

## **Shelf 1: Introduction**

The religious legacy of the Ancient Near East is the Abrahamic tradition (of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the theology of which identifies a God who created the world but is apart from it. Not so the older religions of the region. They envisioned divine, superhuman entities as the forces of nature and of human nature. The sea god made the tides rise and fall; a couple fell in love only at the will of the goddess of love. Religion was everywhere and in everything. This exhibit contains artifacts created for daily prayers and specific rituals, others made for practical use but decorated to invoke a god or express its power. Still others, some special, some commonplace, were chosen to accompany the dead into the afterlife. Everyday objects like statuettes, charms, lamps, pottery, and even coins, all reveal how religion pervaded life – and death – for the people of the Ancient Near East.