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THE ROYAL CEMETERY OF UR

William B. Hafford

Opposite

View of the Goat in a Tree (30-12-702) on display in the new Middle East Galleries at the Penn Museum. Likely a stand for a small offering or incense bowl, this highly detailed sculptural furnishing from the “Great Death Pit” in the Royal Cemetery reflects the high standard of artistic development in the Early Dynastic Period.

Introduction

The famous Royal Cemetery of Ur is only one part of a large and very deep burial ground in the middle of the ancient city. The site's initial excavators divided this burial ground, known in archaeological parlance as Area PG, into three primary layers or periods of burial that might be considered discrete cemeteries within it, with the latest burials situated closest to the surface. These vertical distinctions help us to understand the complicated sequence of burials and will be referred to in this discussion—even if they are not as clear as Sir Leonard Woolley, director of the joint Penn Museum and British Museum archaeological expedition at Ur from 1922–1934, believed. In actuality, the burial ground was in nearly continuous use for a thousand years, from a little before 3100 to just after 2100 BCE, making its division into discrete cemeteries a difficult and problematic prospect (Fig. 8.1).

The uppermost and most recent layer of burials in Area PG date to the Akkadian (ca. 2334–2154 BCE) and partly into the subsequent Ur III (ca. 2112–2004 BCE) Periods; we will consequently call this layer the Akkadian Cemetery. Graves of this upper cemetery were typically found between 2 and 5 meters (6.5 and 16 feet) below the modern ground surface.

The burials of the middle layer, typically found between 5 and 11 meters (16 and 36 feet) below the surface of the mound, mostly belonged to the Early Dynastic III (ED III) Period (ca. 2600–2334 BCE). It is this layer that is identified as the Royal Cemetery, since all of the sixteen graves designated as royal were found in this vertical zone.

The deepest and oldest graves in the burial ground, located some 11 to 18 meters (36 and 59 feet) below the surface, date from the end of the Late Uruk through the Early Dynastic I (ED I) Period (ca. 3100–2600 BCE). Within this span is a short, transitional period sometimes termed Jemdet Nasr, so that we can call these burials, as Woolley did, the Jemdet Nasr Cemetery.

Overall, more than 2,000 graves were uncovered in Area PG at Ur, located at varying depths below the surface and spanning a thousand years of history. Because the middle or ED III Period cemetery, the so-called Royal Cemetery, has garnered the most attention and remains the most mysterious, much of this chapter will be dedicated to it.

Some 750 graves were excavated in the Royal Cemetery, but only 16 of these included the type of extravagant display of precious objects and human sacrifice that led to their designation as royal. There is good reason to examine these tombs carefully, for such extravagant display is well beyond that found in any other excavated grave or other site of this period (ca. 2450 BCE) in Mesopotamia. Yet, not a single one of these 16 graves can be definitively associated with historically attested kings and queens of Ur. If the occupants of these tombs were royalty, then what was their dynasty, and why is it not attested in the textual records extant from Mesopotamia? If they were not royalty, how

Fig. 8.1 *Opposite*

The Royal Cemetery (Area PG) is seen at the bottom right of this plan map of the sacred zone of the city of Ur. It lies to the south of the Ur III temenos wall and was crossed over by the later, Neo-Babylonian temenos wall.

were they able to amass such wealth as was buried with them and such dedication as is attested by the human sacrifices that accompany them? Furthermore, why were so many other and much less elaborate burials found in and around these 16 extraordinary tombs, often cutting through and destroying parts of them? Finally, what was the process and ritual involved in the burial of the individuals found in the so-called royal tombs and what was the nature of the belief system behind it?

We do not know the precise answers to these questions, though theories abound. Indeed, much about the Royal Cemetery remains a mystery and the subject of ongoing research. In order to attempt an understanding of this remarkable archaeological area and the artifacts it has yielded, we must first look to the history of excavation at Ur, which began almost a century ago.

Excavating Area PG and the Royal Cemetery

In 1922, C. Leonard Woolley's first excavation trench at the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur uncovered traces of what would later gain worldwide fame as the Royal Cemetery. This trench, Trial Trench A, revealed scattered artifacts such as gold and lapis lazuli jewelry that could have been high-end burial goods. As no clearly defined walls or graves were discovered, however, Woolley's team did not pursue further excavations at Trial Trench A immediately but concentrated instead on Trial Trench B, which had exposed major architecture in the sacred zone near the ziggurat. In later years, Woolley claimed also to have intentionally avoided further excavations in the vicinity of Trial Trench A until his workers had gained more experience digging at the site.

It was only in 1926, then, that Woolley would return to excavate the area. Upon digging four additional trial trenches and discovering hundreds of graves, many of which contained impressive small finds, he ultimately expanded his excavations to an area of nearly 4,000 square meters (43,000 square feet). He assigned sequential numbers to the graves he found, preceded by the letters PG. These letters, which appear in the earliest field notes to stand for Pre-dynastic or Prehistoric Grave, later came to denote Private Grave (since none of the excavated graves actually belonged to prehistoric periods) and were then applied to the entire area of the cemetery as Area PG. The discovery within this cemetery of a handful of private graves containing very rich grave goods, which were heralded worldwide as rivaling those from Tutankhamun's tomb in Egypt found only a few years earlier (Fig. 8.2), has sometimes led to the mistaken popular appellation of the entire Area PG as the Royal Cemetery of Ur.

Woolley and his team worked in Area PG for five years, uncovering more than 300 graves per season (Fig. 8.3). Eventually, the number of graves exceeded 2,000. One grave would often encroach on or obliterate another and evidence of looted and scattered graves was commonplace; Woolley estimated that the original number of graves in area

Fig. 8.2 Opposite

Newspapers picked up stories of the Ur excavations, particularly after the discovery of the Royal Cemetery. Queen Puabi (her name then read Shubad) was a favorite source of speculation. She was often compared with 'flappers' of the day.

Grim Tragedy of Wicked Queen Shubad's 100 Poisoned Slaves

Science at Last Reveals How the Greatest Suicide Pact in History Was Carried Out at the Tomb of the Beautiful Oriental Ruler Who Died 5500 Years Ago



One of the many beautiful golden cups found alongside the remains of Queen Shubad. It is said that poisoned slaves



Feasting by Queen Shubad, during the banquet of a great banquet in the palace, when she and her slaves were poisoned at the foot of the page in the belief that they would accompany her into the next world.

Science Unearths the "Flapper" of 6,000 Years Ago



Rouged Her Cheeks Red and Her Eyes Green, Used the Lipstick, Bobbed Her Hair and Danced at the Jazz Parties at the Temple in the Patriarch Abraham's Ancient City of Ur



Dr. Louis (Smith) Taylor, Philadelphia, who discovered the remains of Queen Shubad.

Here is how the first Flapper of 6,000 Years Ago lived. She was a beautiful woman, with her hair bobbed and her cheeks rouged. She used lipstick and danced at the jazz parties at the temple in the patriarch Abraham's ancient city of Ur.

Science has unearthed the remains of a beautiful woman, who lived 6,000 years ago. She was a flapper, with her hair bobbed and her cheeks rouged. She used lipstick and danced at the jazz parties at the temple in the patriarch Abraham's ancient city of Ur.



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Sunday ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH Magazine



A PRINCESS of 3000 B. C.



What Science Has Discovered About the Personal Adornment of Chaldean Ladies.

By a Member of the Philadelphia Society of Naturalists

What science has discovered about the personal adornment of Chaldean ladies. The remains of a beautiful woman, who lived 6,000 years ago, have been unearthed. She was a flapper, with her hair bobbed and her cheeks rouged. She used lipstick and danced at the jazz parties at the temple in the patriarch Abraham's ancient city of Ur.

Science has unearthed the remains of a beautiful woman, who lived 6,000 years ago. She was a flapper, with her hair bobbed and her cheeks rouged. She used lipstick and danced at the jazz parties at the temple in the patriarch Abraham's ancient city of Ur.

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Fig. 8.3 Above

Leonard and Katharine Woolley are seen here digging with a few local workmen in the “Great Death Pit,” PG 1237. Many of the flattened skeletons can be seen at the bottom of the picture, while the Woolleys are digging amongst the collapsed lyres.

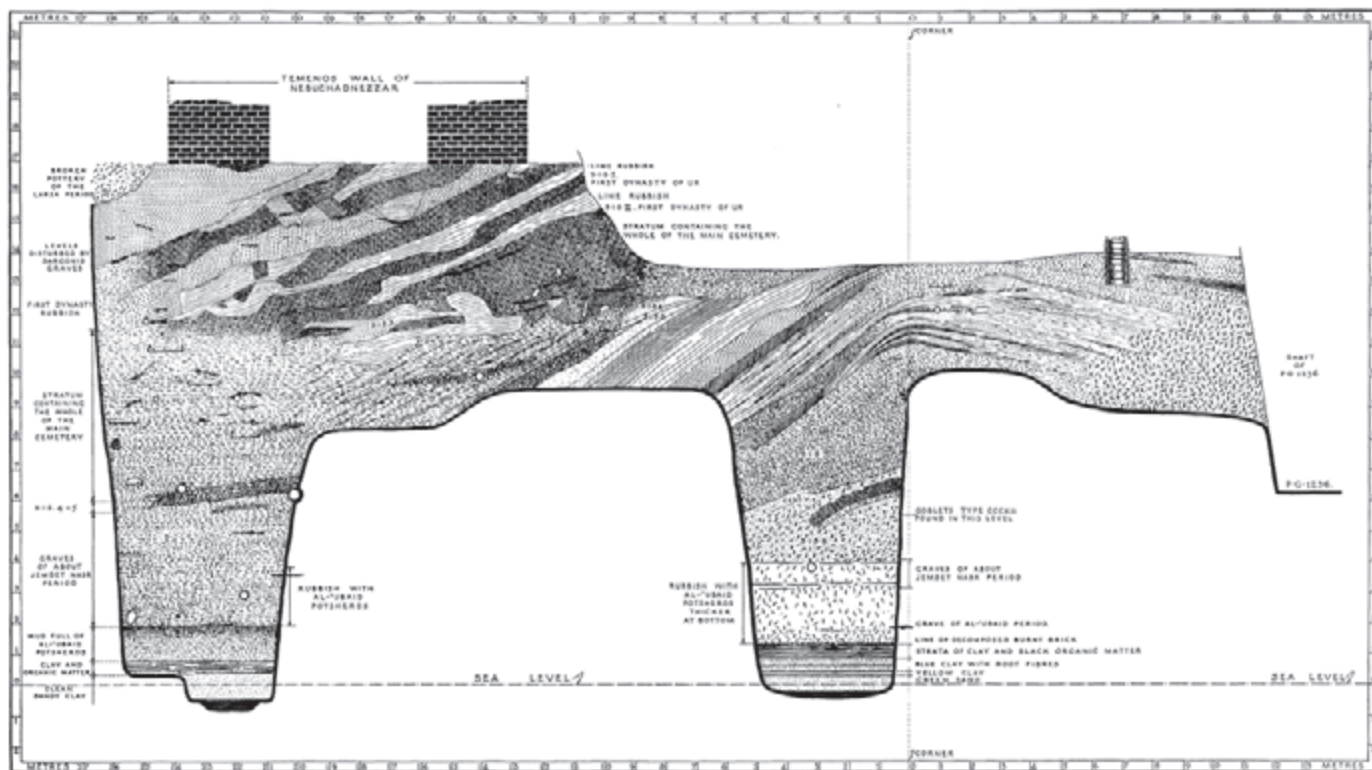
PG may have been two or three times greater than he actually counted. Some graves, moreover, contained multiple burials while others contained bones that had completely deteriorated; the total number of people buried here is, thus, impossible to calculate, though it certainly ranges in the thousands.

