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Royal Tombs at Ur Research Project, Part Four: Context and History of Research

Sixteen of the tombs unearthed by C. Leonard Woolley's archaeological work at Ur are distinguished from the rest of the cemetery in their opulence, architecture, and number of occupants (Woolley 1934, 33). Despite the striking richness of this find, these so-called Royal Tombs at Ur present several challenges, complicating scholars' understanding of the phenomenon. Currently, these are the only known instances of collective burial in the Sumerian world (Horne 1998, para. 10). Their contents, moreover, were disturbed in antiquity, the skeletal remains were highly decayed and fragmented, and little textual evidence remains to elucidate the identity of the occupants, the rituals of Mesopotamian burial, or the dominant ideology that made such tombs possible (Dickson 2006, 131). This paper attempts to articulate and organize the principal research questions surrounding the Royal Tombs of Ur, in hopes of illustrating both the indefinite nature of the archaeological record as well as general trends in the scholarly work surrounding this record.

Issues of Dating and Chronology

To what period can the burials be attributed (Moorey 1977, 24-34; Reade 2001, 14-17; Zettler 1998, 21)? Both contemporary textual evidence [seal impressions and tablets from the seal impressions strata (SIS)] and modern carbon-14 dating date the tombs from 2600-2500 BCE, consistent with Woolley's original claims (Moorey 1977, 24; Reade 2001, 14; Woolley 1934, 32-33). The rubbish from the SIS, however, may have been deposited concurrently with or after the construction of the tombs, making this evidence circumstantial at best (Reade 2001, 16-17).

When were the tombs dug, relative to the lifetime of the occupant(s) (Reade 2001, 18-19)? While the rough dates of the tombs are fairly certain, scholars do not know if the tombs were

constructed during the principal occupant's lifetime or if mummification took place after death, in order to delay burial and allow time for the tombs to be built (Reade 2001, 18-19).¹

What is the relative internal chronology of the tombs (Moorey 1977, 29-34; Pollock 1985, 129; Zettler 1998, 22)?² Following Woolley's initial publication (1934), Hans Nissen's *Zur Datierung des Königsfriedhofes von Ur* (1966) began what would become an ongoing examination of the stratigraphy and the relative dating of the tombs.³ Nissen's findings report that the sixteen tombs were dug and filled in a rather small time frame, divisible into seven distinct phases.⁴ While Woolley (1934, 20-32) uses artifact types to relatively date graves, Nissen relies on glyptic imagery and inscriptions.⁵ Susan Pollock (1985, 133), by contrast, relies upon recurrent pottery types to create a rough approximation of the internal chronology. It has also been suggested that tombs may be grouped according to structural resemblances and close proximity to one another (Moorey 1977, 30-34). Thus, there are several gauges to piece together some internal chronology, each to different ends (Pollock 1985, 129-133).

Identity, Royalty, Status

Who was buried in the Royal Tombs (Gansell 2007, 43; Marchesi 2004, 153; Moorey 1977, 25-26; Pollock 1991, 173; Pollock 2007a, 213; Woolley 1934, 37-40)? Were the principal

¹ Evidence of possible mummification is discussed in greater depth later in this paper.

² Determining the relative chronology is complicated by the overlapping, intrusive, and sometimes destructive nature of some of the burials (Zettler 1998, 22). Thus, unlike most archaeological studies of sedimentation, a deeper position in the strata may not indicate the tomb is indeed older

² Determining the relative chronology is complicated by the overlapping, intrusive, and sometimes destructive nature of some of the burials (Zettler 1998, 22). Thus, unlike most archaeological studies of sedimentation, a deeper position in the strata may not indicate the tomb is indeed older than those above it (Zettler 1998, 22). To further complicate this question, there is not a large enough sequence of radiocarbon samples to date to determine if carbon dating measurements are unambiguously certain (Reade 2001, 14).

³ This summary of Nissen's contributions is taken from Zettler 1998, 22.

⁴ This summary of Nissen's chronology is taken from Mallowan and Parker 1970, 218; Moorey 1977, 29-30; and Pollock 1985, 130.

⁵ The overviews of these methods are taken from Pollock 1985, 129-130.

occupants of the tombs of kings and queens, as Woolley (1934, 37-40) believes (Marchesi 2004, 153)? Based on the number of graves unearthed and the estimated population of Ur, it is clear that the Royal Cemetery was reserved for select persons, mostly adults (Pollock 2007a, 213). Woolley (1934, 37-40) deems the tombs ‘royal’ due to the discovery of objects inscribed with the titles of *lugal* and *nin* (meaning ‘big man’ and ‘queen,’ respectively), which are typically associated with royal offices.⁶

The main alternative theory to this interpretation is that these were not kings and queens, but rather priests and priestesses ritually sacrificed as part of a religious ceremony (Moorey 1977, 25). There is no direct archaeological or textual support for this theory (Pollock 1991, 175). Amy Gansell (2007, 43) suggests that perhaps both priests and secular rulers were buried here, all operating within a religiously affiliated communal structure.

The theory of the substitute king/queen has also been reexamined recently (Moorey 1977, 25; Scurlock 1995, 1885). Perhaps substitute kings and queens were ritually slaughtered following their brief reign as some sort of symbolic ritual (Moorey 1977, 25; Scurlock 1995, 1885). In such instances, according to contemporary texts, the substitute king’s retinue died with him in a ceremony marked by lavishness (Scurlock 1995, 1885).⁷ However, P.R.S. Moorey (1977, 26)

⁶ The inscriptions on seals discovered in the tombs may verify that at least some of the individuals were royalty or connected to royalty (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 128). For example, the seals of Pu-Abi and of Nintur name these individuals “queen” (Marchesi 2004, 176). These are the only two whose formal titles and royal status are known and documented, based on epigraphic evidence alone (Marchesi 2004, 186). The three seals found on Pu-Abi’s body confirm the identification of the associated corpse with a considerable degree of certainty (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 139). There are, however, dissenters who question the accuracy of this attribution: there is no unchallengeable reason to expect that one individual would need three seals or that the inscribed seals could not have been gifts or heirlooms (Cohen 2005, 81). Moreover, artifacts mentioning kings cannot be directly associated with any specific principal occupant (Pollock 1991, 175).

⁷ Notably, this is the only evidence of human sacrifice recorded by ancient Mesopotamian texts (Scurlock 1995, 1885).

asserts that none of these hypotheses unequivocally and wholly explains the phenomenon of the cemetery.

Seven of the tombs show evidence of mass burial associated with a principal (and perhaps higher-ranking) individual (Marchesi 2004, 153-154). Who was the entourage buried with the principal occupant (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 137; Gansell 2007, 43; Molleson and Hodgson 2003; Pollock 1991, 175; Pollock 2007a, 218; Woolley 1934, 33-42)? Were these familial relatives of the principal occupants (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 137)?⁸ Were these native subordinates, or foreign prisoners of war (Vidale 2011, 440)?

Woolley (1934, 33-42) claims these individuals were the retainers of the principal occupant.⁹ Pollock (1991, 175) similarly describes these individuals as attached to public institutions, though does not assign them a more specific role.¹⁰ Pollock (2007a, 218) later proposes that the successor to the household's now-deceased leader (in this case, the principal occupant) may have used mass killing as a means of ridding their regime of unwanted, overly loyal former entourage members.

⁸ Because the evidence provided by the presumed age and sex of the skeletons overwhelmingly favors young women and mature men, this is unlikely; if these were indeed family members, one would expect a greater number of elderly individuals, married couples, and younger children (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 137; Dickson 2006, 129). However, Woolley's sex determinations are speculative, based primarily on the dress of the skeleton (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 137). There is no systematic or scientific way of determining the sex of the corpses, and most of the skeletal remains unearthed by Woolley were discarded (Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 91-93; Moorey 1977, 34). Moreover, there are seven documented instances of a skeleton with both male- and female-associated accouterments, further complicating the appropriateness and reliability of Woolley's methodology and, therefore, his interpretations (Charvát 2002, 205).

⁹ Woolley (1934, 35) asserts that the flexed positions of the bodies of the so-called retinue are indicative of their state of servitude. Dietrich Sürenhagen (2002, 330) challenges this claim, noting that some principal occupants were found in a similar pose. The richness of the dress, jewelry, possessions, and tableaux accompanying the bodies further suggests these were not average subordinates, but more likely elites with some institutional connection to the ruling power (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 137).

¹⁰ Pollock (1991, 177) likewise proposes that the discrepancies between tomb architecture, grave goods, and number of occupants may indicate that these graves were not exclusively for any single group (e.g., royalty), but rather individuals of various ranks and positions within this complex state.

Gansell (2007, 43) raises the possibility of these being substitutes for the actual royal retinue; the true members would thereby be preserved, presumably valued for their skills or indispensable services.¹¹ However, the findings of Theya Molleson and Dawn Hodgson (2003, 125) suggest that the skeletal remains of some bodies might indeed be used to infer individuals' former occupations. The musculature of some bodies was developed in such a way that indicated prolonged exercise or labor, targeting specific muscles repetitively and with little alternation (Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 125).¹² Notably, remains of the primary occupants Meskalamdug and Pu-abi are considerably less muscular than others, indicating a lack of physical exercise and perhaps suggesting their superior rank (Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 127). Thus, Woolley's is still the most likely explanation (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 137).

