Art and Science in LACMA’s *Cosmologies* Exhibition

2024

Stephen Little
Mapping Space and Time
Neolithic Stone Circle, Nabta Playa, Nubian Desert, southern Egypt, c. 7500–5400 BCE
Tablet: Planisphere with Constellations, from the Library of Ashurbanipal

Neo-Assyrian, 650 BCE

From Kouyunjik (ancient Nineveh), Iraq

Clay; diam. 14.10 x 3.20 cm

British Museum (K.8538)

**Drawing of the Astronomical Ceiling Paintings in the tombs of Senenmut**
(Egypt, Dynasty 18, c. 1479–1458 BCE)

28 3/4 × 22 1/4 in. (73 × 56.5 cm)

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
Rogers Fund, 1948
(48.105.52)

A schematic guide to the night sky that
decorates a ceiling in the tomb of Senenmut (TT 353) at Deir el-Bahri
“[The] inscription indicates it was the property of Bes, son of Khonsirtis (Khensardais var.), an astronomer priest of the god Horus of Edfu in Upper Egypt. [The device] used to layout axes of buildings and to determine the hours of the night by observing the passage of selected stars across the north-south meridian.”
Zodiac Chart from the Osiris Chapel of the Temple of Hathor
Ptolemaic Period, 50 BCE
Dendara, Egypt, from Description de l'Egypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont ete faites en Egypte pendant l'expedition de l'armee francaise
Bound book; ink on paper / Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1817
Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles
‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Umar al-Sufi (903–986)
The Constellation Pegasus, from Kitāb ṣuwar al-kawākib
(Book of the Constellations of Fixed Stars)
Persia, 14th century
Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz al Khama'iri

**Astrolabe**

Seville, Spain, 1226–1227 CE / 624 AH

Gilt copper alloy; 8 3/8 x 5 1/2 x 1 1/8 in. (21.28 x 13.97 x 2.86 cm)

LACMA, Gift of Carolyn Merchant (M.2003.116a-k)
The Buddha Shakyamuni at Mount Meru
(at the center of the multiple world systems)

Tibet, 1700–1800

Thangka; colors on cotton
39 1/8 x 25 5/8 in. (99.4 x 65.1 cm)

Asian Art Museum of San Francisco,
The Avery Brundage Collection
(B60D13+)
Mirror with Cosmological Designs

China, Tang dynasty (618–906)

Bronze; D. 26.4 cm.

American Museum of Natural History, New York, Berthold Laufer Collection (70/11671)
Star Chart
Southern Song dynasty, 1247
Confucian Temple, Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, China
Panel with Inscription Referring to the Date of Creation

Mexico, Maya, 9th century

Limestone
52 7/10 x 18 7/10 x 3 4/5 in.
(133.858 x 47.498 x 9.652 cm)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Anonymous gift
(M.2010.115.112)
Cosmic Deities
Censer Stand with Solar Deities

Maya, 650–850 CE

Post-fire painted ceramic
42 1/2 x 24 x 8 1/2 in. (107.95 x 60.96 x 21.59 cm)

Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Anonymous gift
(M.2010.115.426)
Codex Borgia (detail)

Mexico, Aztec, early 16th century

Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

This page symbolically illustrates the transformation of the planet Venus taking place during the inferior conjunction in the month of the winter solstice.
Inanna (Ishtar), Goddess of Love and War, with her Deputy, the Goddess Ninshubur, a Lion, and the Planet Venus (Inanna’s celestial manifestation)

Iraq, Akkadian, ca. 2334–2154 BCE
Cylinder Seal Impression
Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago
Nun, the Primordial Being, Lifting the Solar Barque, from the Book of the Dead of Anhay [Anhai]

Egypt, 20th dynasty (1189–1077 BCE)

Ink and colors on papyrus

46 x 65 cm

British Museum (EA10472 / 1888,0512.222.1)
Ma’at, Goddess of Cosmic Order and Justice

Egypt, New Kingdom, 19th Dynasty, reign of Seti I (c. 1290–1279 BCE)
Painted limestone bas-relief; H. 74 cm.
National Archaeological Museum of Florence, Palazzo della Crocetta (SA FI 42469)
Brahma, the God of Creation

Indonesia, Central Java, 9th century

Volcanic stone (andesite)
45 3/4 x 17 1/2 x 12 1/2 in. (116.2 x 44.45 x 31.75 cm)

LACMA, Gift of the 2000 Collectors Committee (M.2000.30)
Astronomy and Astrology
Mahmud ibn Yahya ibn al-Hasan al-Kashi
Zodiac Chart / Persia, 1411
Wellcome Library, London
The Astrological Body, from the Guild-Book of the Barber-Surgeons of York

England, 15th century

British Library, London (MS Egerton 2572, f. 50v)
Twelve Deities of the Chinese Zodiac

Ming dynasty, 1454

Hanging scroll; ink and colors on silk

Musée Guimet, Paris
Cosmology and Power
Stela of Shamshi-Adad V

Neo-Assyrian, 824–811 BCE

From the Temple of Nabu at Nimrud, Iraq

Limestone; 195.24 x 92.54 x 71.96 cm

British Museum (118892)
Coronation Stone of Motecuhzoma II (Stone of the Five Suns). Mexico, Aztec, 1503. Basalt, 55.9 × 66 × 22.9 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago, Major Acquisitions Fund (1990.21)

This sculpture conflates cosmic and historical time, with glyphic carvings of the four previous suns (or eras) at the four corners of the monument, with the current sun (4 Movement) depicted in the center. The monument marks the coronation of Motecuhzoma II in 1503 CE, and thus his central place in the cosmic order of birth, death, and regenesis.
The Rise of Modern Cosmology
Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528)

Imagines coeli septentrionales cum duodecim imaginibus zodiaci, 1515

Etching; 48.4 x 44.1 cm

National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, England

Print depicting the northern sky with twelve images of the Zodiac. In the four corners are the authorities on whom the constellations are based: Aratus Cilix (Aratus of Soli), Ptolemaeus Aegyptus (Ptolemy), M Mamlius Romanus (Marcus Manilius), and Azophi Arabus (‘Abd al-Rahman al-Sufi).
Nicolaus Copernicus
(Mikołaj Kopernik, 1473–1543)

Diagram of a Heliocentric Solar System from *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (*The Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres*), 1543

Printed in Nuremberg, Holy Roman Empire
Bound book, ink on paper

Houghton Library, Harvard
Galileo Galilei (1564–1642)

Sidereus nuncius (The Starry Messenger)

Pisa, 1610

Printed book, ink on paper

Houghton Library, Harvard
Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675)

The Astronomer

c. 1668

Oil on canvas; 20 × 18 in.
(51 × 45 cm)

Musée du Louvre, Paris
Thomas Wright (1711–1786)

Universe with Multiple Star Systems,
from the book, *An Original Theory or New Hypothesis of the Universe*

1750

Mezzotint

Wolbach Library, Harvard University, Cambridge MA
Etienne Léopold Trouvelot

Saturn

1875

Charcoal on paper

US Naval Observatory, Washington, DC
Edwin Hubble, Glass plate negative identifying a variable star in the Andromeda Galaxy
October 6, 1923
Carnegie Observatories, Pasadena
The Hubble eXtreme Deep Field (2012)
NASA
Sloan Digital Sky Survey Map of Galaxies

(Screen shot from Juna Kollmeier’s TED Talk Video)
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Nancy Thomas, Senior Deputy Director, Curator, Egyptian Art, and Curatorial Coordinator, Art of the Pacific
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