

SELF-GUIDED TOUR

# Take Two and Call Me in the Morning



ANCIENT NEAR EAST

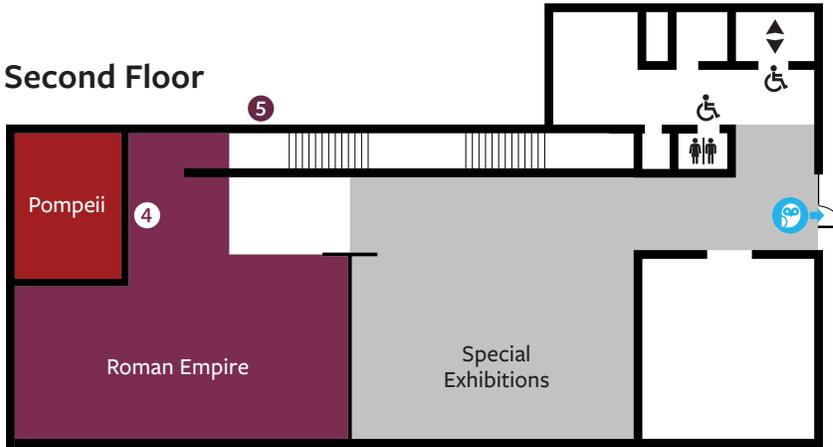


DYNASTIC EGYPT

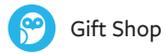
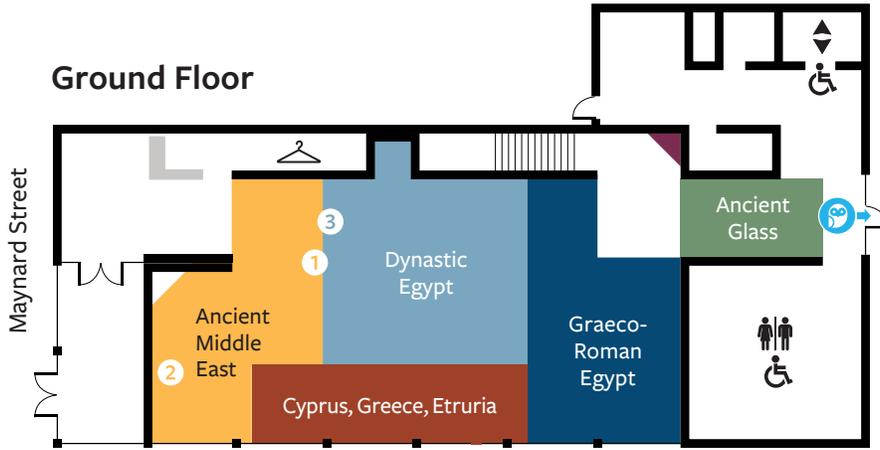


ROMAN EMPIRE

## Second Floor



## Ground Floor



Gift Shop



Restroom



Accessible



Coatroom



Elevator

## SELF-GUIDED TOUR:

# Take Two and Call Me in the Morning

This tour explores some of the tools used by healing practitioners from the various cultures represented in the Kelsey Museum.

Today we understand that disease is caused by microscopic organisms: viruses, bacteria, parasites. In the ancient Mediterranean world, people believed that disease and sickness were caused by curses, evil spirits, and an imbalance of humors in the body. People sought care from medical practitioners who would treat the physical symptoms (a sore eye or a fever), as well as from spiritual, magical, and religious practitioners who treated the underlying cause (the curse sent by your political rival or punishment for disrespecting a god, for example).

Let's start the tour in ancient Mesopotamia, at the "Mudbrick Mysteries" case near the main entrance to the museum, ❶ on the map.

Look at object number 18 (KM 33978). This small, unassuming object is a fragment of a **cuneiform medical text**. Texts like this record diagnostic information about different diseases and injuries as well as treatment plans. They might have been used to educate and inform medical practitioners. They are important windows into medical beliefs and practices in ancient Mesopotamia.

An *asu*, or physical healer, treated things like broken bones and wounds. For ailments like fevers, infections, and digestive problems, the *asu* would diagnose the problem and identify the cause, often some wrong-doing on the part of the afflicted. For patients with diseases, the *asu* would also work with an *asipu*, a healer who used medicines, ointments, magic amulets, prayers, and spells in an attempt to change unfavorable outcomes. Physical and magical/spiritual healing were both needed to treat any illness.