Who organized the funerary displays (Cohen 2005, 82; Gansell 2007, 44)? Whoever these individuals were, they clearly had a significant degree of control over capital (Cohen 2005, 82). Perhaps an existing religious elite coordinated these interments as part of their temple duties, though the tombs themselves may have served more secular individuals (e.g., royalty) as well (Gansell 2007, 44).

Artifacts

Part of Sumerian funerary rites involved placing offerings in the tomb (Sürenhagen 2002, 326). Why bury the dead with objects of considerable wealth (Cohen 2005, 94; Kramer 1963, 130; Moorey 1977, 29; Sürenhagen 2002, 325; Tinney 1998, 28)? Were these objects intended for the deceased individual or for a deity (Cohen 2005, 94; Kramer 1963, 130; Moorey 1977, 29;

¹¹ Gansell (2007) does not elaborate much on this possibility and does not seem to personally subscribe to this theory, though her comments did seem appropriate to mention here.

¹² This evidence is also reflective of the role specialization of the Early Dynastic IIIa period (Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 126). Molleson and Hodgson (2003) do not explicitly attempt to identify these individuals within a class hierarchy; however, I felt it appropriate to outline their findings in this context.

Sürenhagen 2002, 325; Tinney 1998, 28)? There is no contemporary textual evidence that indicates such gifts were specifically meant to placate the gods or deities (Moorey 1977, 29).¹³ However, passages from *The Death of Ur-Namma* have been used as evidence for burying goods for the individual's own provisions, and Babylonian texts include in the care of the dead the supply of provisions and status symbols (Cohen 2005, 94; Kramer 1963, 130; Sürenhagen 2002, 325).¹⁴

Can the assemblage of artifacts be used to determine the social status of individuals (Cohen 2005, 23; Gansell 2007, 29, 31, 37; Pollock 1991, 80; Pollock 2007a, 214-216; Redman 1978, 277; Winter 2010, 229)? Are these offerings symbolic, and if so, what do they symbolize (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 125)? How does one access this symbolism (Cohen 2005, 126)? Charles Redman (1978, 277) views grave goods principally as indicators of the wealth of the individual, largely distinct though not entirely divorced from the greater society. Some of the artifacts, however, may have been contemporarily associated with a ruling institution, and perhaps these types of adornment were the restricted privilege of those in power (Pollock 1991, 180). Cohen (2005, 23) equates the ability to bury wealth and create an elaborate display with the economic resources available on a statewide level, ultimately making the graves a display of wealth and control over said resources. Gansell (2007, 29, 31, 37) argues that the organization and types of objects found with individuals were

¹³ However, the discovery of female accouterments with (supposedly) male skeletons may indicate these precious objects were intended for a deity in the afterlife (Tinney 1998, 28). Furthermore, the *Epic of Gilgameš* does describe the Underworld as a dismal place, which may suggest the need to placate the powers of such a realm (Pollock 1991, 179-180; Pollock 2007a, 212; Reade 2003, 95).

¹⁴ The presence of boats and chariots in some of the tombs may also be indicative of a journey to the underworld that, in Sumerian thought, needed to be furnished by the living (Katz 2007, 46; Reade 2003, 95; Scurlock 1995, 1884). Moreover, pipes unearthed at the site may have been used for pouring libations into the graves as a means of providing drink to the deceased, a practice that likewise finds parallels in Sumerian texts (Katz 2007, 101, 207; Selz 2004, 196).

The practices of dedicating votive statues and making offerings to dead ancestors, known from Lagaš administrative documents, seem to further suggest that the artifacts and rituals are indeed provisional (Pollock 2007a, 212; Selz 2004, 188). Andrew Cohen (2005, 94) does not subscribe to this theory on the basis of the considerable chronological distance between these various texts and the tombs; he merely acknowledges the existence of the theory.

worn in standard configurations and, therefore, may be indications of gender, age, chronology, and privilege.¹⁵ Going a step further, Pollock (2007a, 214) proposes that the burial of wealth in these mass funerary contexts represents the death of the household along with the head of household.¹⁶ This was, in turn, a demonstration of authority, social position, and economic clout (Pollock 2007a, 216).

Were these artifacts meant to remain buried with the dead (Pollock 1991, 183)? Pollock suggests that perhaps the disturbance and looting of some of the graves occurred roughly contemporarily with the burials and was socially sanctioned, as though the artifacts were loaned to the deceased rather than permanently given to them (Pollock 1991, 183).

Possible Rituals and Theories of Mass Killing

Under what circumstances were the retinue buried; what took place at this cemetery (Gansell 2007, 43; Woolley 1934, 35-26, 121)?¹⁷ Where did ritual practices associated with burial occur (Cohen 2005, 5)? Did these individuals die due to natural random circumstances, or did they take

¹⁵ More precisely, cylinder seal designs remain the most reliable index of gender: banqueting scenes for female owners, contest and hunting scenes for males (Gansell 2007, 38). As later pointed out by Massimo Vidale (2011, 444), individuals with cylinder seals were most often found near the corners of the tomb/pit structures, perhaps acting as gatekeepers controlling access and explaining the need for seals in the afterlife. Determining the rules for object ownership as determined by age is more complicated, since most of the buried individuals were adults, though this fact alone may reveal something about the qualifications for burial within this community (Gansell 2007, 38). Finally, the quantity of objects and quality (or rareness/preciousness) of the materials of those objects may also be used as indexes of privilege (Gansell 2007, 39).

¹⁶ This interpretation may explain those individuals and objects conspicuously absent from the tombs: children or heirs to wealth, cultic personnel, spouses, and most practical tools (Pollock 2007a, 214). These various resources could be reallocated following the ceremony for ongoing use or employment, while the ceremony itself could remain conspicuously lavish (Pollock 2007a, 216). Therefore, variations between grave sizes, grave structures, and grave goods may be indicative of different household types operating within the existing *oikos* economy (Pollock 2007a, 210, 214-215).

¹⁷ This question is complicated by the severely damaged and decayed state of the skeletons found, making the exact cause of death difficult to determine with certainty and necessitating much conjectural work (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 130; Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 111; Woolley 1934, 120). Moreover, Woolley preserved few skeletal remains (Baadsgaard et al. 2011, 27).

part in some sort of ritual suicide or coordinated mass killing (Marchesi 2004, 155; Woolley 1934, 35-26, 121)? Were these individuals buried at the same time or over a longer period of time (Sürenhagen 2002, 330)? Can certain patterns be determined or traced based on this archaeological evidence (Winter 2010, 229)? Did the occupants go to their deaths willingly, and if so, how was this subordination achieved (Dickson 2006, 141; Pollock 2007b, 90)? Were some individuals buried only as skull deposits, and if so, why (Sürenhagen 2002, 330)?

Woolley (1934, 35-36, 121) subscribes to the interpretation that the burial of the retainers was part of a mass suicide; such a ritual would explain the significant number of vessels and the large copper pot found in PG/1237, which perhaps contained poison that was voluntarily consumed by the retainers.¹⁸ The orderliness of the tombs and passivity of the corpses' poses, demonstrated most conspicuously by the neatly arranged rows of bodies in PG/1237, likewise supports this theory (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 137; Reade 2003, 120; Woolley 1934, 35-36). Woolley (1934, 41-42) goes as far as to suggest that such a fate would have been considered a privilege, as the retainers were essentially accompanying their master to serve in a divine realm. Because there is no contemporary Sumerian textual evidence for ritual killings or human sacrifice, Moorey (1977, 37) similarly defines this phenomenon as self-immolation, rather than a more violent mass killing.

¹⁸ Winter (2010, 233, 241) makes a similar conjecture about the large number of libation vessels and lamps in PG/1237 as evidence of established ritual; however, she contends that the exact function of these objects is ambiguous and indeterminable. Furthermore, there are two ancient inscriptions or texts that support Woolley's claims (Kramer 1963, 130; Marchesi 2004, 157-158; Moorey 1977, 38-39; Selz 2004, 187; Tinney 1998, 27). The first may be found in the *Death of Gilgameš*, a close literary parallel that describes the king's loved ones and attendants following him to the grave, perhaps in a literal sense (Kramer 1963, 130; Marchesi 2004, 157-158; Selz 2004, 187; Tinney 1998, 27). Moorey (1977, 39) argues this is not substantial enough evidence to confirm the practice of mass killing, and Gianni Marchesi (2004, 160) likewise contends that this is not a direct reference to collective burial. The second piece of evidence may be found on the inscription of the Disk of Enheduanna, an Akkadian object that alludes to servants being ready to die following the death of a master (Moorey 1977, 38).

