



Biblically Related Artifacts in the Museums of Berlin

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Egyptian

General Information

Before 1989, and the fall of the Iron Curtain, Eastern Europe was a place of intrigue to Americans, and a place where our enemies lived. In 1978 and 1979 I took groups into East Berlin to visit the great museums. Our guide in West Berlin explained that she was unable to visit the East, but that the driver was a loyal communist and would go with us. We waited more than an hour to pass through “Checkpoint Charlie.” The dismal views on the other side of the wall were exactly what we had come to expect from the movies we had seen – a stark, cold environment with people moving about silently; a place from which people were willing to risk their life in order to escape.

After the wall came down, the great museums of formerly East Berlin became easily accessible. The most important museums are located on Museum Island in the River Spree. The important museums for this study are the Bode Museum which once housed Egyptian antiquities, and the Pergamon Museum which houses Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Greek and Roman antiquities. The portion of the Pergamon Museum which houses the Sumerian, Assyrian, and Babylonian artifacts is called the Vorderasiatisches Museum (Museum of the Near East).

This material is based on several visits and research (in part) in the books listed throughout. Not listed, but of help, was *Relics of the Past: The World's Most Important Biblical Artifacts*, by Siegfried H. Horn.

The collection of Egyptian materials was begun in 1828. For nearly a century the collection was housed in the Bode Museum. In 1895, the great Greek scholar Adolf Deissmann studied papyri that was being uncovered in Egyptian garbage dumps and discovered that the Greek of the New Testament was not classical or literary Greek. It was the language commonly spoken by the people of the first century. We call it Koine Greek.

Since 1998 the Bode Museum has been closed for renovation. Some of the items once displayed here are now displayed in the Ägyptisches Museum und Papyrussammlung (Egyptian Museum and Papyrus Collection) in Charlottenburg. Within the next five years there should be many changes

Execration Texts

These texts contain curses pronounced over foreign countries, cities, and tribes who were considered by the Egyptians to be their enemies. The names and curses were written on ceramic vases and then broken, accompanied by ritualism. This was supposed to render the enemies powerless. The texts date to the 19th century BC, roughly the time of Abraham. They were deciphered by Kurt Sethe in the 1920s. The main value for us is that they give the names of Canaanite cities and rulers from that period of time which included the Patriarchs of the Bible).

(See examples in *ANET*, 326-328; from Sakkarah, 25th century BC, and other periods).

Thutmose III

Pharaoh Thutmose III fought the earliest recorded battle at Megiddo. In this battle against Syrian forces in 1468 BC., Megiddo became important as a battle field. This importance continued in Old Testament history and provides the symbolism for the battle of Armageddon described in Revelation 16:12-16. See Jenkins, *Studies in the Book of Revelation*, 15-16; *ANET*, 237. I did not see this item on my last visit.

Queen Nefertiti

The bust of Queen Nefertiti is one of the most famous pieces of art from Egypt. It dates to 1340 BC. and is thought to be a model used for other portrait busts of the Queen. The bust was among the discoveries at Tell el Amarna.

Amarna Letters

About 350 tablets were found at Tell el Amarna in Egypt in 1887. They were written in Babylonian cuneiform during the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep (Greek, Amenophis IV) about 1380 BC. These letters describe conditions in Palestine, showing that it was a well-developed country and tell of the invasion of Palestine by a group of outsiders, called the *Habiru*. Some scholars see this as a reference to the Israelites. The senders of the letters include rulers of Hazor, Gezer, Megiddo, Lachish, Shechem, *et al.* A few tablets are on display in this museum. Other tablets can be seen in the British Museum and the Louvre.

Papyrus Collection

The papyrus collection is one of the largest of its kind in the world. It includes approximately 15,000 papyri, potsherds, parchments, wax and wood tablets. An Egyptian literary text, *The Story of Sinuhe* (20th century BC), contains the earliest known description of Palestine. Sinuhe describes the land as follows: "Figs were in it, and grapes. It had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant its olives. Every (kind of) fruit was on its trees. Barley was there,

and emmer. There was no limit to any (kind of) cattle" (*ANET*, 19). This is similar to the description of the land promised to Israel in Exodus 3:8.

All Items Below are in the PERGAMUN MUSEUM

Sumer

"There are no direct references to Sumer in the Bible, although it corresponds to the 'land of Shinar' mentioned eight times in the OT" (*NIDBA*, 425). Babel, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh were among the early cities of Shinar (Gen. 10:10). The tower of Babel was built in the land of Shinar (Gen. 11:2). Amraphel was a king of Shinar (Gen. 14:1). Achan coveted a beautiful mantle from Shinar (Josh. 7:21). Some items from Sumer are in a room adjoining the Procession Street. Some items from Uruk are displayed. Uruk was one of the most important city-states of Sumer, and is identified with the biblical Erech (Gen. 10:10; Ezra 4:9).

Hittites

The Hittites are mentioned more than 40 times in the Bible. The museum has several original items from Zinjirli (Zincirli), including lion sculptures, and a large statue of the weather god Hadad. The king of Aram (Syria) was named Ben-hadad (son of Hadad).