Think about the processes we go through today for the treatment of diseases. What's similar? What's different? Do doctors today still refer to texts like this one to help diagnose and treat disease?

Let's now look at a couple of examples of the tools for magical/spiritual healing. Move to the "Messages and Magic" case behind you, ❷ on the map.

Look for object 14 (KM 26196). This small piece of polished and carved hematite is an **amulet**, an object that would have been worn or carried for protection. Healers would "prescribe" amulets like this to prevent or treat ailments. We know this amulet was meant to protect its wearer from indigestion because on the back is carved the Greek word *pepte*, which means "digest" (think ancient Pepto Bismol).

Look closely at the amulet. Carved on the displayed side is a figure with a lion head, a human body, and snakes for legs who's carrying a whip and a shield. This is the image of a demon, probably Abraxas or Chnoubis. Chnoubis in particular is associated with indigestion and poisoning. This amulet would be worn with the Greek inscription touching the skin to activate the magic, and the carved image facing out to drive away demons and other evil spirits. Using the likeness of a demon to drive away an actual demon is a concept very similar to how we use vaccines today. An inactive virus helps our immune system "drive away" a more harmful version of the same virus.

Protective amulets were used throughout the ancient Mediterranean world. Let's now move to Egypt to look at another example. Please head to the Dynastic Egypt case, ❸ on the map.

Find objects 18 (KM 1971.2.29–30) in the center of the case. Look closely at these two similar objects. What do they look like to you? Do they look like human eyes? These are healing amulets called **Eye of Horus amulets**, or *wedjats*. The son of the gods Osiris and Isis, Horus was the protector of the living Egyptian king. He was also a healing god. One myth about him records a battle between Horus and his uncle Set over the throne of Egypt. During the fighting, Set tore out Horus's eye. Thoth, another healing god,

returned it to Horus, who then gave the restored eye to his murdered father in the hopes of bringing him back from the dead.

These amulets were thought to have healing properties and were placed over wounds or worn by an injured person. During mummification, wedjat amulets were often incorporated into the wrappings over the incisions where the deceased's organs had been removed.

Amulets were not the only way people sought spiritual or magical healing. In the Greek and Roman worlds, anatomical votives were used to seek divine help with ailments. Let's now head upstairs to look at some examples in the "Health, Adornment, and Entertainment" case at the top of the stairs, 4 on the map.

Look at objects 1–8 (KM 1761, 1774, 1776, 1780, 1773, 1767, 2800, 2722). Here we have what appears to be a collection of ceramic body parts. They look like random pieces of a ceramic doll, but in fact each of these body parts was made to stand alone. So what is going on here?

In the Greek and Roman world, people with illnesses often went to a temple to pray for help. Greeks visited the healing god Apollo or his son Asklepios. For the Romans, any god or goddess would do. Shops near the temples sold small models of healthy body parts in ceramic, marble, bronze, and wood. Supplicants would buy a model of the ailing body part at the level they could afford. At the temple, they would dedicate the model to the god and ask that their own corresponding body part be healed. They might also promise to return with a more expensive version of the body part if the healing was successful. We call these offerings **anatomical votives** because they are gifts to the gods (votives) in the form of anatomically correct body parts. They could be used to ask for help with anything from disease to infertility.

Do you see the bronze implements below the anatomical votives? These are **Roman medical tools**. In addition to asking the gods for healing, ailing individuals could also seek help from a surgeon, midwife,

or other medical practitioner. These professionals treated physical symptoms such as swelling and pain from gout or the blisters from dermatitis. Do any of these tools look familiar? How do you think you would fare in the ancient world if you needed medical help? (Remember, there was no penicillin or aspirin!)

So who were these healers? Let's now move to our final stop, right at the top of the stairs, 5 on the map. Find inscription number 16 (KM 869).

Here we have the **funerary inscription** for a midwife. Midwives in the Roman empire not only looked after pregnant women and delivered babies, they were also highly respected healers in general. They provided treatment for a wide range of illnesses, especially ones that afflicted women and children. What else does this inscription tell us about the midwife? Do you think you might have sought her help if you lived in ancient Rome?

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.