The cemetery sat to the southeast of the sacred temple zone that included the ziggurat of Ur. Much later, the Neo-Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar II (ca. 634–562 BCE) extended the sacred zone and built a new wall surrounding it. The southeast corner of this new wall ran directly over the top of the cemetery, which had been long out of use by that point. Woolley dug down below the Neo-Babylonian wall, through ancient dumping layers, and into the cemetery. He then dug several test pits that were deeper still to reveal evidence of a much earlier cemetery beneath. In some pits he reached a depth of nearly 20 meters (65.5 feet) below the modern ground surface.

Because the cemetery had been covered over by heavily eroded debris and refuse, Woolley's Trial Trench A had uncovered little evidence of the graves. As he expanded the trench, however, he found that most had been cut into an earlier rubbish dump that had formed an irregular and sloping surface. The rubbish formed a complex set of layers sloping down toward what was possibly a marshy area or canal just outside the earliest city. After excavating the Akkadian and ED III graves, Woolley extended the area to the south in order to explore the deepest, Jemdet Nasr, cemetery.

The different layers of dirt in Area PG yielded characteristic artifacts that helped to date them. Many contained administrative artifacts, such as archaic tablets and seal impressions, that were particularly diagnostic of their time periods. Especially in the southwestern portion of the cemetery, Woolley encountered layer upon layer of these administrative artifacts; he dubbed these layers the Seal Impression Strata (Fig. 8.4). The study of these and their contents has helped to refine our understanding of early 3rd millennium BCE administration at Ur. The archaic texts from these layers are among the earliest known from Mesopotamia, and the sealings come from doors, jars, and other commodities sealed for protection or identification. They were likely dumped in Area PG from an early temple of Nanna or other important building that once existed near this space.

Since the graves in Area PG were cut into sloping ground and to varying depths below this sloping surface, the elevation of one burial relative to another offered little insight into their dates. However, since later burials commonly overlay, cut through, or otherwise disturbed earlier ones, Woolley was able to gather data from groups of superimposed burials to create a developmental sequence of artifacts such as pottery, stone and metal vessels, and metal tools and weapons. By comparing the objects recovered from a grave to this developmental sequence, any single burial could be assigned a relative date with respect to the other burials discovered. This allowed Woolley to differentiate what he initially reported as two cemeteries, the later Akkadian and the earlier Royal (ED III). The oldest Jemdet Nasr graves had not yet been excavated at this point; in fact, Woolley's



1934 publication entitled *The Royal Cemetery* covered only the ED III and Akkadian Period graves. He was convinced that there was a break between these two cemeteries, marked by a division in the Seal Impression Strata, but the division is not particularly clear and even Woolley recognized the existence of a few graves intermediate in date between the two cemeteries.

Woolley's methodology in dating the burials in Area PG at Ur was seemingly solid, but a number of questions remain, and many studies have continued to examine the stratigraphy and relative dating of the burial ground's thousands of graves. These studies generally suggest the more or less continuous practice of burying the dead in Area PG in the centuries between the Early Dynastic III through the Akkadian Periods, and probably also into the Ur III Period.

Burial Patterns

Although a few graves in Area PG held tremendous wealth, particularly the sixteen royal graves in the Royal (ED III) Cemetery, the burial ground overall suggests an

Fig. 8.4 Above

Stratigraphic profile drawing of the west side of area PG, including deep test pits Y and Z. Note the steep slope of the upper layers of soil. Many of these are Seal Impression Strata (layers containing archaic seal impressions) and it appears the material in them was thrown downhill from a built-up area to the north (right side of the drawing). This would have been an administrative area, possibly associated with an early temple.

overwhelming preference for simple inhumations with few grave goods. The body, wrapped in reed matting or placed in a wooden, wickerwork, or clay coffin, was set at the bottom of a rectangular pit averaging 1.50 x 0.70 meters (5 x 2 feet). The graves were almost always oriented with the corners at or near the cardinal points. With a few (royal) exceptions, the body was always placed on its side, either left or right; the head could be at either end of the pit. In the Royal (ED III) and subsequent Akkadian Cemeteries, the legs were slightly flexed and the arms bent at the elbow so that the hands were at about the level of the mouth. Woolley deemed this the position of sleep and differentiated it from the fetal position of bodies buried in the Jemdet Nasr Cemetery. The deceased—clothed or perhaps wrapped in a shroud, and often with his or her personal ornaments—typically held a cup or drinking vessel of metal, stone, or clay. A jar or bowl was almost always nearby, probably indicative of the need for the dead to be supplied with food and drink in the afterlife. In some burials, the pit was larger than needed for the body alone; in these cases, it was common to find utilitarian goods, such as other bowls, jars, weapons, and tools, included in the grave. Such functional objects were probably associated with the profession or duties of the deceased in life; the quantity and quality of these goods further reflected the wealth and social status of the dead. It is worth noting that, although gods, goddesses, and temples played a large role in Mesopotamian life, no clear representations of deities—apart from those appearing in scenes on cylinder seals—were found in the graves.

Of more than 2,000 graves excavated in Area PG, Woolley designated only sixteen as royal and all of them were found in the middle zone (ED III Period) of graves dating to around 2450 BCE. Woolley believed, though he found no actual material traces of this in his excavations, that the royal tombs were marked on the surface by chapels or other monuments where the dead kings and queens might be honored, and which constituted the nucleus around which the cemetery grew. In Woolley's reconstruction, a double row of royal chapels ran from southwest to northeast across the cemetery. The people of Ur, elite and common alike, wanted to be buried near their revered rulers and, from the beginning, smaller graves encroached on the royal burial grounds. At first these more humble burials were clustered near the tombs of the kings and queens; gradually, they moved outwards. Eventually, as space ran out, they began cutting into the fill of older pits and even into each other; many of the graves Woolley uncovered had, indeed, been partially or largely destroyed by later grave digging and intentional grave robbing.

The deepest and oldest burials, those of the Jemdet Nasr Cemetery, were also densely packed and often cut into one another. The overall pattern of simple inhumation, with the body on its side and hands holding a cup near the face, was the norm for this early cemetery, just as it was for the later. Here, however, the bodies were contracted in a near fetal position, with heels nearly touching the pelvis and knees at times near the chin. These burials were far from grandiose; most of the goods they contained were clay or

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THE BULL-HEADED LYRE OF UR AND ITS SHELL PLAQUE

William B. Hafford

In the death pit of PG 789, the so-called King's Grave at Ur (see Chapter 8S3: Lovers among the Ruins?), Woolley discovered a most interesting artifact. At first it was unclear what the artifact was—he encountered only the upper portion of a wooden frame, which appeared as discolored soil since the wood had deteriorated thousands of years before. When he came upon the inlaid sound box and gold bull's head attachment farther down, however, he realized that it had once been an intricate lyre (Fig. 8S1.1). It was the first of several lyres that would be found in the Royal Cemetery.

The bull's head was made of hammered gold over a wooden core and had a beard made of lapis lazuli. The bearded bull was a symbol of strength and power, one that represented both the sun god and the king himself.

Under the bull's head the sound box was inlaid with an extensive shell panel that seems to tell a story relating to the Sumerian netherworld (Fig. 8S1.2). The panel is divided into four registers tapering slightly from top to bottom. The uppermost register shows a bearded hero wrestling with two human-headed bulls, also bearded. This register may

Fig. 8S1.1 Right

The golden bull's head (B17694B) with lapis lazuli beard, along with the shell plaque (B17694A) beneath it, originally adorned the front of a wooden lyre. The decayed and crushed remains were found in PG 789, the so-called "king's grave." The bearded bull may have represented the god Shamash, as well as the might of the king, and large lyres like this one were said to have the deep sound of a braying bull.





represent the might of the king. The two middle registers probably indicate the topsy-turvy nature of the underworld: animals, acting like humans, participate in a funerary banquet. Above, a jackal with a dagger on its belt carries food offerings and a lion carries vessels of liquid offerings; both animals walk upright. Below, an equid playing a lyre is accompanied by a small dog with a rattle while a bear dances. The lyre in this third register has a bull's head attachment, a visual reference to the lyre on which the plaque itself appears.

The fourth and lowermost register contains a scorpion-man, perhaps a netherworld guardian, holding an unidentified object in each of his raised hands; to his left, an anthropomorphized antelope or gazelle holds two cups, which have been compared to those held by the attendants in the Great Death Pit (see Chapter 8S5: The Great Death Pit: Reconstructing a Funerary Feast). The image of the scorpion-man—a motif scene in the Epic of Gilgamesh—may have been transmitted from the mountainous regions to the east; the distant mountains were thought in some periods to house the entrance to the netherworld itself.

