

NEWS RELEASE

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Eastern Mediterranean Gallery: Crossroads of Cultures Penn Museum Showcases a Cosmopolitan Hub Whose Innovations Shaped Today's World



Image: Rendering of the new Eastern Mediterranean Gallery at the Penn Museum, opening Saturday, November 19, 2022. Available for download [here](#).

PHILADELPHIA—On **Saturday, November 19, 2022**, the Penn Museum will unveil its [Eastern Mediterranean Gallery: Crossroads of Cultures](#) revealing how innovations rooted in this diverse region still impact the world today—from the alphabet to the origins of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity.

For more than 4,000 years, the region that now encompasses Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinian Territories, and Cyprus has been a nexus where priests, merchants, armies, and immigrants created a cosmopolitan culture with global significance.

The reimagined signature gallery will uncover the area's remarkable technological innovation, as well as the personal stories of its people, with nearly 400 artifacts from the Middle Bronze Age (2,000 to 1,200 BCE) through the Ottoman Period (1299 to 1922 CE).

Co-curated by Dr. Lauren Ristvet, Dr. Virginia Herrmann, Dr. Joanna Smith, and Eric Hubbard, a Ph.D. candidate in the Anthropology Department at Penn, the gallery aims to dispel popular misconceptions that this region has been defined only by conflict.

"People are central to this story," says Dr. Lauren Ristvet, Lead Curator for the **Eastern Mediterranean Gallery** and the Robert H. Dyson Curator in the Penn Museum's Near East Section. "As empires rose and fell over time, there was imperialism and civic resistance. But a lesser-told story is that this was a place of peaceful coexistence and great creativity. "

Upon entering the 2,000-square-foot gallery, museum-goers will encounter [a near life-sized section of a ship](#), based on a vessel that capsized in the Mediterranean Sea near Uluburun, Turkey during the 14th century BCE—as well as two other shipwrecks from the 16th and late 13th centuries. Guests can peek inside its cargo hold, filled with ivory, glass, containers for perfumes and oils, gold, copper, bronze, Cypriot pottery, and Mesopotamian seals: evidence of international commerce and cultural exchange.

Interactive, multi-sensory elements, involving touch, sight, and smell, will bring the process of archaeological excavation to life—making connections between the region's past and the contemporary world. Visitors will gain a renewed understanding of how their own lives have been affected by concepts first introduced in this thriving sphere of influence—with an opportunity to learn more about the origins of the alphabet, touch six replica artifacts, and smell frankincense.

Providing a clearer picture of some of Penn's most notable excavations, a projection inside the **Eastern Mediterranean Gallery** will animate how archaeologists carefully dig in layers to reach older artifacts buried beneath later material. In addition, it will feature documents from 100-year-old excavations, along with maps from the Museum Archives.

"This new gallery showcases the Museum's foundational excavations during the 20th century at the sites of Beth Shean, Beth Shemesh, Gibeon, Tell es-Sa'idiyah, and Kourion, allowing us to see tombs, temples, palaces, and houses as archaeological keys to unlocking the geographic, cultural, and political connections that defined this important crossroad of the ancient world," says Penn Museum Williams Director Dr. Christopher Woods. "As our work in archaeology continually yields new discoveries, we think in new ways about history and recover the voices of people who shaped it."

Demonstrating the potential for human achievement when people collaborate across geographic, political, and religious lines, the Eastern Mediterranean Gallery highlights the roots of sacred traditions and written scripts that are central to communities across Philadelphia and the globe.

Access to the **Eastern Mediterranean Gallery** is included with Penn Museum admission.

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Editor's Note: Additional high-resolution images are available for download [here](#).

About the Curators

Lauren Ristvet, Ph.D., Lead Exhibition Curator

Dr. Lauren Ristvet, the Robert H. Dyson, Jr. Associate Curator in the Museum's Near East Section, earned her Ph.D. in Near Eastern archaeology from the University of Cambridge. Her research focuses on the emergence of early states, the intersection of religion and politics, and the rise of ancient empires. She founded and is co-director of the Naxcivan-Archaeological project in Azerbaijan (from 2006 until the present) and was associate director of excavations at Tell Leilan, Syria from 2006-2011.

Joanna S. Smith, Ph.D., Co-Curator

Dr. Joanna S. Smith is a Consulting Scholar in the Museum's Mediterranean Section. She is a Consulting Curator whose other museum projects include reinstallations of Cypriot art at The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art and The Metropolitan Museum of Art. She specializes in interconnections among the arts of the Mediterranean, Near East, and Egypt from the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic Period. She co-directs the Princeton University archaeological fieldwork project at Polis Chrysochous, Cyprus. Dr. Smith earned her Ph.D. from Bryn Mawr College.

Virginia Herrmann, Ph.D., Co-Curator

Dr. Virginia Herrmann, a Consulting Co-Curator at the Penn Museum since July 2020, earned her Ph.D. in Near Eastern archaeology from the University of Chicago. Her research on the ancient Near East focuses on the construction of state and social identities through monuments and the development of ancient cities in periods of state formation and imperialism. She has been the co-director of excavations at Zincirli, Türkiye since 2014.

Eric Hubbard, Ph.D. Candidate, Co-curator

Eric Hubbard is a Ph.D. Candidate in Penn's Anthropology Department whose research interests focus on Bronze Age settlement and water dynamics in the Middle East and South Central Asia, remote sensing applications to archaeology, and cultural heritage politics. As a member of Penn Museum's Graduate Advisory Council, Eric contributes to its programming. As a Graduate Guide, he co-authored popular tours, such as "Monsters, Myths, and Legends." He earned his M.A. in anthropology from the University of Chicago and a B.A. in archaeology from the College of Wooster in Ohio. He has participated in fieldwork spanning the U.S. Midwest, Israel, Palestine, Cyprus, and Azerbaijan.

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About the Penn Museum

Home to over a million extraordinary objects, the Penn Museum has been highlighting our shared humanity across continents and millennia since 1887. In expanding access to archaeology and anthropology, the Penn Museum builds empathy and connections between cultures through experiences online and onsite in our galleries.

The Penn Museum is open Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm. The Café is open Tuesday–Saturday, 10:00 am–2:00 pm. For updated safety guidelines and information, visit www.penn.museum, call 215.898.4000, or follow **@PennMuseum** on social media.