However, it must be noted that while the vessels constitute the principal piece of evidence used to support Woolley's claims, the majority of attendants in graves did not have cups (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 138). Vidale (2011, 446-447) alternatively suggests that rather than the individuals meeting their demise in the tomb, they were killed sometime before interment as part of a sequence of formal ritual performances. A recent examination conducted by the Penn Museum using CT scans of the skeletal remains shows signs of blunt-force fragmentation on at least one of the individuals interred, suggesting the mode of death was more violent than a voluntary intake of poison (Baadsgaard et al. 2011, 36; Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 144).¹⁹

Evidence of heat exposure (or partial cremation) on the skulls of two individuals and deposits of mercury sulfide on one of these skulls suggests the preservation of bodies *post mortem* to delay decomposition, perhaps indicating a longer time frame between the time of death and burial (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 145-146; Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 94-95).²⁰ If this is true, the neat arrangement of the tomb could then be explained as a ritual staging of the corpses into such positions (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 148).

In contrast to this theory, yet operating within the same vein, Vidale (2011, 438) suggests that the unnaturally extreme turn of the neck of some bodies, when considered alongside the relatively undamaged state of the remainder of their weakest joints, could indicate death by strangulation followed by rapid burial.

In either case, whether burial was rapid or prolonged, evidence suggests the retinue did not die in their resting place (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 145-148; Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 94-95).

¹⁹ A hafting instrument with a sharp end was likely used to make the circular holes found in the cranial bones (Baadsgaard et al. 2011, 36).

²⁰ Heating as a form of preservation is known from later periods in Western Asia (Baadsgaard et al. 2011, 38). Harriet Crawford (2004, 147) further suggests that the evidence of burning on some but not all of the remains may indicate some hierarchical, class, or professional differentiation. However, though the bones appear to have suffered from such heat exposure, actual chemical analyses are ultimately inconclusive (Baadsgaard et al. 2011, 37).

Aubrey Baadsgard, Janet Monge, and Richard Zettler (2012, 136) accept the theory of voluntary mass death, though not exactly as Woolley describes it, and deem this the opinion of the overwhelming majority of scholars. There are dissenters, however. Sürenhagen (2002, 332) contends that the principal occupant was only the individual buried most recently and was to be laid aside when the next deceased individual required interment.²¹ Vidale (2011, 440), moreover, emphasizes the lack of evidence (osteological, archaeological, and otherwise) that prevents knowing whether this death was voluntary or not with a reliable degree of certainty.

Beyond the actual cause of death, Woolley (1934, 34, 104) believes that the rituals associated with the Royal Tomb phenomena were prolonged and involved making food offerings as well as human sacrifices. Irene Winter (2010, 229, 231, 235-236, 249) likewise argues that the archaeological evidence—principally the large number of “lamps,” conches, and libation vessels unearthed at the site, as well as the distribution of these objects within the tomb—reflect ritual acts associated with burial.²² Winter (2010, 249-251) does not, however, link these to the intake of poison, but rather interprets them as evidence of cleansing rituals, such as symbolic hand-washing, ablution with water, and anointing with oil. Similarly, Gebhard Selz (2004, 188, 203-204, 211) interprets the tomb artifacts not as personal belongings, but rather as remnants of more impersonal ritual activity, perhaps associated with state funerals that served to stabilize the reigning institution.

Problems of Architecture

²¹ In an earlier article, Pollock (1985, 144) notes that Woolley’s descriptions and illustrations overwhelmingly suggest simultaneous burial within a single tomb. Though she was not preemptively dismissing the claims of Sürenhagen (2002), I felt it appropriate to mention here the rationale of one other scholar in accepting Woolley’s original interpretation.

²² To be exact, the north and northwest corners are favored in eight instances—that is, more objects were discovered in these parts of the tombs (Winter 2010, 235). Furthermore, the type of libation jug unearthed is similar in shape to those depicted on votive plaques, connecting the function of this pottery type to ritual practice (Winter 2010, 239). Winter (2010, 241, 251), however, does emphasize the conjectural nature of this interpretation, as well as the possible multiplicity of and ultimate ambiguity of the functions of the artifacts.

Why are there discrepancies between the tomb architecture of some of the graves (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 130; Marchesi 2004, 154; Pollock 2007b, 97, 100)? Could this be indicative of differential status or the social hierarchy of the living (Pollock 2007b, 97, 100)? Why did they change throughout time (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 130)?²³ Why are some tombs without chambers (Marchesi 2004, 154)?

Discrepancies and differences in architecture, alongside wide-ranging differences in the numbers of bodies and proportions of the two sexes, complicate understanding of the tombs, since no truly consistent or all-pervasive pattern may be established (Moorey 1977, 29, 34). PG/1237, for instance, had no tomb chamber (Woolley 1934, 114, 116). The richness of the tomb, however, led Woolley (1934, 114, 116) to conclude that such pits must have been royal tombs, their corresponding chambers likely plundered and destroyed.²⁴ Marchesi (2004, 154) conversely maintains that it is possible such tombs were constructed without chambers originally.²⁵ Pollock (2007b, 97, 100) further suggests that these differences may be reflective of the various types of *oikoi* in operation during the Early Dynastic period: that is, royal- versus temple-based institutions, and the symbolic demise of such institutions following the death of the household's head.

Tombs as Phenomena: Various Interpretations

What political or social implications did these burials have (Cohen 2005, 3; Dickson 2006, 123; Redman 1978, 277-278, 298; Pollock 1991, 182; Pollock 2007b, 105; Woolley 1934, 33-42; Zettler 1998, 29)? Woolley (1934, 33-42) suggested the mass burial of the so-called royal retinue

²³ Earlier tombs were multi-roomed structures with attendants buried throughout; later tombs typically had a large pit for the retinue and a chamber for the principal occupant (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 130).

²⁴ This is also the case with PG/337, /580, /1232, and /1332 (Marchesi 2004, 154).

²⁵ Woolley (1934, 114, 116) emphasizes the unfixed relationship between the locations of tombs relative to pits as evidence of former chambers. However, this may also be used to justify the argument of Marchesi (2004, 154): since there was no fixed relationship, a pit may very well be constructed without a corresponding tomb.

was a reflection of aspirations of semi-divine or divine status by the principal occupants. Pollock (1991, 182) more broadly explains the phenomenon as principally a display of power. In this interpretation, the retinue was coerced, perhaps disciplined, into an established tradition that normalized the practice of mass killing and burial through public display (Pollock 1991, 182; Pollock 2007b, 105). The retinue thereby internalized these notions as a result of this dominant ideology and willingly met their demise, as Woolley originally suggests (Pollock 2007b, 92, 105; Woolley 1934, 35-36, 121). Vidale's (2011, 448) theory of the prolonged ritual, discussed previously, likewise supports theories of conspicuous demonstrations of wealth, status, and power.

Several scholars suggest interpretations similar to that of Pollock (1991) with some important variations. Redman (1978, 277-278, 298) explains the tombs as ritual destructions of wealth, necessitated by the fundamental reorganization of Early Dynastic city-states and an oblique reflection of the secularization of power—that is, the development of the institution of kingship.²⁶ Cohen (2005, 3) essentially conceives of kingship as an ideology that inculcated followers to view the royal leader as a necessity, which could be achieved through public spectacles like the death rituals of the Royal Cemetery. The position of the graveyard in the center of the city would have made it easy for a ruling elite to control, and moreover, this politicization of space would have made the process of conducting lavish burials highly (and pointedly) visible to some public body (Cohen 2005, 66; Vidale 2011, 427). Moreover, the proximity of the site to the temple complex would have conflated the actions of the elite with the realm of the divine, shielding them from criticism and legitimizing their actions (Cohen 2005, 137). D. Bruce Dickson (2006, 123) proposes that perhaps the Royal Cemetery as a phenomenon may be viewed as a tableau of the ideals of the ruling power.

²⁶ Zettler (1998, 29) emphasizes the speculative nature of this theory in particular. Reade (2003, 96), however, poses a similar theory; namely, the increasing strength of the institution of kingship allowed and perhaps necessitated such a mass burial to take place, likely as a pointed reference to the *Epic of Gilgameš*.

The graves thus might be a highly public display of cruelty by rulers wishing to affirm their divinity (Dickson 2006, 123).

Why were the great majority of the retinue women (Marchesi 2004, 162)?²⁷ Were these women the high priestesses of the moon god Nanna (Marchesi 2004, 163; Moorey 1977, 40)?²⁸ This possibility has been revisited in recent scholarship (Marchesi 2004, 163, 174; Moorey 1977, 29, 40). The principal evidence for this theory comes from a seal unearthed in PG/1237 that bore the inscription, “child of the *gipar*,” connecting the individual (somewhat nondescriptly) to the temple dedicated to Nanna in Ur (Marchesi 2004, 174). Relatedly, Nanna was traditionally associated with decreeing the fate of the dead (Moorey 1977, 29).