The imagery in shell inlay on the lyre may thus represent the death of a hero or king and his subsequent journey through the funerary feast into the mixed-up world of the afterlife, where he will finally meet with the guardian of the netherworld.

Fig. 8S1.2 Left

The shell plaque (B17694A) seems to tell the mythical story of the journey into the afterlife. It depicts a struggle between hero and animals in the uppermost register and animals conducting a funerary feast in the turned-around world of death. Finally, it depicts the scorpion-man, who was thought to guard the entrance to the netherworld.

THE GOAT IN A TREE OR THE “RAM IN THE THICKET”

William B. Hafford

The Goat in a Tree, once renowned as the “Ram in the Thicket,” (Fig. 8S2.1) is one of the most iconic artworks extant from southern Mesopotamia. Made of shell, lapis lazuli, and gold over a perishable wood and bitumen core, the piece had collapsed long before Woolley excavated it (Fig. 8S2.2) and another similar one from the Great Death Pit in 1929. Both required extensive conservation and restoration.

In popular circles, the sculpture came to be called the “Ram in the Thicket,” a name drawn from a Biblical narrative (Gen 22:13) in which Abraham spied a ram caught in a thicket and ultimately sacrificed it in place of his son Isaac. But the subject of the work is clearly a goat rather than a ram and it is not caught but rather feeding on the leaves high up in the tree—a typical sight in the scraggly brush of Mesopotamia. The eight-petal flowers in the tree may represent the goddess Inana and the overall motif may represent the repeating cycle of life that she and her consort Dumuzi came to personify.

A central support running through the body of the goat and out its back indicates it was originally part of some type of small furnishing rather than a freestanding sculpture. It may have been a stand or support for a dish or bowl used for small offerings or perhaps for incense (Fig. 8S2.3).

Fig. 8S2.1 Right

This sculptural furnishing was found along with another very similar one (now in the British Museum) in the west corner of the Great Death Pit (PG 1237) near Body 61, the likely owner of the grave. Often called “The Ram in the Thicket” (30-12-702), it actually depicts a goat in a tree.



Fig. 8S2.2 Below

The “ram” as originally found, crushed nearly flat on its back. It required much conservation; Woolley's original reconstruction placed the central stem of the tree too deeply into the base, throwing off the angle of the branches. A much more recent reconstruction corrected the tree, resulting in an additional correction of the goat's forelegs in relation to its body.



Fig. 8S2.3 Below

The use of zoomorphic stands in Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic Period is indicated in the enlarged image detail below, from this cylinder seal (VA 3878) from the collection of the Vorderasiatisches Museum in Berlin. The “ram” may once have held a small tray for incense or offerings. © bpk Bildagentur/Vorderasiatisches Museum, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany/Olaf M. Tessmer/Art Resource, NY.



stone jars and bowls with little in the way of personal ornamentation. Still, some of these early graves were better appointed than others, probably signaling the existence of economic stratification already by this early period (ca. 3000 BCE). The differential expression of wealth in the graves increased greatly in the Royal (ED III) Cemetery.

The Royal Tombs

Quite in contrast to the simple burials found throughout Area PG, the sixteen largest graves discovered in the Royal (ED III) Cemetery were particularly notable in terms of the precious materials found in them, the peculiarities of their structures, and the evidence they contained of ritual performance. Woolley called these graves royal tombs, assuming they contained the deceased kings and queens of Ur. In support of this interpretation, he found cylinder seals inscribed with the Sumerian titles **lugal** (king) and **eresh** (queen) associated with several of the tombs.

Woolley's designation of any particular burial as royal was based on the following three criteria:

(1) Ritual: The grave had to show evidence of major ceremony, with human sacrifice representing a clear element of such. Evidence of other ritual observances, such as libation and extensive offerings, should also be present.

(2) Architectural: The grave had to contain one or more built chambers in brick or stone, typically with a vaulted or domed roof. The primary chamber would have contained the royal body. Other chambers or spaces, such as the death pit (an open pit beyond the primary chamber) or the shaft above the grave, would contain sacrificial victims, presumably attendants of the dead king or queen.

(3) Material: Lavish furnishings had to be present; even where plundered, traces of such would typically remain. The wealthiest artifacts would be found with the royal corpse inside the primary chamber, though attendants would likely also be heavily ornamented. Ornate objects would be found throughout the grave; these might include musical instruments, wheeled vehicles, weapons, furniture, game boards, jewelry, and cylinder seals.

The sixteen tombs meeting Woolley's three criteria for designation as royal have the PG numbers 337, 580, 777, 779, 789, 800, 1050, 1054, 1157, 1232, 1236, 1237, 1332, 1618, 1631, and 1648. In many cases, later analysts replace the letters PG with RT to show more clearly that these are Royal Tombs rather than simply Private Graves. These tombs, despite the seemingly concrete nature of Woolley's criteria, demonstrate significant variation in construction and layout; they are by no means a homogeneous group and Woolley had to, at times, explain away the absence of one of his criteria when identifying a burial as royal. Tombs PG 580, 1232, 1237, and 1337, for example, have no built chamber; Woolley suggested that later plundering was responsible for obliterating the chamber in

these cases. Other variations in construction are notable. PG 789 and 800B had vaulted tomb chambers and the former at least had an extensive death pit. PG 777, 779, and 1236 consisted of multi-roomed chambers that occupied the entire pit. PG 1050 and 1054 were large, single-chamber tombs set at the bottom of a deep shaft, both apparently with minor chambers in the shaft fill that contained subsidiary burials. In the southern end of the cemetery, PG 1618, 1631, and 1648 may represent yet another distinct tomb type; these take the form of small, single-chamber tombs set at the bottom of small pits.

In one case, Woolley may have conflated parts of two tombs into a single royal one: he associated the chamber of PG 800B with a death pit some 2.5 meters (8 feet) above its floor. Having discovered the built chamber of PG 800B, a queen's tomb, while excavating the neighboring PG 789, he interpreted the proximity of the two tombs as suggesting a close relationship between their occupants. Unfortunately, Woolley's romantic story of the queen who outlived her husband (presumably buried in PG 789) but so loved him that she demanded to be buried next to him when she died (thus placing her burial chamber much lower than the sacrifices attendant upon her, which were situated in the death pit above), has little basis in fact. There were no identifiable remains in the chamber of PG 789, which Woolley called the King's Grave. The intact chamber of PG 800B, in contrast, contained the skeleton of Queen Puabi (whose name was originally read and widely publicized as Shub-Ad). She was identified by an inscribed cylinder seal complete with name and title found on her body; there is, however, no discernible evidence linking her tomb to the death pit (labeled PG 800) located 2.5 meters (8 feet) above. This leaves open the question of where the death pit actually associated with PG 800B may be located, if one ever existed.

How, then, is the death pit situated above PG 800B to be understood, if it does not belong to PG 800B? No other chamber was found that might be associated with this death pit, but this does not preclude its belonging to a separate tomb altogether. Woolley certainly excavated royal tombs that lacked accompanying built chambers (e.g., PG 580, 1232, 1237, and 1337), and this death pit may belong among their number.

The royal tombs, in addition to containing the bodies of deceased kings and queens, also contained the bodies of what have been identified as retainers or attendants, often found in the so-called death pits. Some of the tombs contain numerous such bodies; others only very few: for example, PG 789 contained 63 additional bodies, the majority of which were women; PG 1237, which Woolley dubbed the Great Death Pit, contained 74, again mostly women; PG 1050 had 40 bodies below its floor; PG 800B had three in the chamber with the queen and 21 in the death pit Woolley associated with it; and still other royal burials, such as 1618 and 1648, contained fewer than five additional bodies. Unfortunately, this variation in the number of accompanying bodies in the royal graves remains as puzzling today as it was when Woolley first uncovered the cemetery nearly a hundred years ago.

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LOVERS AMONG THE RUINS?

William B. Hafford

When Woolley uncovered the tomb chamber and death pit PG 789, he found an immediately adjacent chamber, which he numbered PG 800B. He suggested, on the basis of their proximity, that the owners of PG 789 and PG 800B represented a loving royal couple that had wanted to be buried together. The king, according to Woolley's reconstruction, died first and was buried in PG 789; his queen, identified as Puabi, held an elaborate burial ceremony and created a death pit outside his tomb filled with 63 attendants who would accompany him in the afterlife. Years later, when Puabi herself died, she was buried in the adjacent tomb chamber PG 800B. Puabi's own funerary ceremony (Fig 8S3.1) was then enacted in a space

above the tombs of the two lovers (it is actually above tomb PG 789), and the remains of the ceremony were preserved in the death pit labeled PG 800.

Woolley's reconstruction attempted to make sense of the complicated and somewhat puzzling archaeological evidence for PG 789 and PG 800B, particularly the presence of a death pit (labeled PG 800) significantly above rather than on the same level as the tomb chamber, PG 800B. But it also ignores some important points.

The first is that PG 800B was actually set some 40 centimeters (15 inches) lower than the adjacent PG 789 (Fig 8S3.2). It is possible, consequently, that PG 800B rather



Fig. 8S3.1 Left

Artist's reconstruction of the PG 789 death pit as it may have looked just before the attendants were sacrificed. Created by the Anglo-French artist Amédée Forestier in 1928 for the *Illustrated London News*, it followed Woolley's advice from the excavated evidence closely. © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans.