One room contains replicas of reliefs showing Hittite divinities from the rock sanctuary at Yazilikaya near Boğazköy in central Turkey.

In this same area of the museum are some items from Tell Halaf, a site in north-eastern Syria. It is associated with the biblical Gozan (2 Kings 17:6; 19:12; Isa. 37:12). Some Israelites taken during the Assyrian captivity were located in Gozan.

Assyrian

Sargon II (721-705 BC)

Sargon is mentioned only once in the Bible (Isa. 20:1). In his annals, he claims to have captured

the Israelite city of Samaria. The museum has a stele depicting Sargon.

Merodach-Baladan (Berodach-Baladan, NASB)

Merodach-Baladan was a Chaldean who ruled Babylon during the reign of Sargon II of Assyria. He sent letters and a present to Hezekiah, king of Judah (716-687 BC; 2 Kings 20:12; Isa. 39:1-8). Hezekiah showed him all the treasures of his house. The prophet Isaiah warned that one day all of these treasures would be taken to Babylon. The fulfillment came in 586 BC. The museum has a small monument of black marble (18 inches high) with an inscription on one side depicting Merodach-baladan presenting an official with a piece of land "forever." The stone was originally set up as a boundary stone (*kurudu*) by the landowner. This item (VA 2663) is in one of the rooms containing items from Babylon along the Procession Street. See photo in Lewis, *Historical Backgrounds of Bible History*, p. 75; *ANEP*, No. 454; *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, No. 125.

Esarhaddon (680-669 BC)

Esarhaddon was the son of Sennacherib and his successor as king of Assyria (2 Kings 19:37; Isa. 37:38; Ezra 4:2). The museum has two stela depicting Esarhaddon. Of most interest is the stele (VA 2708) which depicts the king holding ropes leading to the lips of Tirhakah of Egypt and Ethiopia [Cush] (in *ANET*, 293, he is referred to as king of Nubia) and Ba'alu of Tyre. Tirhakah, the kneeling figure with Negroid features, was an ally of Hezekiah against the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:9). The stele which was set up at Zinjirli was discovered in 1888. Zinjirli is about 40 miles west of Gaziantep, Turkey. See *JFLAP*, 214-215.

Babylonian

Early Mesopotamia (See SUMER above)

There are several artifacts from ancient Mesopotamia, including a replica of the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1760 BC).

Ishtar Gate and Procession Street

This beautifully decorated gate and procession street have been reconstructed nearly original size. The multicolored tiles depict lions, bulls, and dragons. Excavations were conducted at Babylon by Robert Koldewey between 1899 and 1917. Daniel was in Babylon during the reigns of Nebuchadnezzar (605-562), and Nabonidus (556-539). Part of the Throne Room facade has also been reconstructed to the sides of the gate. Two earlier examples of the materials of the gate are displayed in one of the rooms along the Procession street.



Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 BC)

A small inscribed cylinder describing the building activities of Nebuchadnezzar is displayed in a wall case in a room beside the Procession Street. Nebuchadnezzar is mentioned more than 90 times in the Old Testament. He took Daniel and other Judean royal youths to Babylon in 606 BC, captured Jerusalem in 597 BC, and destroyed the city in 586 BC (Dan. 1; 2 Kings 24-25).

Jehoiachin

Jehoiachin (Jeconiah, Coniah) was the young king of Judah who was taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC. (2 Kings 24:15). The date of the capture of Jerusalem (March 16, 597 BC) was learned in 1955 when Donald J. Wiseman, then of the British Museum, read a cuneiform tablet from Babylon. About 300 cuneiform tablets, dating between 595 and 570 BC, were found near the Ishtar Gate in Babylon. They contain lists of rations such as barley and oil paid to the captives and craftsmen. Persons from various countries are mentioned: Egypt, Philistia, Phoenicia, Asia Minor, Judah, etc. Some Biblical names are included: Gaddiel, Semachiah, and Shelemiah (a name mentioned prominently in Jeremiah 36-37). The most interesting name is Yaukin, king of the land of Yahud (Judah), along with five royal princes. The name, pronounced *Yow-keen*, is known to be an abbreviation for

Jehoiachin. One document in which his name occurs is dated to 592 BC. These tablets show that the Babylonians continued to regard Jehoiachin as the legitimate king of Judah and gave him special treatment while he was in captivity (2 Kings 25:27-30; Jer. 52:31-34). The tablets were read by E. F. Weidner in the basement of the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin, after 1933.

Some Sources: Albright, *BA* 5 (1942), 49-55; *ANET*, 308 for translation; *DOTT*, 84-86; *JFLAP*, 225-227; *IDB*, II:811-13; Werner Keller, *The Bible as History*, 285-287; Wiseman, *Illustrations from Biblical Archaeology*, 73 for photo.

Roman Period

The Pergamum Museum is, from my experience, the greatest architectural museum in existence. View the Gate and Procession Street from Babylon, and the structures mentioned below, and I think you may agree.