Is there evidence of the sacred marriage within the tombs (Miller 2013, 127-129, 132; Winter 2010, 239; Woolley 1934, 39-40)? Woolley (1934, 39-40) dismisses the possibility of the practice of the sacred marriage for two primary reasons: (1) mass sacrifice is not mentioned in literary texts discussing the union, and (2) there was never a documented instance of two principal occupants. However, the types of libation vessels discussed by Winter (2010, 239) are found in depictions of the palm-vase libation, which Kathleen McCaffrey (2013, 232) later suggests may be a symbolic performance of the sacred marriage, citing the sexual undertones of the pouring spout and phallic shape of the palm.²⁹ Thus, if the occupants of the tombs are indeed priests and

²⁷ This statistic is based on the sexual determinations of Woolley (1934); as previously noted, there is no way of confirming these designations, though it is a recurring theme of the research surrounding the tombs (Moorey 1977, 35).

²⁸ Woolley (1934, 39-40) rejects this theory.

²⁹ McCaffrey (2013) does not explicitly discuss this possibility in the context of the royal tombs, though her work seemed related enough to that of Winter (2010) to mention here. However, beyond McCaffrey’s interpretation, it has been suggested that libations to the dead may have been intimately connected with the cycles of nature and broader concepts of fertility (Selz 2004, 197). Donald Hansen (1998, 49) likewise notes that several artifacts unearthed in the tombs have iconography associated with the sacred marriage, namely the rosettes of Inanna and other natural plant forms. Naomi Miller (2013, 127-129, 132) suggests that the wire pendants found with Pu-Abi (PG/800) may reference the shepherd Dumuzi, which, when paired with the flowering imagery on

priestesses, their sacrificial deaths may be connected to a sacred marriage ceremony that ensured fertility of the land (Moorey 1977, 25).

Are banqueting and funerary rituals connected, and if so, how (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 149; Cohen 2005, 43, 50, 92; Pollock 2007b, 99; Selz 2004, 191-192)? Contemporary documents indicate funerary rites involved banqueting (Selz 2004, 191-192). Images similar to the grave goods and the graves' structures are found on several banqueting scenes in contemporary glyptic imagery, inlays and votive plaques (Pollock 2007b, 99).³⁰ Such an association is further supported both by Early Dynastic documentary sources and the discovery of animal remains and other foodstuffs in the royal tombs (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 149-150; Cohen 2005, 43, 50). Were these provisions for the deceased in the afterlife or the remnants of a practiced ritual (Baadsgaard et al. 2012, 149-150; Cohen 2005, 43, 50, 92)? Perhaps this staged tableau is evidence of an actual feast, in which the group doing the burying participated (Cohen 2005, 92).

Concluding Remarks

While the Royal Tombs constitute a rich archaeological example that provides insight into Mesopotamian life, rituals, and society, the nature of the material record tends to raise more questions than it answers. The complicated data and various interpretations thus must be treated with a critical eye. Even those interpretations suggested by Woolley (1934), whose firsthand engagement with the site allows him significant credibility, cannot be accepted as unambiguous truths, as demonstrated by this overview. Continual probing, questioning, and reframing of the

the so-called diadem, evoke the story of Inanna and Dumuzi traveling to the underworld. Inanna and Dumuzi are also associated with the sacred marriage (McCaffrey 2013, 229).

³⁰ Among the artifacts and architectural phenomena noted include vessels, libation jugs, drains, "offering table" structures, musical instruments, wagons, and model boats (Cohen 2005, 28, 50, 88-90, 115-116; Pollock 2007b, 102-104). Moreover, the mere prevalence of cups and tumblers may be indicative of a ritual banquet, rather than a collective intake of poison (Selz 2004, 194).

significant problems of the data thereby characterize both the history and future of the scholarship of the Royal Tombs, a phenomenon ultimately unknowable but not entirely impenetrable.

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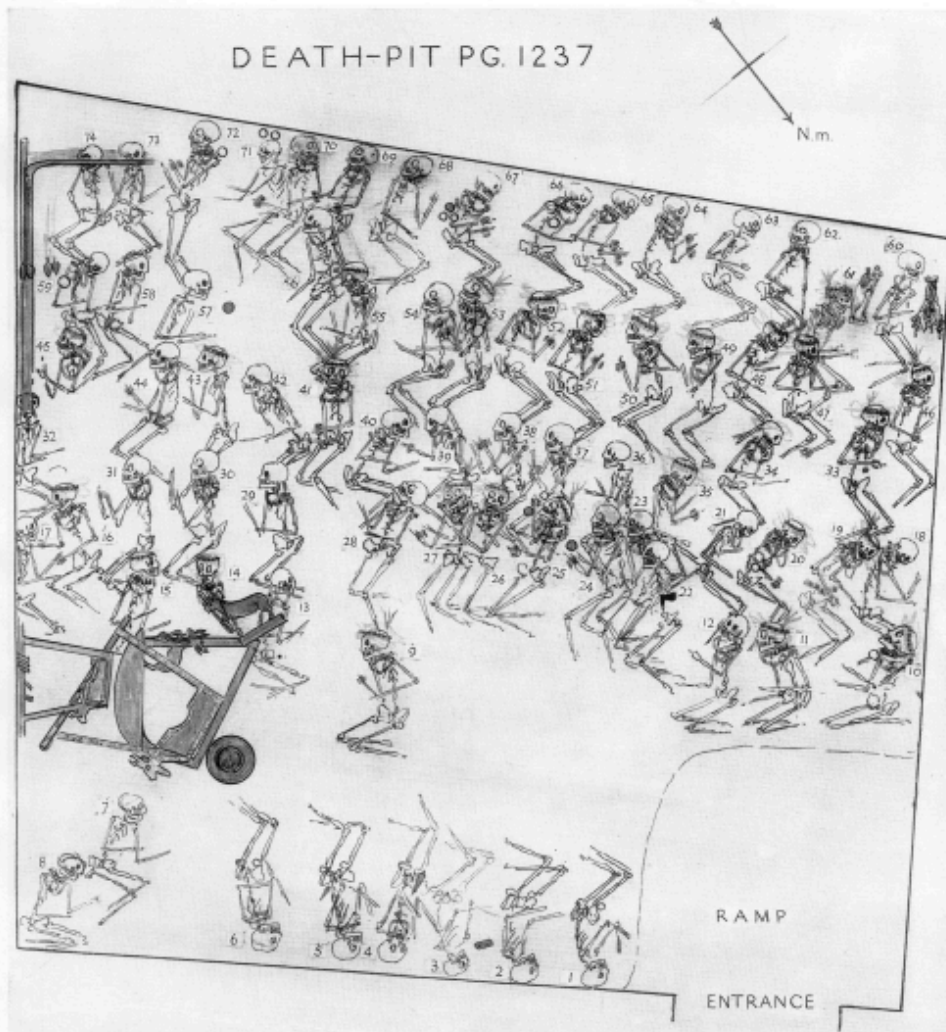
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Royal Tombs at Ur Research Project, Part Three: Description of PG/1237 (bodies 62-74)

1. Structure and pit:



THE BODIES IN POSITION IN THE GREAT DEATH-PIT PG/1237

o. p. 113

Figure 1. Woolley 1934, Plate 71

PG/1237 was located on the northeastern edge of the cemetery of the Royal Tombs at Ur (Woolley 1934, Plate 274). Horizontally, it was positioned northeast of PG/1054 and southeast of PG/789 and /800B (Woolley 1934, Plate 274). For further reference, PG/1232 was just southwest of the southernmost corner of PG/1237 (Woolley 1934, Plate 274). The Temenos Wall, built at a later date, ran roughly parallel to the southeast-facing side of PG/1237 and was positioned just farther southeast of this tomb (Woolley 1934, Plate 274).

According to Plate 271, this pit was located at a higher level than PG/1054, /1236, and /779. It was found deeper than PG/777, /1332, and the stratum of temporary occupation containing remains of houses (Woolley 1934,

Plate 271). C. Leonard Woolley's drawing (Plate 271) shows the floor of PG/1237 approximately 4 m. below the modern surface.