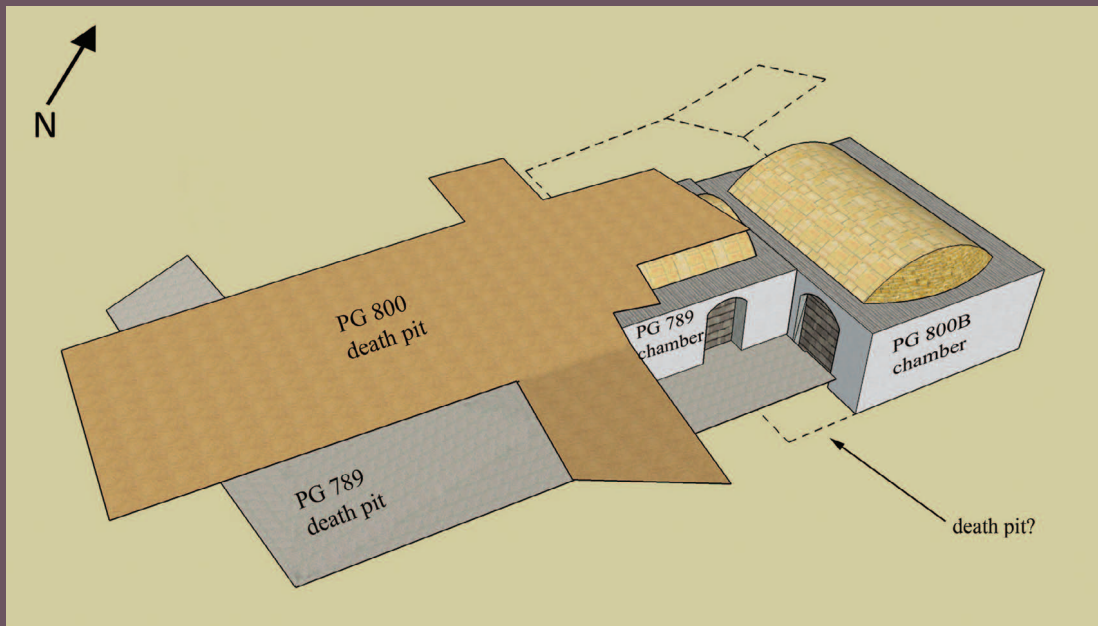


Fig. 8S3.2 Left

This model shows the positioning of PG 800 and PG 800B in relation to PG 789. The death pit Woolley associated with PG 800B (PG 800) is situated above PG 789 and seems to have little connection with PG 800B, the chamber that is located 40cm lower than PG 789. A death pit might exist at the lower level of PG 800B (dashed line in the model) but Woolley did not dig beneath PG 789 to find out.

than PG 789 is the earlier tomb, and that its death pit is not PG 800 but was actually situated below what would later become the floor of PG 789. Woolley never excavated below this floor and so would not have come across traces of this possible death pit. The second is that PG 800B is described as having no door. Woolley suggested that its occupant, Queen Puabi, was placed in from above, even though this maneuver would have been exceedingly difficult to perform in a vaulted tomb. Yet, Woolley's original notes suggest the presence of a sealed door at the southern end of the tomb's southwest wall. The only clear space on the tomb's floor was between this possible doorway and Puabi's body; heavy deposits of grave goods were found everywhere else. This, then, was probably the path used to place both the body and the grave goods in PG 800B.

When all of the above evidence is considered, alternate visions of the relationships between tombs PG 789 and PG

800B, and between tomb chamber PG 800B and death pit PG 800, emerge than those proposed by Woolley. It is likely that the burial of Puabi in tomb PG 800B was the earlier, followed at a later date by the burial of the unknown occupant of tomb PG 789 (this tomb had been looted before its excavation). As for the death pit PG 800, located more than 2 meters (6.5 feet) above the floor of tomb PG 800B, this almost certainly belonged to a separate and later tomb altogether, one either built without a tomb chamber or with a tomb chamber that was later destroyed. Woolley's poignant story of the loving couple that occupied tombs PG 789 and PG 800B is intriguing and perhaps still possible, but only if it was the occupant of PG 789 who wished to be buried near Puabi who had already been placed in PG 800B.

QUEEN PUABI

William B. Hafford

The occupant of PG 800B, the tomb chamber originally and probably erroneously associated with Death Pit PG 800 (see previous “Lovers among the Ruins?”), was Puabi, a queen of Ur around 2450 BCE (Fig. 8S4.1). We know her name, which means something like “word of my father” in Akkadian, because it was inscribed on a cylinder seal she wore on her body. The title, *eresh*, which means queen, was also inscribed on the seal. It was unusual for a cylinder seal to be inscribed with only a female name and title; the fact that Puabi’s husband or father are not named on the seal suggests she may have ruled in her own right.

The massive wealth found in Puabi’s tomb further bespeaks her power and prestige. Her grave goods included thousands of beads; silver, gold, and exquisite stone vessels; and, perhaps most impressive of all, a headdress of gold and imported stones that weighed some 2.21 kilograms (4.85 pounds). The main headdress (Fig. 8S4.2) was formed of four wreaths of sheet gold cut into the form of poplar and willow leaves; it was elaborated with beads and pendants of gold, lapis lazuli, and carnelian. Tiers of gold ribbon, measuring some 12 meters (39 feet) in total length, layered her hair; her hair was also supported in the back by a large golden comb topped with seven rosettes.

Fig. 8S4.1 Right

The arrangement of Puabi’s jewelry as she likely wore it in death. Her body was found covered in beads and her skull surrounded by a gold headdress. More than 80 strands of beads make up her cloak and the headdress weighs around five pounds (or a little more than 2 kilograms).





Fig. 8S4.2 Left

Puabi's headdress as found; note the gold comb and wreaths at the top of the image. Note also the cylinder seal and garment pins at the left, as well as the many beads visible in the soil. It is easy to see why the exact arrangement has been difficult to recreate, resulting in many different displays through the years.

While Puabi's was the only royal tomb in the cemetery at Ur to escape ancient looters, part of its vaulted roof had collapsed and it was difficult to know precisely how her jewelry was originally arrayed on her body. Shortly after the excavation, Katharine Woolley (wife of archaeologist Leonard Woolley) made a plaster head on which she arranged the headdress; this arrangement, however, was influenced by contemporary fashions of the 1920s (Fig. 8S4.3). In 1929, after the jewelry came to the Penn Museum, Curator Léon Legrain made a new reconstruction—though this had its own biases. He eschewed the large wig reconstructed by Katharine Woolley in favor of a hairstyle more in keeping with that known from figurines recovered from Sumer. The circumstances in which the headdress itself was excavated, however, seem to indicate Katharine Woolley was correct to envision the jewelry's placement on a large hairdo, probably a prearranged wig.

Puabi's headdress and beaded cloak have gone through many reconstructions during their time at the Penn Museum and are today displayed in a manner as close to the original (as indicated by the excavation records) as possible. While

many details are still unclear—we do not know, for example, whether the many beads found above and below Puabi's body really made up a cloak, and we do not know whether the gold rings at her waist constituted a separate belt or were attached to the upper belt—the great beauty of Puabi's accoutrement, and her role as a powerful woman of Ur, are undeniable.

Fig. 8S4.3 Right

Katharine Woolley's original reconstruction of Puabi's jewelry in a colorized image that appeared in *Ur Excavations* volume II and in the *Illustrated London News*. The diameter of the headdress as found was around 30 cm (roughly one foot), the basis for the width of the hairdo shown in this model. © Illustrated London News Ltd/Mary Evans.



Human sacrifice, whether voluntary or involuntary on the part of the accompanying retainers, and the burial of the sacrificed retainers with the deceased ED III Period kings and queens of Ur was, for Woolley, an integral element of Ur's royal tombs. Unfortunately, written explanations or even clear archaeological evidence for the precise process of elite burial and the motivation(s) for human sacrifice are not known; Woolley was, thus, left to (re-)construct these by analyzing aspects of the various royal tombs he had excavated at Ur. In particular, he interpreted the well-organized rows of retainers' bodies in PG 1237, the so-called Great Death Pit, as indicating the peaceful (and self-sacrificing) nature of the retainers' deaths. He suggested the retainers had drunk a soporific drug and then lain down to the long sleep of death without disturbing their elaborate jewelry and headdresses. In support of this interpretation, he cited the presence of a small cup that was found with each body, though he admitted in a footnote that not all bodies were actually associated with such a cup; moreover, Woolley had actually found cups with most of the dead buried throughout the cemetery and had not taken those to indicate self-sacrifice.

A possibility that Woolley either failed to consider, or dismissed as unlikely, was that the retainers had been killed elsewhere, their bodies preserved or desiccated to some extent, and then dressed in their finery and deliberately arranged in the death pits. This is a complicated reconstruction, but it accounts for the well-ordered rows of dead retainers discovered with all accoutrements in place. Recent analysis of the few bones saved from Woolley's excavations also supports this alternate reconstruction: many of the bones, including those analyzed from PG 1648 and PG 1237, show evidence of having been heated to temperatures of 150–250 degrees Celsius (302–482 degrees Fahrenheit). Such heating may have occurred as part of a deliberate process designed to preserve the bodies. Computed tomography (CT) scan analysis has also revealed that at least two of the skulls of death pit individuals, one recovered from PG 1237 and the other from PG 789, had perimortem fractures resulting from blunt force trauma (Fig. 8.5): such fractures suggest the deceased may have been killed by a blow to the back of the head. This would naturally have preceded the heating of the body and arrangement of the headgear.

That the royal tombs contained the bodies of wealthy and powerful people, possibly kings and queens, along with associated individuals of lesser status is not in doubt; the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the lower status individuals, and the reasons for the inclusion of their bodies in the royal tombs, however, remain in question. Some scholars understand these additional bodies as displays of power by potentially deified kings. Others suggest a connection to temple and religious observance, and reference the myths of a dying fertility god who must be resurrected for the continued growth of crops, or suggest some relationship to a rite peculiar to Ur and its patron god Nanna.

It is also possible that some of the graves, perhaps those without chambers, are the burials of high religious officials. In PG 1237 (the Great Death Pit), for example, Body

Fig. 8.5 Opposite

This CT scan of a soldier found at the entrance to the PG 789 death pit shows the underside of the crushed skull. The ear-flaps of the copper helmet can be seen as well as the holes for sewing in the leather lining. More importantly, the damage to the skull beneath the helmet is clear as a dark hole with radiating fractures. This puncture wound was likely the cause of death, inflicted before the helmet was placed on the head. Furthermore, the helmet appears to be placed on the head backwards, with the wider opening at the back of the skull.

