

SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

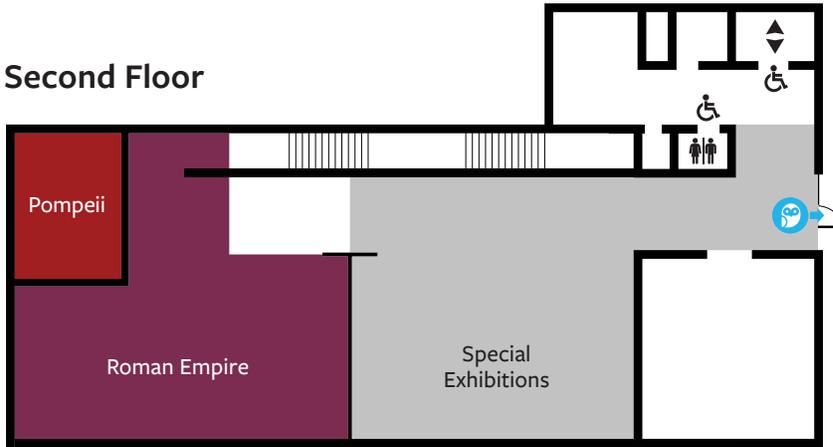


ANCIENT NEAR EAST

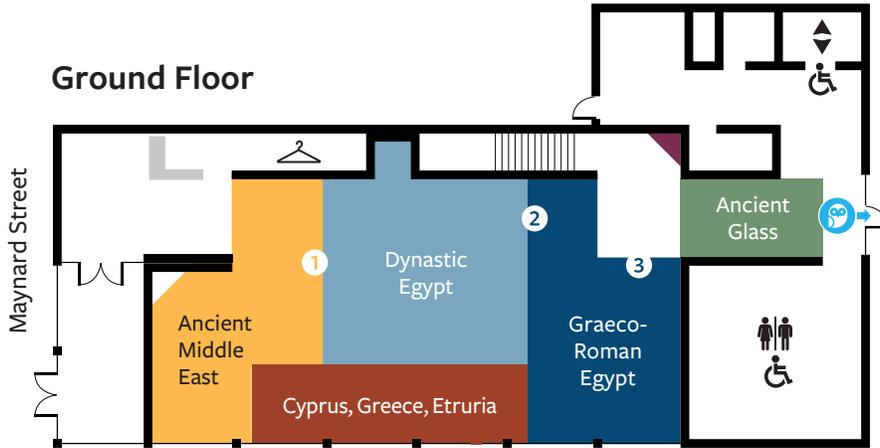


GRAECO-ROMAN EGYPT

Second Floor



Ground Floor



Gift Shop



Restroom



Accessible



Coatroom



Elevator

SELF-GUIDED TOUR:

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

The concept of reusing, repairing, and recycling objects is not new. In the ancient Mediterranean world, broken or obsolete items found new purposes all the time.

To start our tour, please visit the “Mudbrick Mysteries” case near the main entrance of the museum, ① on the map.

Find object 3 (KM 33676). It is a mudbrick. Mesopotamia is a region with very little stone, and in ancient times mudbrick was the most common building material. Making them was easy: just form mud and a little straw into rectangular blocks and leave them in the sun to dry. Mesopotamians used mudbricks to build everything from houses to palaces to temples.

Look closely at this mudbrick. Do you see the lines scratched into the surface? This brick had a second life as a **game board**. The ancients played many different types of board games. We know they played chasing games similar to Parcheesi, racing games like Chutes and Ladders, games of strategy like checkers, and games of chance like dice. We don’t know what was played on this board; it could have been used for a variety of games. We do know that being a game board was a reuse of this construction brick. Have you ever reused something like this for a game, like a sidewalk for a game of hopscotch?

Speaking of games of chance, our next stop on this tour moves us into Egypt. Please head to the “Michigan Excavations in Egypt” case, ② on the map.

Look for objects 1–2 (KM 5930 and 22782–85) at the left side of the case. Do you see the **conical glass vessel and four dice**? The dice were actually found inside the vessel in a house at the site of Karanis in northern Egypt. Although it looks like a cup, this vessel was originally used as an oil lamp (there is an example of a similar lamp in the “Home Life at Karanis” case behind you, object 22). Glass was a costly material, so this lamp probably belonged to someone who was

wealthy. Nevertheless, when the lamp broke (do you see the chip in it?), it wasn’t just thrown away. It was reused for playing dice games.

Not everything re-purposed was made of a costly material, though. Let’s move to the other end of the same case, to object 28 (KM 21379).

This “bowl” was found at the cemetery site of Terenouthis, also in northern Egypt. At first glance it doesn’t look like anything special, but take a closer look. Do you see how narrow the base is? Why do you suppose that is? Because originally this was not a bowl but an **amphora**. Amphoras were the shipping containers of the ancient Mediterranean. You can find other examples along the wall at the base of the stairs. Amphoras were used to ship all kinds of foodstuffs around the Mediterranean. Once they reached their destination, a number of different things might happen. Sometimes they were cleaned out and used to ship something else. Sometimes they were cleaned out and reused as storage containers. The pieces of broken amphoras were used for various things.

Here we have the pointy bottom of a broken amphora being reused as a bowl for mixing paint. A red pigment, likely red ocher, has been mixed with some kind of binder (like oil, egg yolk, or water). The narrow bottom of the amphora made a convenient handle for the painter. Can you think of any modern containers that would also make good vessels for painting?

If we move to the case behind you, number ③ on the map, we can see another use for broken pottery.

Look for object 28 (KM 4232). This is what archaeologists call an **ostrakon**, or piece of broken pottery reused as a writing surface. It records the transport of a shipment of grain. In the ancient

Mediterranean there was no junk mail and no paper napkins lying around, but people did need to make lists or jot quick notes like we do today. Papyrus paper was expensive and not necessarily something you wanted to waste on a list of things you needed at the market. Instead, people looked for what they had on hand. Broken pottery was one answer. Ink was made using soot from oil lamps mixed with water; pens were probably made from reeds.

In recognition of our multicultural society we have chosen to use the more inclusive BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era) in our printed materials, although our galleries still employ the designations BC and AD.