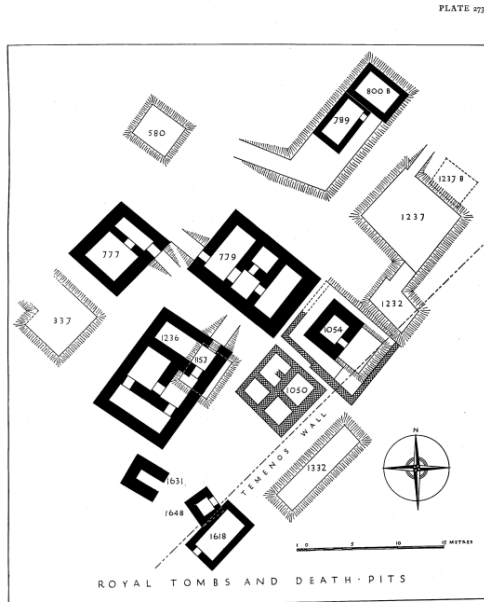


Figure 2. Woolley 1934, Plate 273

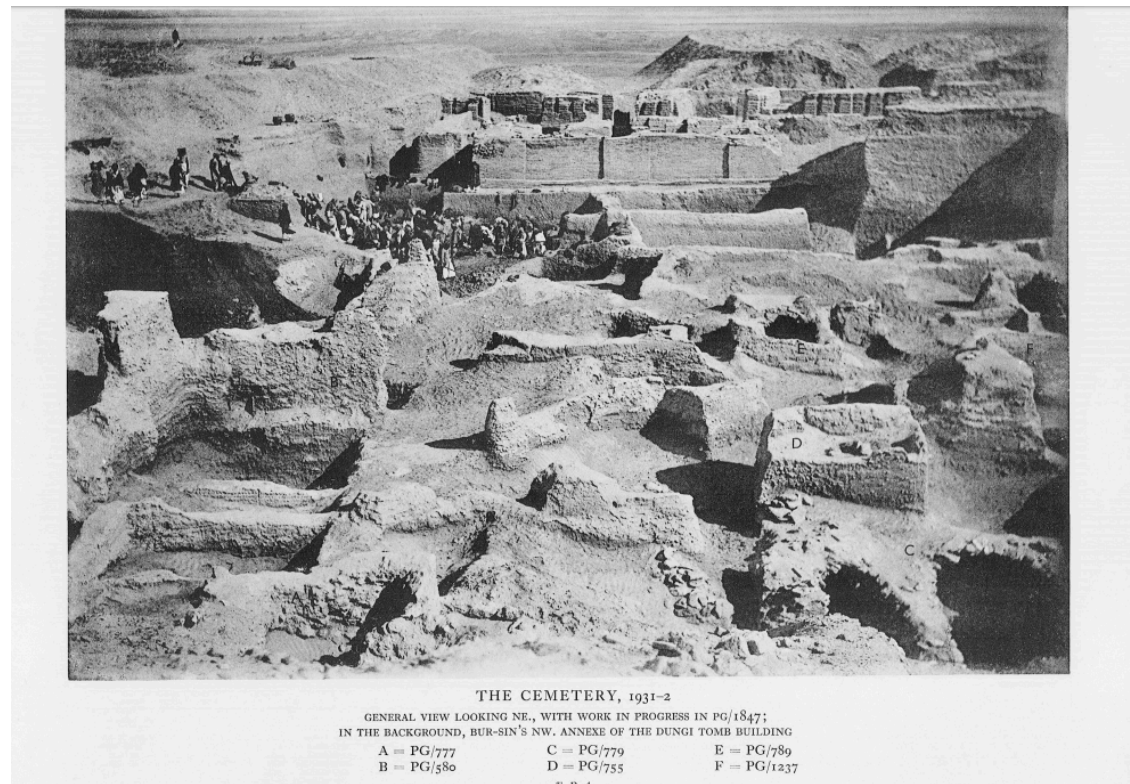


Figure 3. Woolley 1934, Plate 3



PG/777

THE CEMETERY SITE 1931-2
GENERAL VIEW LOOKING NE. TO THE MAUSOLEA OF BUR-SIN AND DUNGI
v. p. 4

PL. 4

Figure 4. Woolley 1934, Plate 4



a



b

PG/1237

a. GENERAL VIEW, SHOWING MEN IN THE 'DEATH-PIT' CLEARING DOWN TO THE GOLD OBJECTS

b. EXCAVATING THE LYRES

v. p. 113

Figure 5. Woolley 1934, Plate 70a/b

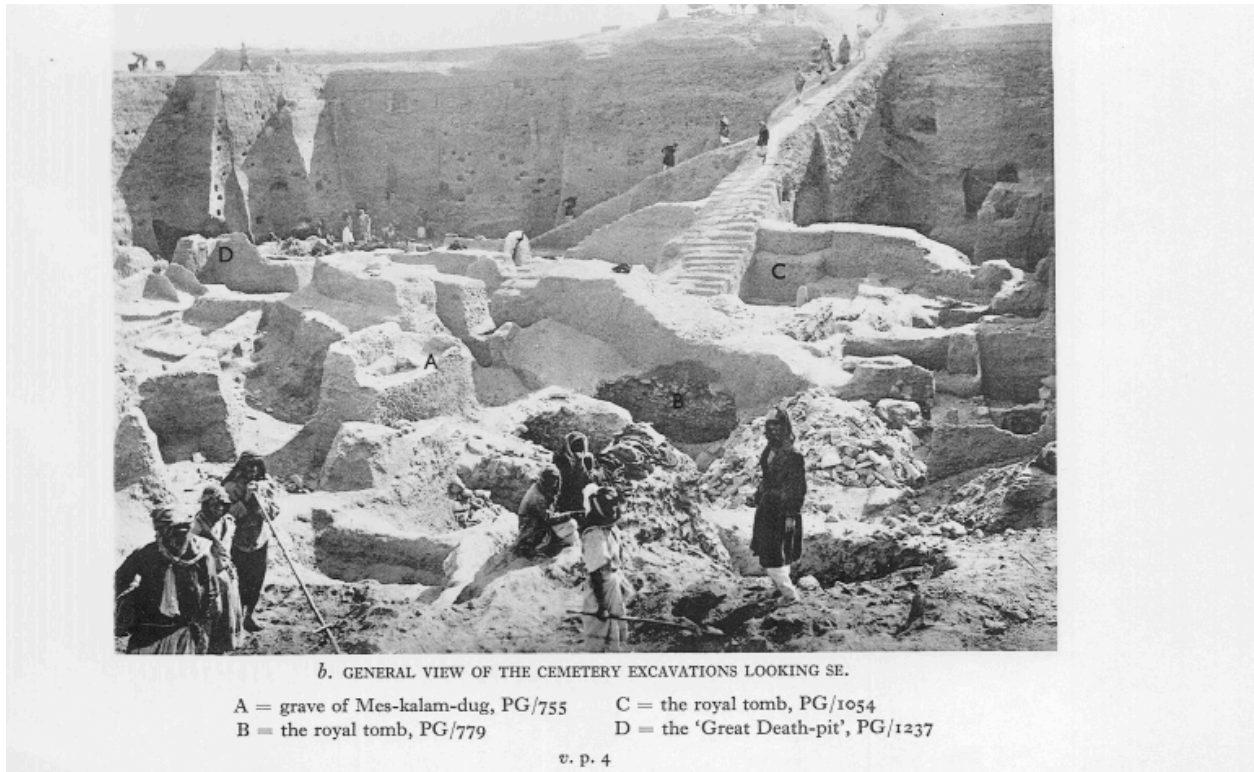


Figure 6. Woolley 1934, Plate 8b

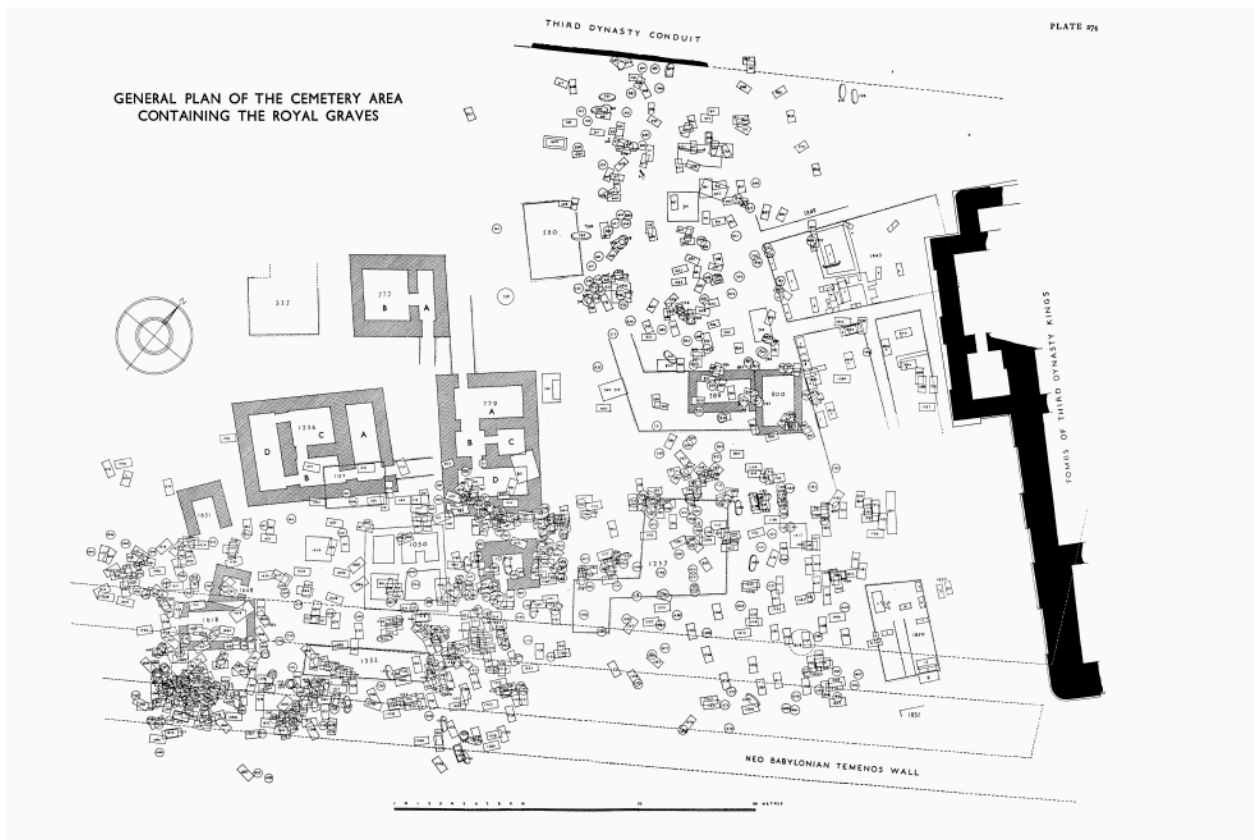


Figure 7. Woolley 1934, Plate 274

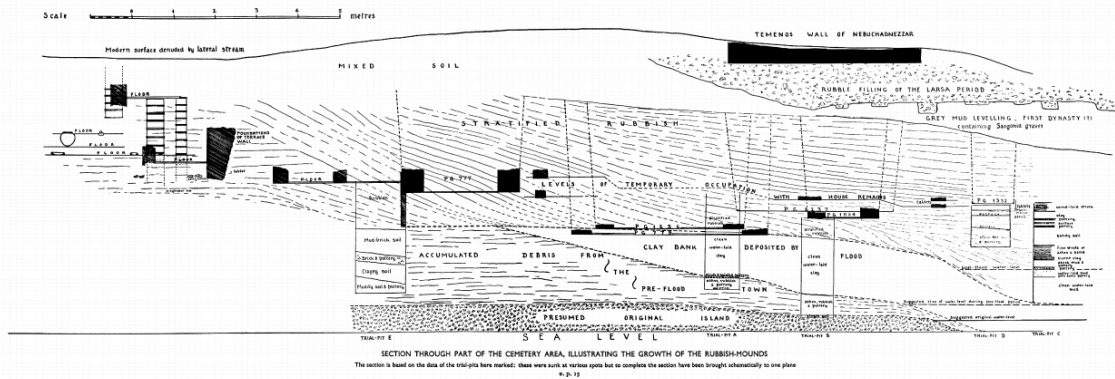


Figure 8. Woolley 1934, Plate 271

According to the scale Woolley provides in Plate 273, the interior of the tomb measured as follows: the northeast-facing side was approximately 8.5 m. in length, the northwest-facing side 8 m., the southwest-facing side 8.75 m., and the southeast-facing side 8 m. The shaft entrance, located along the northeast face, measured approximately 1 m. in width (Woolley 1934, Plate 273). The shaft of the tomb was located near the northernmost corner of PG/1237, and all four corners of the tomb were roughly oriented along the cardinal directions (Woolley 1934, Plate 273).

PG/1237 lacked a tomb chamber and was, therefore, deemed a death pit for human sacrifice (Woolley 1934, 113-114). However, the richness of this particular burial suggests that it was indeed a royal tomb, its corresponding chamber likely plundered and destroyed (Woolley 1934, 114, 116).¹ About 1.50 m. above the floor of the pit, loose limestone blocks, beads, and evidence of a rubble masonry wall were found, which could be the remnants of such a chamber (Woolley 1934, 114).

A burnt plano-convex brick and bitumen structure shaped like an offering table was excavated northeast of the grave-shaft (Woolley 1934, 114). Bitumen lined the interior to make the structure waterproof, but this material was not used as mortar (Woolley 1934, 232). According to Woolley's Figure 19, not shown to scale here, the interior of this structure measured approximately 1.50 m. sq., excluding its "spout," which has an entrance approximately 0.75 m. wide (Woolley 1934, 114). The spout was found 1.90 m. from the side of the pit (Woolley 1934, 114). The walls of this structure measured slightly larger than 30 cm. thick, and the whole rested on a mud brick mass that extended downward for 2.00 m. (Woolley 1934, 114). However, a portion of this structure was destroyed by an intrusive burial, PG/1180, explaining the partial conjectural reconstruction shown below, indicated by the dotted line (Woolley 1934, 114). The exact function of this structure remains uncertain, though Woolley describes it variously as an "offering-basin," an "offering-table," and a date press (Woolley 1934, 114, 232).

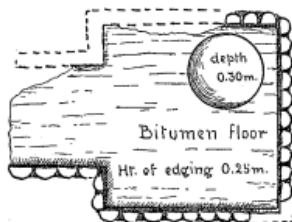


FIG. 19. PG/1237. Scale $\frac{1}{16}$.

Figure 9. Woolley 1934, 114

¹ Woolley also cites the lack of a fixed relationship between the chambers and pits of other tombs in the area as further evidence that such a chamber may have existed (Woolley 1934, 114, 116).



b. THE 'OFFERING-TABLE' OF PLANO-CONVEX BRICK AND BITUMEN ABOVE PG/1237

v. p. 114

Figure 10. Woolley 1934, Plate 69b

Below this, remains of mud brick formed a system of crosswalls in a compartmentalized layout (Woolley 1934, 115). Remains of a burial may have belonged in one of these compartments, though the lack of their original floors makes this impossible to determine with certainty (Woolley 1934, 115). In the southwest part of this level, Woolley found a compartment measuring 4.15 m. x 2.60 m. with limestone and mud brick ceilings and a green clay floor (Woolley 1934, 115). In the east corner of the same level, 1.90 m below the floor of the bitumen structure, there were heavy deposits of burnt ash and a large pot of coarse clay, which also showed evidence of burning (Woolley 1934, 115). At an even lower level, there was a thin stratum of ash extending over the shaft, resting on yellow mud (Woolley 1934, 115). Below this, there was a stratum of mud brick about 0.25 m. thick, directly on top of the bodies (Woolley 1934, 115). Here the shaft measured 8.50 m. x 7.50 m (Woolley 1934, 115).