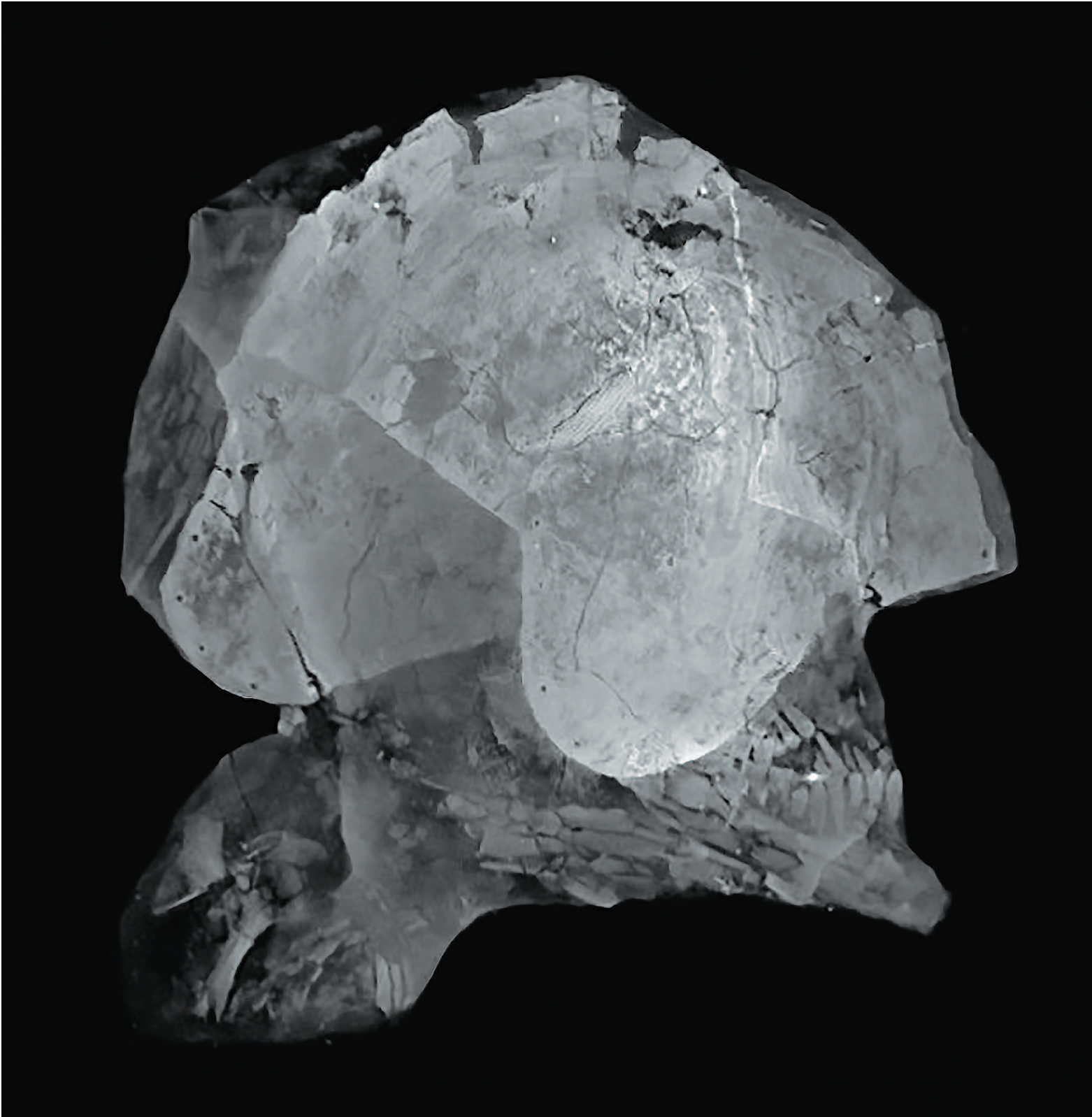






Fig. 8.6 Above and Opposite

This cylinder seal (30-12-2) was found in the Great Death Pit, on Body 7 near the lyres. It shows a banquet scene, with music, dancing, and feasting, that is very much like the one that the dead in the pit were laid out to reenact. Its inscription can be read “Child of the Gipar” and may indicate that the primary burial, Body 61, was an *entu*-priestess.

61 (her name is unknown) has been identified as that of a woman who was potentially both a princess and a high priestess. She was buried among the retainers in the death pit rather than in a separate chamber; while the cups associated with other bodies were clay or stone, however, hers was silver. Moreover, she wore far more jewelry than any other person in the death pit. In fact, her jewelry was comparable only to that of Puabi in PG 800B, who was clearly designated a queen on her cylinder seal.

The other bodies in the Great Death Pit were arranged in such a way as to imitate a banquet or funerary feast, a ceremony often seen on cylinder seals, including on a seal belonging to Puabi. Such funerary feasts included the playing of music, dining, drinking, and dancing, all of which are indicated in the PG 1237 finds. Furthermore, a cylinder seal found on Body 7 in the Great Death Pit itself also depicts a banquet—perhaps the very one the bodies were arranged to reenact—and bears an inscription reading “child of the gipar” (Fig. 8.6).

The *gipar* or *giparu* was the official abode of the *entu*-priestess, the high priestess of Ur (see Chapter 7S2: The Importance of the *Entu*-Priestess). She maintained the cult of the moon god Nanna and his consort Ningal, the chief deities of Ur, and was one of the most important people in the city. Typically, she was also the daughter of the reigning king, a circumstance that would have bolstered her power and status. It is possible that the cylinder seal found on Body 7 in the Great Death Pit actually depicts the individual we call Body 61—the woman at the center of the retainer’s attention, the one with the silver cup and the stunningly elaborate jewelry—as *entu*-priestess and as the person to whom the tomb actually belongs. She may well be the first recognizable *entu*-priestess at Ur, predating other famous *entu* whose names we do know, such as Enheduanna (ca. 2300 BCE) of the Akkadian Period, and Enannatumma (ca. 1950 BCE) of the Isin-Larsa Period. If this interpretation is correct, the elaborate burial in PG 1237 may signify the importance of Body 61 in her roles both as priestess and as princess.

The wealth displayed in the royal tombs implies a powerful group was in control of Ur at a very early period. Moreover, the types of displays evident in these tombs, particularly the human sacrifices, are not known from any other place or time period in Mesopotamia. It is tempting to connect these graves with an early dynasty of kings ruling at Ur noted on the Sumerian King List, but the few names found in the royal tombs of the Royal (ED III) Cemetery do not match those on the list. It appears that the royal tombs predate the kings on the list. How such wealth could be gathered and expended on lavish burials by a group otherwise so ill attested in the textual and archaeological records of the Near East remains a major question for historians.

One scholarly suggestion has been that, while temple elites held political power in the preceding Jemdet Nasr Period and into the earlier part of the Early Dynastic Period, a more secular elite was gaining dominance by the later part of the Early Dynastic Period. At this critical juncture, rulers may have been powerful enough to accumulate great

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THE GREAT DEATH PIT: RECONSTRUCTING A FUNERAL FEAST

William B. Hafford

In PG 1237, more famously known as the Great Death Pit, 74 bodies were arranged as if in attendance at a Sumerian funerary banquet (Fig. 8S5.1). Rows of women in elaborate jewelry and headdresses stretch from one side of the pit, where at least three lyres were found, to the other, where two statuettes in the form of gold and lapis lazuli goats (see Chapter 8S2: The Goat in a Tree or the “Ram in the Thicket”) stood near Body 61, the most highly adorned woman in the group. A little apart from the women were a row of six men who guarded the ceremony into eternity.

Body 61, which was draped in very rich jewelry, may represent the female owner of the grave. When she died, her body was probably preserved, wrapped, and adorned, and then honored with a funerary ceremony. The acts of eating and drinking were accompanied by music, played on harps and rattles or clappers, as well as by dancing. Afterwards, those in attendance at the banquet either drank poison, as Woolley suggested, or were killed with a pickaxe, as more recent studies of the skeletons from the pit have indicated. Then they too were preserved, adorned, and arrayed for the afterlife.

While much of what was in the grave had disintegrated with time, parts of lyres, cups, other vessels, and personal adornments were recovered. The Penn Museum, with the help of artist John Pearson, decided to reconstruct how a funerary banquet might have looked in life, before it reached its fatal end (Fig. 8S5.2). First, the skeletons and instruments were

righted and placed in the order in which they were found; then flesh was put back on the bones. Bodies that had held a jar or jug in the grave were shown as standing; those holding cups and adorned with more elaborate jewelry were shown seated and drinking. The attendees at the banquet were, in effect, depicted toasting the honoree, Body 61, who held a silver cup to her mouth.

To reconstruct details of clothing and furnishings that might have been present but that had deteriorated, Penn Museum curators and professionals examined figures depicted on clay plaques and models contemporary with PG 1237. It was also not clear where the ceremony was held, but this was possibly in the pit itself, which may have been decorated for the occasion. We added to the reconstruction a few potted plants, evidence for which is seen in some reliefs from Mesopotamia; reed mats on the floor; and a kind of sidebar with food offerings, the presence of which was suggested by inlaid poles found in the south corner of the pit.

This process of reconstructing PG 1237 was a long one: images were drafted, considered and reconsidered by scholars, and then redrafted. The picture emerging from this process is by no means a definitive recreation of the original funerary banquet as it occurred some 4,500 years ago, but it is a *potential* version of the event (Fig. 8S5.3). It humanizes the participants in the banquet, the bodies of whom were excavated in PG 1237 by Woolley, and offers us new ways of exploring ritual life in the period of the Royal Cemetery at Ur.