Miletus

The Market Gate of Miletus (c. 165 BC) has been reconstructed. Paul made a short stop at Miletus on the return from the third journey about A.D. 57 (Acts 20:15-38). Later, Paul tells Timothy that he left Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20). The museum recently celebrated the 100th anniversary of the excavations of Miletus.

Pergamom (or Pergamum)

1. The Zeus Altar

The altar of Zeus was built by Eumenes II (197-159 BC) to commemorate the victory of Attalus over the invading Gauls two centuries earlier. The gods of Olympus are represented on the frieze as giants with serpent-like tails. Zeus was called savior. The Altar was the most important and largest building from the Hellenistic age. The unique discovery of the Altar is told by Dr. Henry Koch: "A German engineer named Carl Humann had been authorized to build a road from Pergamon to the Aegean Sea. While he was supervising the work he noticed that marble statues and torsos were being carted from the ruins of

the city and brought to the limekiln to be burnt into lime. It is to be feared that many a valuable statue was thus reduced to limestone. One day Humann also observed, how a peasant was hauling a marble slab adorned with statues and figures to the limekiln. He halted the peasant, asked him, how much he wanted for the slab, paid the price and immediately had the slab sent to the curators of the Berlin Museum in Germany. He offered the peasant more money, if he could procure additional slabs for him. The peasant gladly consented. For him it was lucrative business, for the curators it was a precious find.

"Alexander Conze, a curator in Berlin, discerned the great value of the find. He recalled having read that a Roman writer named Ampelius living in the second century after Christ had written a Book of Wonders (*Liber Memorialis*). Among the wonders he also had mentioned the Altar of Zeus in Pergamum. This was a valuable clue for Conze. Humann was at once requested to obtain as many slabs as possible. Permission was also requested of the Turkish Government to have the slabs sent to Berlin and that excavations could be started at once. Permission was granted and the excavations were carried out from 1879-1885. Fortunately most of the ruins of the Temple had not as yet been found or touched. The curators in Berlin could piece them all together and thus the priceless Altar of Zeus could be assembled" (Koch, *The Christian News*, Nov. 22, 1976).

The Zeus Altar was re-assembled during more than twenty years of museum work and is now housed in the special Pergamum Museum in Berlin. A trip to see this fabulous piece of architecture is recommended. The marble frieze depicts the mythological battle between gods and giants. Only the foundations of the altar can be seen at Pergamum. There is a letter to the church at Pergamum in Revelation 2:12-17. The Lord said, "I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is $\frac{1}{4}$." Several commentators have suggested that the mention of the throne of Satan was a reference to the Altar of Zeus. While it may have included this, it likely has reference to the Emperor worship which was prevalent there. See my *Studies in the Book of Revelation* for additional information.

2. The Temple of Athena

Athena was the chief goddess of Pergamum during the early Hellenistic period. Only some portions of the temple and stoas can now be seen at Pergamum. The temple was constructed by Phileterus in the 3rd century BC, and was patterned after the Doric style of the Parthenon in Athens. Some fragments of the early temple, and the gateway of the two-storied propylon stoa built by Eumenes II can be seen in the Berlin Museum.

3. Trajan and Hadrian

In the same room with the Miletus Market Gate is a column from the Trajaneum in Pergamum. This was the temple of Trajan (Roman Emperor AD 98-117), which was erected by his successor Hadrian. Both emperors were worshipped at Pergamum. There is a seated statue of Trajan, and heads of Trajan and Hadrian on display. The Book of Revelation foretells the emperor worship of this period.

Miscellaneous Roman Artifacts

Statues or busts of several Roman emperors including Caracalla and Claudius. A soldier of the Imperial bodyguard (the Praetorian) from the time of Trajan. Coins of most Roman emperors.

Persian

The museum has a few panels of beautiful multicolored tiles from the palace of the Persian king Darius I (521-486 BC). Visit the Louvre for the best Persian materials.

Urartu = Ararat

Urartu was the ancient kingdom called Ararat in the Bible (Gen. 8:4; 2 Kings 19:37 = Isa. 37:38; Jer. 51:27). It is located in present-day eastern Turkey. Displayed items include inscriptions and pottery.

Miscellaneous Items

There are a few items scattered among the collection that would be of interest to students of the Bible. You may see bronze statuettes of Baal. These usually come from the region of Syria.

Other Museums

The Altes Museum, also a part of the Museum Island group, houses art and sculpture from ancient Greece and Rome.

Key to Abbreviations

ANEP: *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*, James Pritchard (ed.).

ANET: *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, James Pritchard (ed.).

BA: *Biblical Archaeologist*.

DOTT: *Documents from Old Testament Times*, D. Winton Thomas (ed.).

IDB: *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (4 vols., plus supplement).

JFLAP: *Light From the Ancient Past*, Jack Finegan.

NIDBA: *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, Blaiklock and Harrison (eds.).

Notes

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Several examples of items in the museums of Berlin, especially papyri, may be found in the writings of Adolf Deissmann such as *Light From the Ancient East* (LAE).

You may access the web site of the museum at www.smb.spk-berlin.de/vam/e/s.html.

We have prepared similar publications on the British Museum and the Louvre.

This update is made following a visit in September, 2004.

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