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January 2013

Where: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

When: March 9–April 28, 2013

Description: One of history's most important objects, the Cyrus Cylinder dates to the sixth century BCE, when the Persian king Cyrus the Great took Babylon. The Cylinder proclaims Cyrus's victory and his declaration of religious freedom for his newly conquered people, a statement that has inspired generations of philosophers, rulers, and statesmen. On loan from the British Museum, this remarkable object makes its US debut at the Sackler and is shown together with key works that offer insight into Cyrus's vast and powerful Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE.).

About the Cylinder: The Cylinder is 9 in (22.86 cm) in length, is barrel-shaped and is made of baked clay. It is inscribed all the way round with a proclamation in cuneiform script. Originally it was inscribed and buried in the foundations of a wall after Cyrus the Great, the Persian Emperor, captured Babylon in 539 BCE. The cylinder is written in Babylonian cuneiform, probably by a Babylonian scribe. It records that aided by the god Marduk Cyrus captured Babylon without a struggle, restored shrines dedicated to different gods, and repatriated deported peoples who had been brought to Babylon.

The Cylinder was rediscovered in 1879 by Hormuzd Rassam and has been on display in the British Museum ever since. In January 2010 the British Museum discovered two fragments of cuneiform tablet which had also been found in 19th century British Museum excavations in or near Babylon. These fragments show that the text of the Cylinder was probably a proclamation that was widely distributed across the Persian Empire. When the Cylinder was loaned to Iran in September 2010, it was viewed by more than half a million people, one of the most visited exhibitions in the country's history.

Objects: *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning* includes related objects that highlight some of the artistic, cultural and historical achievements of the Achaemenid Empire (550–330 BCE) of Iran.

Date range: 550–330 BCE

Object count: 18 objects

Media and format (select list): Architectural fragments, finely carved seals, golden luxury objects from the Oxus Treasure, coins and a ceramic fragment

Curators: **Curator:** John Curtis, *Keeper of Special Middle East Projects, British Museum*
In-house curators: Dr. Massumeh Farhad, *Chief Curator and Curator of Islamic Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery*, Dr. Alex Nagel, *Assistant Curator of Ancient Near Eastern Art, Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery*

Tour: The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery will be the first U.S. venue for *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning*. Additional tour locations include:

- The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston: May 3—June 14, 2013
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: June 20—August 4, 2013
- Asian Art Museum, San Francisco: August 9—September 22, 2013
- The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles: October 2—December 2, 2013

For more information on the exhibition’s U.S. tour, visit CyrusCylinder2013.com.

Organization: *The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning* is organized by the British Museum, in partnership with the Iran Heritage Foundation and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, and is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. Additional support for the Sackler’s presentation is provided by the Leon Levy Foundation, the Ebrahimi Family Foundation and the Foundation for Iranian Studies.

Events: **Title:** The Many Meanings of the Cyrus Cylinder with British Museum director Neil MacGregor
Type: Lecture
Date: Thursday, March 7
Time: 6 pm
Location: TBD
Description: In honor of the opening of “The Cyrus Cylinder and Ancient Persia: A New Beginning,” British museum director Neil MacGregor discusses the many lives, meanings and interpretations of the Cylinder, one of the most iconic objects in world history. The lecture will be followed by a brief Q & A session.

Title: Silent Film with Live Musical Accompaniment: *Intolerance*
Type: Film and performance
Date: Saturday, March 9
Time: 3 pm
Location: Freer Gallery, Meyer Auditorium
Description: The Baltimore-based ensemble Boister performs its acclaimed live score to D. W. Griffith’s masterpiece. Starring silent-film darling Lillian Gish, *Intolerance* intercuts four narratives: a contemporary melodrama, the death of Jesus Christ, the St.

Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572, and the fall of Babylon at the hands of the Persians. (Dir.: D. W. Griffith, United States, 1916, B&W, silent, 197 min.)

Title: Points of View- From Babylon to Persepolis: Cyrus the Great and the Legacy of Ancient Iran

Type: Curator-led tour

Date: Tuesday, March 12; Tuesday, April 23

Time: 12:15 pm

Location: Sackler Gallery, sublevel 1

Description: One of the most important objects in history, the Cyrus Cylinder represents the worldview of the Achaemenid Empire (550–331 BCE.) that ruled over vast territories in the ancient Near East. Curators of the Sackler's exhibition of the Cylinder discuss its archaeological and historical context and its lasting legacy.

Title: Nowruz: A Persian New Year!

Type: Festival

Date: Saturday, March 16

Time: 11 am–5 pm

Location: Freer Gallery, Sackler Gallery, Ripley Center

Description: In conjunction with the US debut of the iconic Cyrus Cylinder, visitors of all ages are invited to enjoy "Haft Sin" table displays, "fire" jumping, a photo booth, games, stories by Xanthe Gresham, performances by the Nomad Dancers, and live Persian music. Explore digitized photographs by Antoin Sevruguin and participate in a variety of family activities. Traditional Persian food by Moby Dick House of Kabob and special cupcakes by Fraiche Cupcakery are available for purchase. The event is made possible by a generous grant from Jahangir and Eleanor Amuzegar. asia.si.edu/nowruz

Title: Cuneiform Tweets: Inscribe a Short Message in Cuneiform!

Type: Family workshop

Date: Saturdays, April 20 and 27; Sundays, April 21 and 28

Time: 2 pm

Location: Sackler Gallery, sublevel 2

Description: The inscription on the iconic Cyrus Cylinder is written in cuneiform, an ancient writing system that was used to record everything from poetry to farming information. In this program, explore the Cyrus Cylinder exhibition with an activity book and then use a stylus to incise a message on a clay tablet.

Title: The Historical King Cyrus and Handel's *Belshazzar*

Type: Lecture and performance

Date: Thursday, April 18

Time: 7 pm

Location: Freer Gallery, Meyer Auditorium

Description: Scholars compare current understanding of King Cyrus with information that was available to Handel, which influenced how he portrayed the ruler in his 1744 oratorio *Belshazzar*. The Gallery Voices and the Smithsonian Concerto Grosso perform live excerpts from *Belshazzar*.

Title: Handel's *Belshazzar*: The Gallery Voices and Smithsonian Concerto Grosso

Type: Performance

Date: Saturday, April 20

Time: 7:30 pm

Location: Freer Gallery, Meyer Auditorium

Description: Handel's dramatic oratorio brings to life the confrontation between the Persian king Cyrus and his Babylonian counterpart Belshazzar. The Gallery Voices, directed by Rosa Lamoreaux, with the Smithsonian Concerto Grosso, directed by Kenneth Slowik, perform.

Title: The Legacy of Cyrus the Great: Iran and Beyond

Type: Symposium and lecture

Date: Saturday, April 27, 9:30 am–4 pm

Time: 9:30 am–4 pm

Location: Freer Gallery, Meyer Auditorium

Description: Coinciding with the Sackler's exhibition of the Cyrus Cylinder, this public symposium examines the legacy of Cyrus the Great. Scholars and experts contextualize Cyrus's achievements and human rights legacy within the ancient world, the American Revolution, and the 21st century. Brief talks, a roundtable conversation, and audience discussion are featured throughout the day.

Hours: 10 am—5:30 pm daily, except Dec. 25

Admission: Free