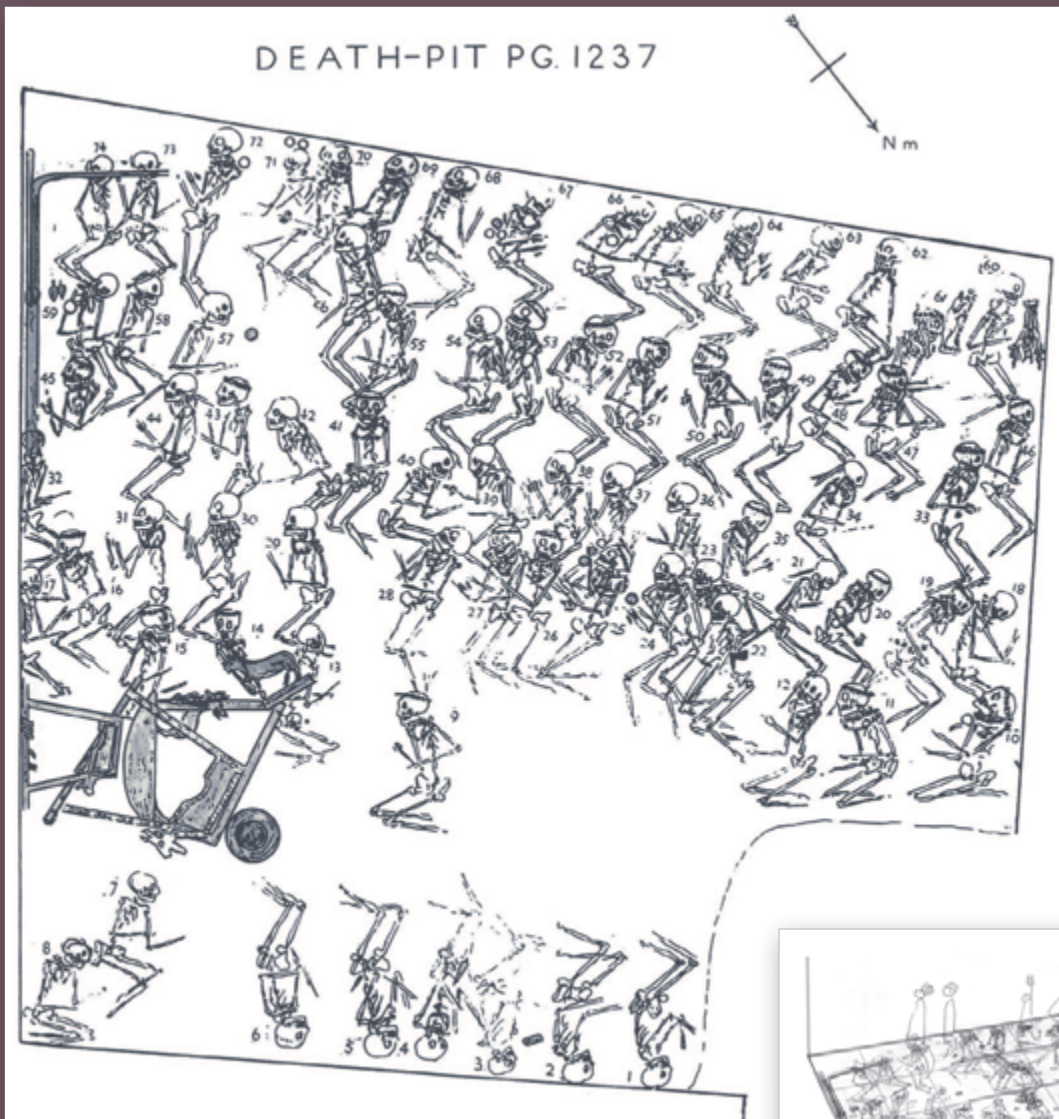


Fig. 8S5.1 Above

Leonard Woolley's published plan map of the Great Death Pit (PG 1237) as found. Body 61, the most highly adorned woman in the grave, is in the upper right of the image near the ram furnishings while the lyres are in the lower left. A total of 74 people were buried in this one grave pit, arranged as if in a funerary banquet.

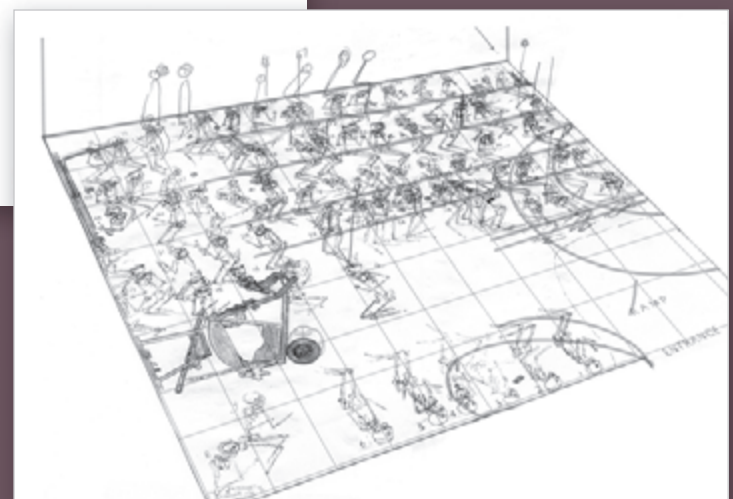


Fig. 8S5.2 Below

To recreate the people standing, the artist has imagined the space in three dimensions and here is beginning to plot out the rows of seated and standing figures. Drawn by HSD/John Pearson.



Fig. 8S5.3 Above

The final version of the recreated banquet in the Great Death Pit, by artist John Pearson. Each of the numbered bodies is in the place indicated by Woolley's plan map, and each has been shown wearing or using artifacts found on or near them. Drawn by HSD/John Pearson.

Fig. 8.7 Right

This field photo shows Area PG in the final season, 1934. At the back of the image stands a very large brick wall, which is the western wall of the Ur III mausoleum, once possibly holding the remains of the Ur III kings. It is so well preserved because it is made almost entirely of baked brick.



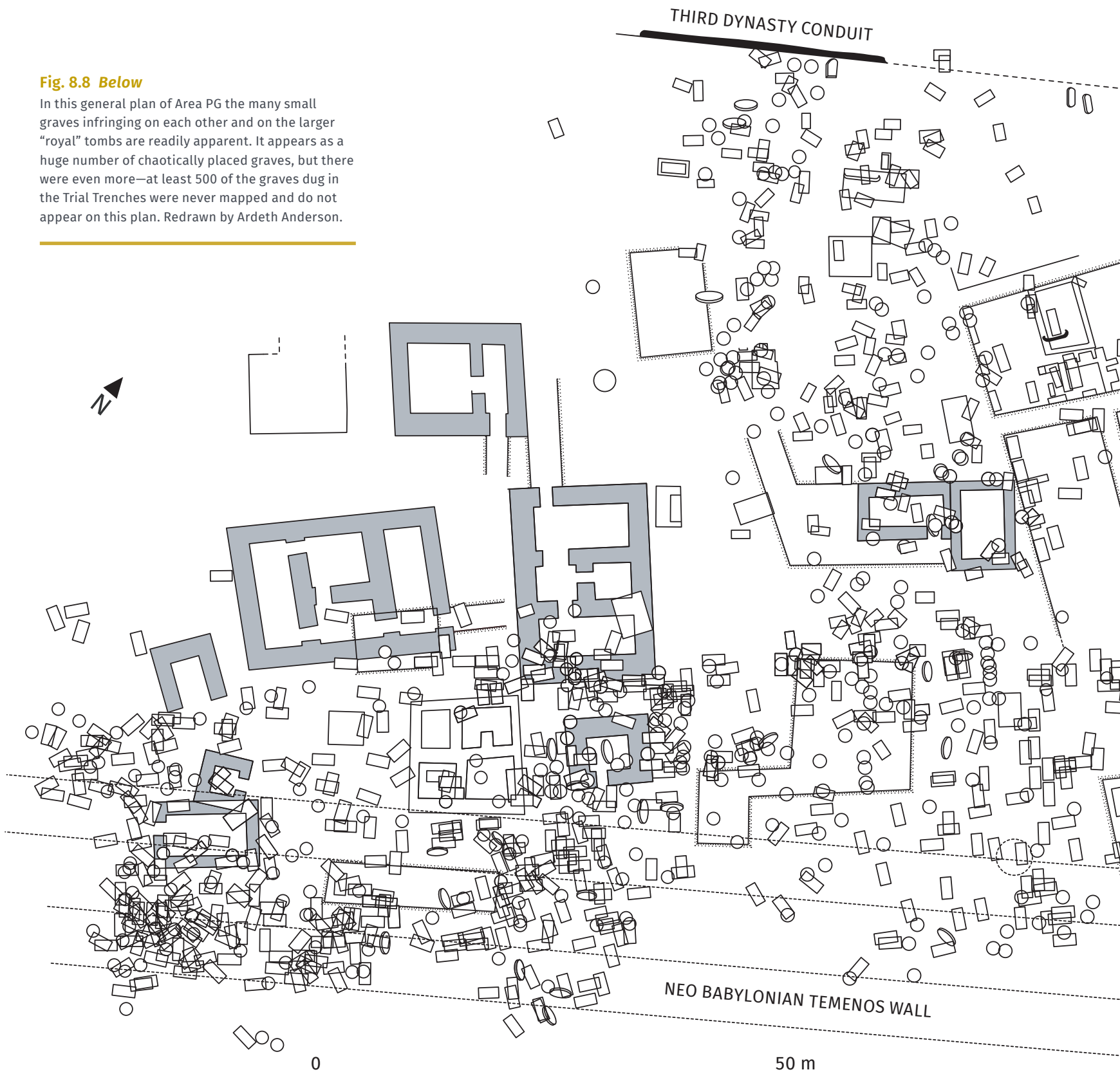
wealth during their reigns but kingship as an institution was not sufficiently strong and regularized to maintain itself. Rituals would have been needed to maintain the authority of the king during periods of succession and the ritual destruction of great wealth—human, animal, and material—may have brought the survivors and heirs of individual rulers the recognition necessary to maintain their elite social status. This suggestion, while compelling, remains speculative.

A Later Royal Tomb?