2. Preserved skeletons:

Bodies No. 62-74 were positioned closely together in PG/1237, neatly arranged in a row along the southeast side of the pit. The bones of these skeletal remains were reportedly so decayed that the exact configurations of the bodies and distribution of the objects were difficult for Woolley and his excavation team to discern (Woolley 1934, 120). Plate 71, which provides a conjectural reconstruction based upon this challenging evidence, shows that Bodies No. 62-74 were all positioned on their sides. Woolley identified these, along with Bodies No. 7-61, as female skeletons (Woolley 1934, 116). The heads of Bodies No. 62-70 and 72 were against or very close to the southwest-facing side of the pit (Woolley 1934, Plate 71). The head of Body No. 71 rested against two circular artifacts, drawn but not described in Woolley's publication, which were likewise located along the pit's southwest-facing side (Woolley 1934, Plate 71). Bodies No. 73 and 74 were positioned farther northeast, not against the southwest-facing side but nearer to the southeast-facing one (Woolley 1934, Plate 71). These two bodies were found with a silver and mosaic beam lying across their upper torsos or necks (Woolley 1934, 124). Woolley referred to this artifact as "the remains of a canopy," though the actual function of the beam remains uncertain (Woolley 1934, 115).

The following information was taken from Woolley 1934, Plate 71.

Body No. 62 was positioned on its left side, torso facing northwest. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis. The skull was oriented in the opposite direction, however, facing southeast, as though the individual were looking over her right shoulder. The left arm was extended, positioned roughly along the southwest-northeast axis, while the right arm was bent with elbow projecting behind the spine (dorsal side of body). Both legs were flexed in a similar fashion with knees and pelvis facing northwest. The feet of the body overlapped with the skull of Body No. 48, resting below or on top of the other head.

Body No. 63 was positioned on its left side, torso and skull facing northwest. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis. Both arms were bent with elbows projecting behind the spine (dorsal side of the body). Both legs were flexed with knees and pelvis oriented northwest. The feet of the body overlapped with the skull of Body No. 49, resting below or on top of the other head.

Body No. 64 was positioned on its left side, torso and skull facing northwest. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis. Both arms were bent and extended slightly outward, elbows and hands positioned in front of the body (ventral side). Both legs were flexed with knees and pelvis oriented northwest. The feet of the body overlapped with the skull of Body No. 50, resting below or on top of the other head.

Body No. 65 was positioned on its left side, torso and skull facing northwest. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis. Both arms were bent, the left arm extended farther forward than the right. The right elbow projected behind the spine (dorsal side of body), while the left was positioned in front of the body (ventral side). Both legs were flexed in a similar fashion with knees and pelvis oriented northwest. The feet of the body overlapped with the skull of Body No. 51, resting below or on top of the other head.

Body No. 66 was positioned on its left side, torso and skull facing northwest. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis, curved as though the individual were hunching over. Both arms were bent; the left arm was extended only slightly farther than the right, overlapping with the bent left elbow of Body No. 65. The right elbow was behind the spine (dorsal side of body), while the left was in front of it (ventral side). Both legs were flexed in a similar fashion with knees and pelvis oriented northwest. The feet of the body overlapped with the skull of Body No. 52, resting below or on top of the other head.

