwide. The Symposium was followed by a special evening lecture, also supported by the Charles K. Wilkinson Lecture Series fund, by Judith Weingarten of the British School at Athens, Greece, on “Queen Zenobia in History, A.D. 267–2016.” The proceedings of the Symposium are now being edited by Curator Emerita Joan Aruz for publication in The Metropolitan Museum of Art Symposia series.



Funerary relief. Limestone. Syria, probably from Palmyra. ca. 50–150 A.D. Purchase, 1901 (01.25.1)

Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale held in Philadelphia

The Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale (RAI) is the annual week-long meeting of The International Association for Assyriology. Typically held in Europe, the 62nd RAI was held in Philadelphia, at the University of Pennsylvania during the week of July 11–15, 2016. The main theme of the meeting was “Ur in the Twenty-First Century CE,” but a wide variety of workshops and sessions were included in the program. Yelena Rakic, Michael Seymour, Elizabeth Knott, and Andrew W. Mellon Fellow Anastasia Amrhein all contributed papers.



Stele of Ushumgal. Gypsum alabaster. Early Dynastic I, 2900–2700 B.C. Mesopotamia, probably from Umma (modern Jokha). Funds from various donors, 1958 (58.29)

Yelena and Michael participated in the workshop “What Can Objects Do that Words Can’t? Recent Contributions of Art History to the Study of the Ancient Near East,” organized by Marian Feldman (Johns Hopkins University) and Stephanie Langin-Hooper (Southern Methodist University), with papers on “The Illusion of Place in Neo-Assyrian Campaign Reliefs” (Michael) and “The Ushumgal Stele: Examining Representation in the Past and its Presentation in the Present” (Yelena).

Elizabeth participated in a workshop organized by former ANE Fellow Gina Konstantopoulos (New York University), “As Above, So Below: Religion and Geography” with a paper on “Mari’s Investiture Scene and the Ideology of Conquest in the Time of Samsi-Addu,” while Anastasia contributed to a session on Deities and Supernatural Beings with a paper on “Detecting Social Tensions in the Archaeological Record: Official and Vernacular Figurine-Making Traditions at Ur in the 1st Millennium BCE.” A number of former Fellows and department members also attended and participated in the meeting. With the traditional emphasis of the RAI falling heavily on the study of cuneiform texts, the strong presence of art history in Philadelphia attested to closer integration of these two fields, hopefully laying the groundwork for increasing collaboration and cross-disciplinary work in the future.

The Iconography of Magic

On September 28, Kim Benzel gave a special lecture in the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium on “The Iconography of Magic.” The magical power of images is a central concept in our field: there is probably no example of ancient Near Eastern art that should not on some level be considered “magical.” Kim’s fascinating and wide-ranging lecture provided the audience with a wonderful key to engaging with and understanding our collections.

Workshop: “Here Be Dragons”

Several members of the Department participated in an exciting workshop held at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World, New York University, on October 28, 2016, entitled “Hic Sunt Dracones: Creating, Defining, and Abstracting Place in the Ancient World.” The workshop was organized by former Fellow Gina Konstantopoulos, now Visiting Professor at ISAW. Michael Seymour and Hagop Kervorkian Fellow Nancy Highcock both gave papers: “Neighbors through Imperial Eyes: Depicting Babylonia in the Assyrian Campaign Reliefs” (Michael) and “Assyrians Abroad: Expanding Borders through Identity in the Middle Bronze Age” (Nancy), while Sarah Graff acted as chair for the afternoon session. Gina Konstantopoulos is now working on plans for publication of the workshop proceedings, and further research on the role of distant lands in ancient Near Eastern thought and culture.

Staff of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art

Acting Associate Curator in Charge

Kim Benzel

Associate Curators

Sarah Graff

Yelena Rakic

Assistant Curator

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If you are interested in the activities of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, please email anedepartment@metmuseum.org or call 212 570 3907.



Top fragment of a kudurru with a mushhushu dragon and divine symbols. Limestone. Mesopotamia. Second Dynasty of Isin, ca. 1156–1025 B.C. Rogers Fund, 1985 (1985.45)