At the eastern edge of Area PG stand the remains of a most impressive structure. Made largely of baked brick, it has survived the ravages of time better than many other structures in the ancient city. Some of its walls are as much as 3 meters (10 feet) thick and it is nearly 40 meters (131 feet) long. Its central building is made with bricks stamped with the name of the Ur III king Shulgi (ca. 2095–2047 BCE), but added onto the center are two annexes built with bricks of his son, Amar-Sin (ca. 2046–2038 BCE). Partly because of its clear association with these two rulers, the combined building is generally called the Mausoleum of the Ur III kings (Fig. 8.7). Beneath the building are vaults that may once have housed royal remains, though they were found looted and almost completely empty. A few scattered bones led Woolley to suggest that an outer chamber held retainers or attendants while the inner held the king himself, in reflection of the much earlier practice of human sacrifice noted in the Royal Cemetery proper. But if the multiple chambers

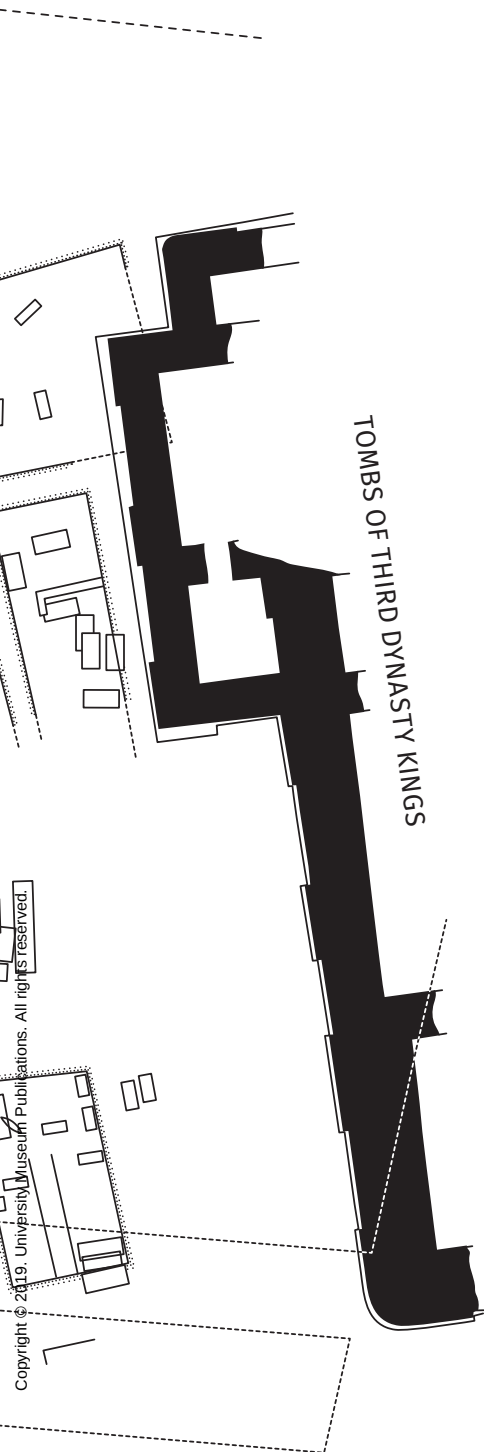
Fig. 8.8 Below

In this general plan of Area PG the many small graves infringing on each other and on the larger "royal" tombs are readily apparent. It appears as a huge number of chaotically placed graves, but there were even more—at least 500 of the graves dug in the Trial Trenches were never mapped and do not appear on this plan. Redrawn by Ardeth Anderson.



0

50 m



beneath both the main building and the annexes could indeed have been used in this way, there is not enough evidence to prove it.

The building above the vaults had also been looted, perhaps by the Elamites when they sacked Ur around 2000 BCE. While its layout was that of a standard courtyard house, the remaining furnishings and artifacts indicate that it had ritual functions. Altars and gold leaf decoration found within it probably reflect high-level cult activities associated with honoring the dead kings. The building's sheer size and the stamped bricks used to construct it also underscore its role as public architecture rather than private. Other burials of Ur III date also occur in the so-called Akkadian Cemetery, although Woolley did not recognize them as such; most of these late burials gather near the Ur III Mausoleum. It seems, then, that this portion of the cemetery was still in use around 2100 BCE, even though burial of the dead beneath private house floors was becoming the standard burial practice at this time. Woolley suggested that the courtyard house layout of the Mausoleum reflected something of the contemporary changes in burial custom on a monumental and royal scale, with the king effectively being buried beneath a monumental and ritual house.

Non-Royal Graves of the Royal and Akkadian Cemeteries

While the sixteen ED III Period royal graves in Area PG have taken pride of place in publications on the burial grounds, these are vastly outnumbered by the non-royal burials occurring throughout all periods of Area PG. The general pattern of these non-royal burials has already been established, but a few specifics will help to illuminate the cemetery as a whole and emphasize the similarities and differences among the non-royal graves across the vast chronological and spatial territory they occupy (Fig. 8.8).

Most of the non-royal graves in Area PG were humble, with no additional offerings or only a few items of clay or stone. Some, however, were far better appointed, reflecting disparities in socioeconomic status that only increased with developing urbanization. PG 1609, found 5.8 meters (19 feet) below the surface and contemporary with the massive royal graves of the ED III Period, is an example of a relatively common burial type that nonetheless had markers suggesting the deceased had some minor status. The body of a man lay beneath an oval, clay coffin called a larnax. In his hands was a small calcite bowl and nearby was a copper dagger. He wore a modest necklace made up of a central carnelian bead with two lapis beads on either side. Also buried with him was a seashell cut into a lamp and a set of 17 very small stone weights.

A second larnax grave, PG 1608, sat only 20 centimeters (8 inches) away. It was the grave of a woman and Woolley suggested that she was related to, and perhaps even the wife of, the man in PG 1609. She wore a three-strand necklace of small gold and lapis lazuli beads, a pair of spiral gold earrings, and a copper cloak pin. She also had a calcite



bowl and cup, but they were located at her feet along with a set of cockleshells containing cosmetic pigments.

These two graves, PG 1608 and PG 1609, would appear to represent a relatively well-to-do couple, perhaps a merchant and his wife if the balance weights can be taken as indicative of a profession. Unfortunately, such graves are so heavily overshadowed by the mysterious grandeur of the royal tombs that they go virtually unnoticed and often remain understudied.

More often mentioned in scholarly and other literature are those graves containing evidence of extreme wealth but not the bodies of sacrificed retainers, an omission that precludes their designation as royal according to Woolley's criteria. The best example of such a splendidly equipped burial is PG 755, a large grave of the ED III Period. It contained a wooden coffin and many spectacular offerings that are only paralleled in the royal tombs. Some of the grave goods also had explicit royal connections, including several metal vessels bearing the names of the ruler Meskalamdug and Queen Ninbanda. The tomb has come to be known as that of Meskalamdug, though there are conflicting attestations of the name in the Royal Cemetery. The young man buried in PG 755, an apparent warrior prince whose name may have been Meskalamdug, since the name appears on items in his grave. He is not, however, the king of the same name whose artifacts appear scattered elsewhere in the cemetery, though it is possible he was related to that king. If he died prior to being crowned, this might explain the absence of the sacrificed retainers that seem to have accompanied full royal burials.

The coffin in PG 755 was marked by rows of upright spears at both its head and foot. The bones inside it were those of a robust young man who wore a silver-plated belt from which hung a gold dagger and a whetstone made of lapis lazuli. An electrum helmet made in the form of an elaborate wig (Fig. 8.9), a form sometimes associated with Early Dynastic kings, was set near the man's skull. Two electrum axes, a gold lamp, a gold bowl, and many beads were also found near his body. Outside his coffin were many more offerings including copper, clay and stone vessels, as well as daggers or short swords, axes, and arrowheads. The overall impression is not solely of wealth but also of military might.

The type of grave containing a wooden coffin marked by upright spears continued in use into the later period of the Akkadian Cemetery, as evinced by PG 1422. In this grave, dating some 250 years after Meskalamdug, we find a wooden coffin surrounded by offerings of metal and clay vessels. Inside the coffin were the bones of a sturdy young man with weapons and jewelry. Although not as richly adorned as Meskalamdug of PG 755, he had a silver axe and copper dagger, as well as six bracelets and a great many beads of agate and other semi-precious stones. He had no helmet but on his head were six hammered gold fillets or diadems. The man, likely a warrior as indicated by the weapons on and near his body, was clearly wealthy and important, though he lacked the royal or near royal accoutrements of Meskalamdug.

Fig. 8.9 Opposite

PG 755 was an Early Dynastic III (ca. 2450 BCE) burial of an apparent warrior prince who may have been called Meskalamdug, as the name appears on objects outside his coffin. He was buried with many offerings including this electrum helmet decorated to look like an elaborate hairstyle. The photograph is of a copy of the helmet (29-22-2) in the Penn Museum. The original is in the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad.

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AN AKKADIAN WARRIOR'S GRAVE

William B. Hafford

The most elaborate of the graves in the uppermost (Akkadian) cemetery was PG 1422. Artifacts within date it to the late Akkadian Period or early Ur III Period and the burial inside is likely that of a warrior (Figs. 8S6.1 and 8S6.2). Placed on one side of the pit was a wooden coffin topped with a gabled lid. At the head of the coffin stood six spears with their tips pointing upwards. The spears collapsed as their wooden shafts deteriorated and only three of the spear points were recovered; one of these, however, was found above the coffin lid. This suggests the spears may originally have marked the grave above ground level.

Inside the coffin were offerings surrounding and covering the bones of a man who lay on his right side facing west. These offerings included smaller clay jars and cups, a silver box, a copper dagger, and copper and silver axes. The man also wore a great deal of jewelry including six fillets, or diadems, of thin hammered gold on his head; gold earrings; at least four necklaces of agate, gold, and carnelian beads (Fig. 8S6.3); and six bracelets. The rest of the pit was strewn with additional grave goods (Fig. 8S6.4) including two entire sheep or goats, many clay pots, a copper cauldron, and a

Fig. 8S6.1 Right

Leonard Woolley's published plan map of the grave PG 1422. The six circles at the top center represent the six spear shafts that rose at the head of the coffin. Two axe blades are seen at the left of the body inside the coffin. These elements seem to identify the man as a warrior.