Body No. 67 was positioned on its left side, torso and skull facing northwest. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis. Both arms were bent with left elbow behind the spine (dorsal side of body). The right elbow was positioned on the ventral side of the body in front of the rib cage. Woolley's drawing features three circular objects on the right side of the body, overlapping with the right arm. He does not indicate what these represent. Both legs were flexed with knees and pelvis oriented northwest. The shins of the body overlapped with the skull of Body No. 53, resting below the other head. Theya Molleson and Dawn Hodgson describe the tibia shafts of this body as "badly crushed and fragmented," visible in the radiograph taken of the skull of Body No. 53 (Molleson and Hodgson 2003, 111).

Body No. 68 was positioned on its left side, torso facing northwest. The skull was oriented in the opposite direction, however, facing southeast as though the individual were looking over her right shoulder. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis. The left arm was bent and extended, left elbow pointing northwest, while the right arm was bent with right elbow near the pelvis. Both legs were flexed with knees and pelvis oriented northwest. The left tibia and fibula were on top of the right leg and knee bones. The right foot of the body overlapped with the skull of Body No. 55, resting below or on top of the backside of the other head.

Body No. 69 was on its right side, torso and skull facing southeast. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis. Both arms were bent, the left extending farther out than the right. Both elbows were positioned near the pelvis; both forearms pointed southeast. The left arm overlapped slightly with the spine of Body No. 70. Both legs overlapped with the skull and torso of Body No. 56, making the exact orientation of the legs difficult to determine from Woolley's sketch. It appears, however, that both legs were flexed with knees and pelvis oriented southeast.

Body No. 70 was positioned on its right side, torso facing southeast. The spine was positioned roughly along a southwest-northeast axis and overlapped slightly with the left arm of Body No. 69. The skull was oriented in the opposite direction, facing northwest as though the individual were looking over her left shoulder. Both arms were bent. The right elbow was positioned behind the spine (dorsal side of body), while the left elbow was near the pelvis.

on the ventral side of the body. The right arm overlapped with the torso of Body No. 71. Both legs were flexed in a similar fashion with knees and pelvis oriented southeast. The right knee overlapped with the right foot of Body No. 71.

Body No. 71 was positioned on its right side, torso and skull facing southeast. The spine was positioned roughly along a north-south axis. The torso overlapped with the right arm of Body No. 70. The left arm was bent and extended in front of the body (ventral side), forearm pointing southeast. The right arm was bent with right elbow above the left elbow. Both legs were flexed with knees and pelvis oriented southeast. The right knee was positioned above the left knee, bent at a sharper angle. The right femur was on top of the left tibia and femur. The right foot of the body overlapped with the knee of Body No. 70.

Body No. 72 was positioned on its right side, torso and skull facing southeast. The spine was positioned roughly along an east-west axis. Both arms were bent, the left extending farther out than the right. Both elbows were positioned near the pelvis, pointing northeast. The left arm was extended slightly farther, bent at a less acute angle than the right. The legs were quite differently posed (i.e., more extended; flexed not as dramatically as those of the other bodies) with knees and pelvis oriented southeast. The knees were inwardly bent toward one another, almost touching. The feet overlapped with the skull of Body No. 57, resting below or on top of the other head.

Body No. 73 was positioned on its left side, torso and skull facing northwest. The spine was positioned roughly along a southwest-northeast axis. The left arm was bent with left elbow pointing northeast. The right arm was bent with radius and ulna draped across the body's torso. The right elbow overlapped with the elbow of Body No. 74. Both legs were flexed with knees and pelvis oriented northwest. The feet overlapped with the skull of Body No. 58, resting below or on top of the backside of the other head.

Body No. 74 was positioned on its right side, torso and skull facing southeast. The spine was positioned roughly along a southwest-northeast axis. Both arms were bent with elbows pointing outwardly and forearms pointing inwardly toward the pelvis. The left elbow was positioned behind the spine (dorsal side of body), while the right elbow was positioned on the ventral side of the body. The left arm overlapped with the elbow of Body No. 73. Both legs were flexed in a similar fashion with knees and pelvis oriented southeast. Feet appeared to overlap with the lower head and neck or upper spine of Body No. 59.

As previously mentioned, Bodies No. 73 and 74 were found with a mosaic beam lying over them (Woolley 1934, 120). More information on this artifact is recorded below.

3. Artifacts:

The following information was taken from Woolley 1934, 120.

Body No. 62.:

- gold ear-rings;²
- gold and lapis 'dog-collar';
- gold and lapis double conoid bead necklace;
- gold and lapis small double conoid bead necklace;
- silver pin with lapis head, Type 7b;³
- bead cuff;
- cockle-shells with green paint;
- fragments of ostrich-shell with applied mosaic ornament, U. 12379.

Body No. 63.:

- gold ear-rings;
- gold and lapis 'dog-collar';

² For Woolley's illustration of this type of artifact, found with several of the bodies described here, see the end of this section.

³ For Woolley's illustration of this type of artifact, found with several of the bodies described here, see the end of this section.

gold and lapis double conoid bead necklace;
silver pin with lapis and gold head, Type 7b;
two bead cuffs;
remains of small limestone bowl, U. 12386. (P. 30-12. 695.)

Body No. 64.:

silver hair-rings;⁴
gold ear-rings
gold and lapis double conoid bead necklace;
gold and lapis 'dog-collar';
necklace with very small lapis ball beads;
two silver finger-rings;
two bead cuffs;
silver pin with lapis head, Type 7b;
copper pin with lapis head, Type 7b;
copper pin with conical head, Type 3a, U. 12402. (L. BM. 123689.)⁵

Body No. 65.:

gold ear-rings;
gold and lapis 'dog-collar';
silver and lapis double conoid bead necklace;
two bead cuffs, U. 12403. (P. 30-12. 721-4.)

Body No. 66.:

gold ear-rings;
gold and lapis 'dog-collar';
gold and lapis double conoid bead necklace;
silver pin with gold and lapis head, Type 7b;
lamp fashioned from a cut conch-shell;
copper bowl (badly damaged, crushed);
cockle-shells with green paint, U. 12404.

Body No. 67:

gold ear-rings;
gold and lapis 'dog-collar';
gold and lapis double conoid bead necklace;
silver pin with lapis head, Type 7b;
two bead cuffs;
remains of a copper bowl and a limestone bowl, U. 12415. (P. 30-z2. 664, 668, 670-2.)

Body No. 68.:

silver hair-rings.

Body No. 69.:

gold ear-rings with silver hair-rings inside;
gold and lapis 'dog-collar';
gold and lapis ribbed ball bead necklace;
necklace with two rows of lapis double conoid beads;
silver double conoid bead necklace;
silver pin with lapis head, Type 1b;

⁴ For Woolley's illustration of this type of artifact, found with several of the bodies described here, see the end of this section.

⁵ For Woolley's illustration of this type of artifact, found with several of the bodies described here, see the end of this section.



Figure 11. Woolley 1934, from Plate 231

bead cuff;
 lapis cylinder seal, Pl. 193 (modern impression shown below);⁶



Figure 12. Woolley 1934, from Plate 193

remains of a copper bowl and a limestone bowl;
 cockle-shells with green paint, U. 12427.

Body No. 70.:

silver hair-rings;
 gold ear-rings, with a third grasped in hand likely belonging to Body No. 71;
 gold and lapis 'dog-collar';
 silver and lapis date-shaped bead necklace;
 copper pin, Type 7b;
 bead cuff;
 fragments of a limestone bowl;
 fragments of a spouted jug, U. 12428.

Body No. 71.:

gold ear-ring, one only;
 gold and lapis 'dog-collar';
 gold and lapis double conoid bead necklace with some carnelian rings;
 silver pin with lapis head, Type 7b;
 bead cuff;
 copper bowl remains;
 cockle-shells with blue paint, U. 12426. (P. 30112. 660, 685-90.)

⁶ This seal's imagery features a banquet scene with men and women drinking through long pipes or straws (Woolley 1934, 337). Woolley interprets the leafy palm(s) as evidence that they are drinking wine (Woolley 1934, 337). The seal impression measures 28 x 15 mm. (Woolley 1934, 337).

Body No. 72.:

silver hair-ribbon;
silver hair-rings;
necklace with two rows of lapis double conoid beads with two carnelian cylinders;
copper pin with conical head, Type 3a;
limestone bowl remains;
copper bowl remains;
cockle-shells with green paint, U. 1563.

Body No. 73.:

silver frontlet, oval type, with ends prolonged as ribbons, cf. Pl. 219;⁷

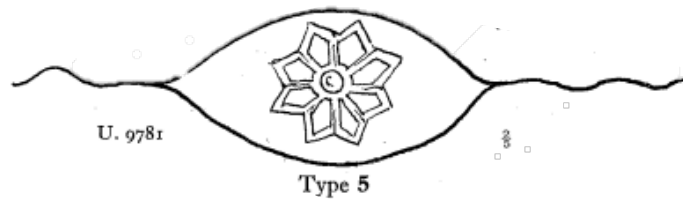


Figure 13. Woolley 1934, from Plate 219

gold ear-rings with silver hair-rings found inside;
lapis and carnelian bead necklace;
row of shell rings around the waist, U. 12360. (L. BM. I224I3-23) (P. 30-12. 500.)

