

*Annie Caubet*

*The Joint Collaboration of the Louvre with the Metropolitan  
Museum of Art for the reunification of a Neo-Sumerian chlorite  
statue*

In 1974, the Louvre and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York passed an agreement to the effect that the two institutions would reunite the head and body of the Sumerian statue and take turn in the presentation of the whole artefact every four years. In the Louvre, a coloured cast takes the place of the original when it is gone across the Atlantic.

The site of Tello, in a now deserted spot of southern Irak, had long been thoroughly looted when the newly appointed French counsel at Bassorah, Ernest de Sarzec, started in 1877 to map and excavate the mounds from where fragments of stone statues were appearing. His finds, reliefs and sculptures bearing inscriptions in an unknown language, brought upon the rediscovery of the Sumerians, inventors of the first scripture, and such masterpieces as the statues that Gudea, prince of the city states of Lagash, dedicated to his gods. The Sumerian script was deciphered by the great philologist François Thureau-Dangin. The archaeological remains were promptly published by Sarzec and Leon Heuzey, keeper of Ancient Near Eastern Antiquities of the Louvre (*Découvertes en Chaldée*).

Sarzec's excavation efforts continued until 1900, amid great difficulties: the official authorities in Constantinople, who shared in the discoveries, were unable to maintain order in the area, the local Muntefik Bedouin tribes were in constant rebellion against the state, looting activity was fuelled by the very importance of Sarzec finds. Captain Gaston Cros, a military man with experience of the desert, succeeded Sarzec and proceeded with the work on the site until 1909. Troubles in the region then worsened and culminated with the outbreak of World War I, preventing any work. Between 1909 and 1924, looting took place on a grand scale. Major artefacts, often with inscriptions, came into the possession of the dealer Gejou. In 1924-1925, a series of statues of the Sumerian dynasty, including the statue in this case, were sold to various European and American institutions or collectors.

Official excavation was resumed at Tello in 1928; a proper department of antiquities was established in Irak and encouraged scientific exploration of the country during more than 75 years. In 2003, the events in Irak completely destroyed the organisation of antiquities, among other disasters. As far as Tello is concerned, no information could be obtained for that isolated zone.

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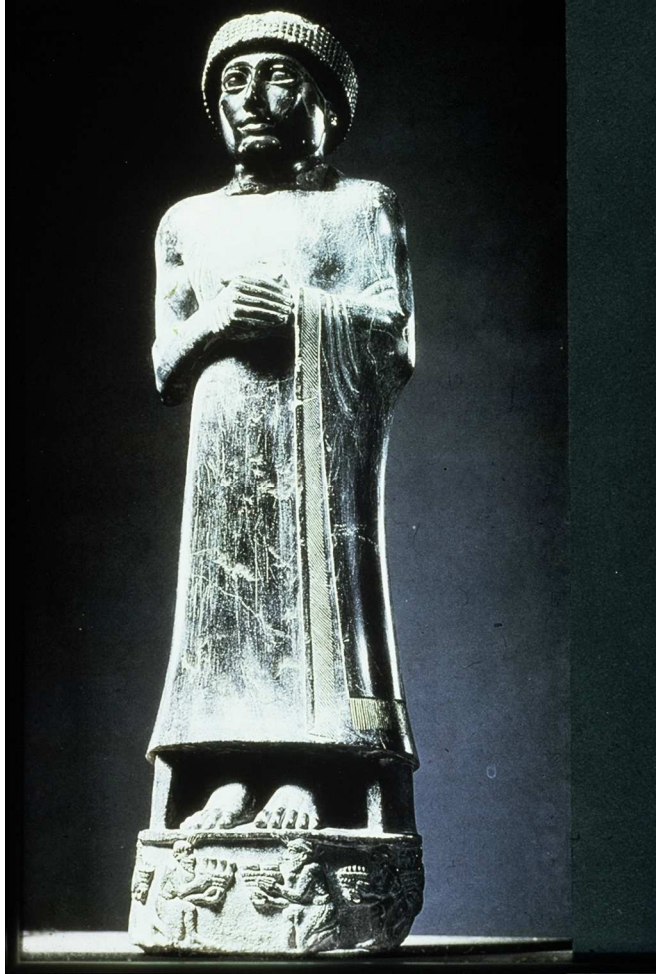
Honorary Keeper of the Ancient Near East Department in the Louvre



Statue of Un Ningirsu, ruler of the city-state of Lagash  
Dedicated to the god Ningishzida  
Brown gypsum alabaster. Completed Height 56 cm.  
Musée du Louvre. Archives DAO



Musée du Louvre. Archives DAO



Musée du Louvre. Archives DAO



Musée du Louvre. Archives DAO