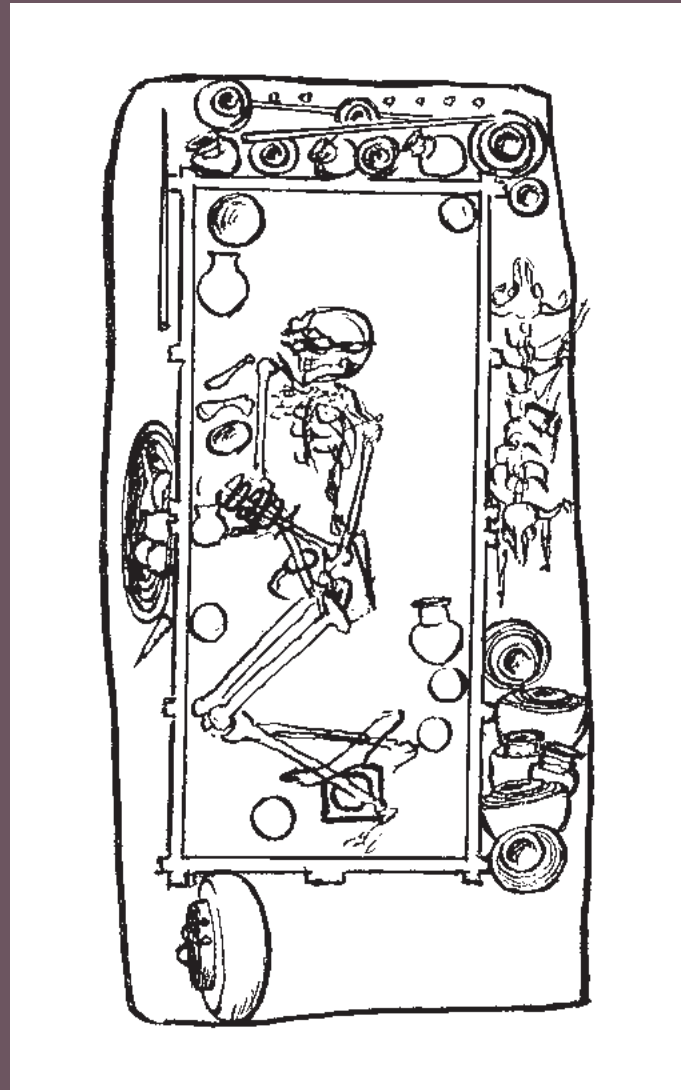




Fig. 8S6.2 Above

Field photograph of PG 1422. The bones of the warrior's arms can be seen in the center right along with the single bracelet on the right wrist and five bracelets on the left. The leg bones can be seen near the top and the impression of the wooden coffin stands out against the soil all around.

Fig. 8S6.3 Below

Along with the weapons buried with the man in PG 1422 were many impressive pieces of jewelry. Here are shown a very long necklace (30-12-567) of banded agate and gold beads and one of the six gold diadems or fillets (30-12-600) he wore on his forehead.





mass of corroded copper cups and bowls on a large copper tray. The cauldron buried with the warrior in PG 1422 may suggest he had a number of dependents or led a large band of soldiers.

The earlier grave PG 755, dated to the Early Dynastic III Period, has several features in common with PG 1422. It also takes the form of a large pit containing a wooden coffin and twelve spears (six erected at both its head and foot), as well as offerings including weapons and jewelry. It is possible that this type of burial was specifically designated for warriors and used into later periods.

Fig. 8S6.4 Above

The man buried in PG 1422 carried two lapis lazuli cylinder seals with gold caps. One of the seals (30-12-38 shown here) had at one point borne an inscription but it had been scraped away, probably indicating it was an older seal that was reused by the deceased.

Fig. 8.10 Right

Field photograph of the model bitumen boat loaded with jars found in PG 627, an Akkadian Period grave. Such boats may have been symbolically carrying food and drink along with the deceased into the netherworld.

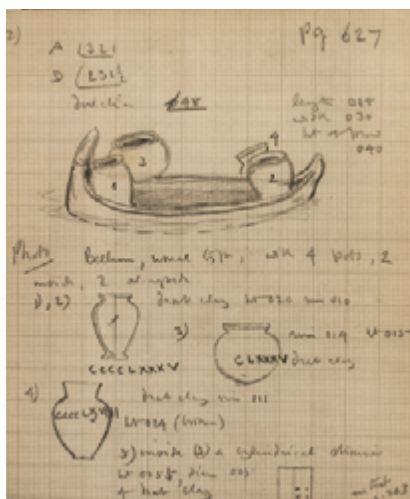


Fig. 8.11 Above

Drawing of the model boat with jars and notes recorded on the PG627 field card. Courtesy of the British Museum.

Woolley dated approximately 450 graves from Area PG to the Akkadian Period, though he detailed only six in his primary publication. There was little to distinguish between the common burials of this later Akkadian Period and those of the (slightly) earlier ED III Period, since the morphology of the graves and the position of the bodies remained nearly identical. The general depth of the graves from the modern ground surface, too, while it helped to generally distinguish the different cemeteries from each other, was not absolute; individual graves were cut into the sloping ground to varying individual depths, and so could not be dated exclusively on the basis of their depth. It is only close examination of the grave goods themselves that suggests a few possible differences between the ED III and Akkadian Period graves. Akkadian Period grave goods, like those in PG 1422, were more likely to include agate beads, probably due to a particular supply route exploited during this period. They were also more likely to include a bitumen boat in the grave shaft (Figs. 8.10 and 8.11). The boat held a few clay vessels and may have been conceptually intended to supply food to the dead, though Woolley suggested it was placed to distract evil spirits away from the grave.

PG 958, located in the Akkadian Cemetery, is a good example of a burial containing relatively modest, but still very interesting and informative grave goods. Located only 1.2 meters (4 feet) below the modern ground surface, it may actually date to the Ur III Period. It contained no coffin; the body was instead placed in a simple rectangular trench. Around the head and shoulders were six pottery vessels, mostly jars, and near the chest was a group of objects that had likely been contained in a woven bag. Evidence of

the cloth bag remained impressed on a corroded copper disk that may have been sewn onto it. The contents of the bag included various pieces of stone, including small bits of lapis lazuli with one piece half formed into a bead. There were also pieces of a copper drill bit. The grave was almost certainly that of a bead-maker and these were the raw materials and tools of his trade.

The Jemdet Nasr Cemetery

In 1934, his last season at Ur, Woolley had already excavated and published the Akkadian and Royal (ED III) Cemeteries. He had cleared away some 11 meters (37 feet) of soil depth over nearly 4,000 square meters (43,000 square feet) in Area PG, and had also found evidence of deeper and older graves in small test pits cut beneath the lowest uncovered levels. He now wanted to understand the full extent of the use of the burial grounds. Because it appeared that the concentration of early burials was mainly to the south, he opened an extension to the southern edge of Area PG that is known as Pit X or Area PJ (Fig. 8.12).

Because the trench was so deep, its walls had to be sloped to keep them from collapsing; as a result, Woolley's pit, which measured 1000 square meters (11,000 square feet) on the surface, had dwindled to only 440 square meters (4,700 square feet) in size by the time the concentration of the Jemdet Nasr Cemetery was reached, some 17 meters (56 feet) below ground level. Even within this greatly diminished trench, however, Woolley recovered more than 200 graves of the period. Most of the bodies found had been wrapped in matting; alternatively, matting was used to line the grave shaft itself. In only one case was there evidence of a coffin, situated in the area to the southwest where the larger and somewhat better appointed graves were located.

The Jemdet Nasr skeletons often had their hands near their faces, as was the norm in the later cemeteries. Small cups made of lead were relatively common, but these were typically placed over the mouth of a clay jar. The bodies were more contracted than those of the later Royal (ED III) and Akkadian Cemeteries and their burial goods, apart from pottery, were typically sparse. Woolley referred to the position of the Jemdet Nasr skeletons as the fetal position, and that of the ED III and Akkadian Period skeletons the sleeping position, but did not speculate on what this distinction might have meant for the people to whom these burials belonged. A change in burial custom may signify a change in belief system, but the change here is not extreme and does not seem to reflect major differences in religious or existential thinking. Woolley also found changes in grave goods over the centuries of burials in the Jemdet Nasr Cemetery, with clay vessels being most common in the earliest and stone vessels becoming more common in the latest. Such changes might reflect the expansion of trade networks in the Early Dynastic I Period, and the consequent greater availability of objects such as stone vessels.

Fig. 8.12 *Opposite*

Pit X as seen in early 1934. Only a few weeks after work had begun, Woolley and his 170 workers had removed more than 13,000 cubic meters (ca. 17,000 cubic yards) of earth to reach the "Jemdet Nasr" Cemetery.



It is worth noting, with respect to the dating of the graves incorporated into the Jemdet Nasr Cemetery at Ur, that many of its graves date into the ED I Period, continuing essentially up to the beginning of the Royal (ED III) Cemetery at around 2600 BCE. This was an important time for the formation of cities and the founding of dynastic kings.

None of the Jemdet Nasr graves appear to be royal, but they do show variation in wealth of grave goods. For example, the body in Jemdet Nasr Grave (JNG) 363 was buried with seven clay vessels, one stone vessel, a lead tumbler and a copper mirror; the body in JNG 215 had only a shell and three clay vessels. The body in JNG 191 wore a necklace of shell and carnelian ring beads and had five stone and three clay vessels, while the occupant of JNG 97 had seven clay vessels and a pierced clay disk.

Conclusion

Area PG, the great burial ground at Ur containing the famous ED III royal graves, and many other graves besides, was in use as a cemetery from as early as the late Uruk Period (3100 BCE or a little before) to the beginning of the Ur III Period (2100 BCE or a little after). It contained more than 2,000 documented graves ranging in form and burial goods from simple to elaborate and, in the 16 royal graves recovered from the ED III phase of the burial ground especially, yielded some of the most spectacular objects known from southern Mesopotamia. The tremendous wealth accumulated in the royal graves highlights the socioeconomic power and reach of the kings and queens buried at Ur; the grave goods are remarkable not only for their stunning artistry but also for their incorporation of a wide variety of exotic materials which could only have been obtained through sophisticated trade networks and relationships (Fig. 8.13). Ur's situation with respect to the Persian Gulf trade was likely one of the reasons it rose to prominence in this early period (see Chapter 5S2: Importing Raw Materials and Finished Goods). The city was, thus, able to sustain an elite that could demand such impressive burial ritual and accoutrements—and that could, in death, remove so significant an amount of wealth from circulation.

For Further Reading

Woolley, C. Leonard. 1929. *Ur of the Chaldees: A Record of Seven Years of Excavation*. London: E. Benn Limited.
Zettler, Richard L., and Lee Horne, eds. 1998. *Treasures of the Royal Tombs of Ur*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Fig. 8.13 Opposite

A few of the extraordinary artifacts discovered in PG 800 at Ur: (top) decorated cosmetic box lid (B16744A); (center) gold cosmetic dish made in the shape of a cockle shell (B16710); (bottom) gold tweezers and fingernail cleaner (B16714).