Body No. 74.:

silver hair-ribbon;
silver hair-rings;
gold ear-rings;
lapis double conoid bead necklace;
row of shell rings at the waist;
cockle-shells with green paint, U. 12359.

Along the southeast-facing side of the pit's interior, across necks of Bodies No. 73-74:

silver and mosaic beam, perhaps once standing upright as a framework for a canopy;⁸
a mass of decayed silver, possibly part of this canopy structure.

⁷ Woolley does not indicate the exact numbered type of frontlet described. However, it may be similar to Type 5, illustrated on Plate 219, reproduced here.

⁸ The silver and mosaic beam measured 1.00 m. long (Woolley 1934, 123-124). This object was significantly decayed, making an exact determination of its original configuration and function difficult to determine with any degree of certainty (Woolley 1934, 123-124).

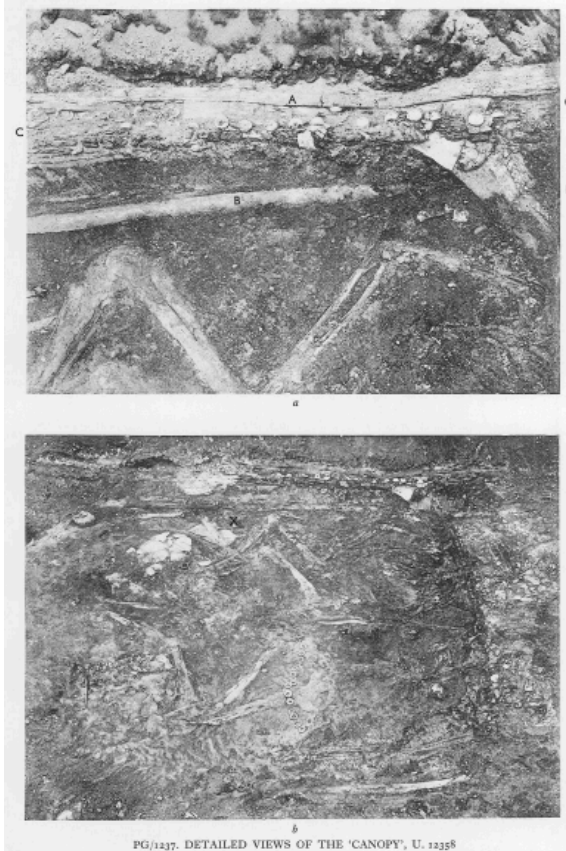


Figure 14. Woolley 1934, Plate 73

There are striking consistencies between the types of artifacts found with the bodies. Most were found wearing gold ear-rings; beaded necklaces of varying types, most often in lapis and gold; hair-rings; and bead cuffs. Woolley notes that all ear-rings in the death-pit were of the big lunate type, illustrated on Plate 219 (Woolley 1934, 121). All bead cuffs were made of gold and lapis tubular beads and carnelian rings “of virtually the same pattern” (Woolley 1934, 121). These were not bracelets, but rather beads sewn onto garments no longer preserved (Woolley 1934, 121). The found hair-rings were spirally coiled lengths of wire, either gold or silver (Woolley 1934, 121). Pins were most often of Type 7b, however some examples of Type 3a were also present. Moreover, the significant number of bowls found in this tomb led Woolley to pose the possibility that one bowl of metal or stone was provided to each body upon the time of death, possibly suggesting the voluntary ritual consumption of poison by royal attendants (Woolley 1934, 121). The presence of a “great copper pot,” not catalogued in this selection of artifacts, in the middle of the tomb into which the occupants could have filled their cups further supports this theory (Woolley 1934, 35).

Big lunate type ear-ring:



Figure 15. Woolley 1934, from Plate 219

Pin, Type 7b:

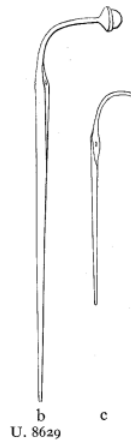


Figure 16. Woolley 1934, from Plate 231

Hair-ring:



Figure 17. Woolley 1934, from Plate 219

Pin, Type 3a:



Figure 18. Woolley 1934, from Plate 231

Work Cited

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Raquel Belden

Royal Tombs at Ur Research Project: Narrative

This assignment was a multi-phase research project on the Royal Tombs at Ur. These tombs constitute rich archaeological phenomena central to the study of ancient Mesopotamia. The nature of this data, however, is incomplete: the tombs were disturbed throughout antiquity, and many tombs are in poor states of preservation due to natural causes and destructive early archaeological methods. The unusual nature of the tombs themselves, coupled with deficiencies in modern documentation of them, has led to wide-ranging, and often conflicting, evaluations of them. The purpose of this research project was to concentrate on one of these tombs, engage with the available data, synthesize it, articulate the problems it poses, and explore the various research pathways scholars have taken in evaluating the tombs.

The first step of this project involved initial exposure to written scholarship on the tombs. During this phase, I gathered information on the general nature of the Royal Cemetery's archaeology. This included selective reading from the 1934 report of Woolley's excavation of the site, considered the seminal work on this topic, as well as comprehensive surveys on the contexts of the tombs and their artifacts within Sumerian culture. In addition to building foundational knowledge on the subject, I also began to read summary descriptions of each individual tomb in anticipation of future phases of research.

The second portion of this project involved the selection of my tomb of interest. I was drawn to PG/1237, also known as the Great Death Pit, due to the unusually high number of skeletal remains found in this tomb. Many of the sources I consulted during phase one commented on the possibility of ritual sacrifice suggested by this evidence. This was particularly intriguing and promised multiple avenues of investigation to be explored in later phases.

The third step was a detailed study of the tomb, focusing upon the relationships between the tomb structure, pit, interred bodies, and found artifacts. The purpose of this phase was to articulate the problems presented by the physical remains of the archaeological record, as published in Woolley's *Ur Excavations* (1934), followed by a methodical inventory.

This stage of the research process provided me with a better understanding of how to approach and utilize archaeological records in art historical and archaeological research. For any one tomb at Ur, one has to consult various parts of Woolley's excavation record. This includes Woolley's detailed descriptions of individual tombs, his section on architectural materials and methods, the tabular analysis of graves, and the artifactual catalogue, as well as the plates and drawings in the plate volume. This stage exposed me to different methods of recording archaeological data—namely descriptive language, physical analysis, charts, photographs, and reconstructive drawings.

Rather strikingly, it is not always easy to find basic information about a tomb in Woolley's report. Woolley's methodology is quite inconsistent: in some instances he provides measurements, in others he does not. As such, I had to consult the original published drawings, measuring their sizes and converting these dimensions to scale. Because the tomb is large and contained many bodies and artifacts, we divided the tomb and its contents among several students. I was responsible for describing the position of the skeletal remains of, and artifacts associated with, Bodies 62-74 (numeration provided by Woolley). Instances where scientific analysis of the skeletons had been conducted outside of Woolley's report were also noted. Lastly, I itemized the number and types of artifacts found in the tomb, locating their illustrations in the plate volume.

Working through the report in this manner, I was actually able to piece together much information on the tomb; in a way, Woolley's report became a usable research tool (one's first encounter with Woolley can be bewildering). I not only gained a working knowledge of the tomb as a physical phenomenon, but also practiced compiling relevant data from a complex and lengthy resource, synthesizing and reorganizing it in a logical fashion.

The final portion of this project concerned the contextualization of the individual tomb within the Royal Cemetery and Sumerian culture. That is, part four articulates the principal research questions, problems, and critical discussions surrounding the Royal Tombs within scholarly literature. This portion required referencing the sources consulted in parts one and three, as well as the wealth of modern scholarly literature on the subject of the Royal Tombs. A critical part of this process was developing an extensive bibliography of research focused upon my tomb in particular and the Royal Cemetery as a whole. It is worth noting that the development of this investigative skill has proved invaluable to other research projects I have conducted since this one.

Because a principal issue in the study of ancient art history is the incomplete nature of the material record, one of the most critical skills that we need to develop is an understanding of the nature and limitations of the data. In most cases, critical thinking involves understanding the nature of the question(s), not finding the answer. The ability to recognize the essential research questions is thus vital to the research process. As such, I focused on how scholars posed specific questions about the Royal Tombs based upon the available data. Therefore, rather than a reiteration of one particular interpretation of the tomb, part four constitutes a comprehensive and synthetic survey, an exercise in *Forschungsgeschichte*, the "history of research." Each section of the paper thus outlines some general information on the tombs, issues that this information presents, and the relevant questions with which modern scholarship are currently grappling. By tracking these methods of modern scholarly inquiry, I gained a thorough understanding of how to identify the limitations of datasets and, perhaps more importantly, how to generate viable avenues of investigative research from them.

Please find attached the submitted parts three and four as well as the instructions for the project.