

THE ROYAL CEMETERY AT UR

Excavations of the ancient city of Ur in southern Iraq have provided historians with important information about the Sumerian civilization and culture. In the following account, archaeologist Leonard Woolley describes his discoveries at a royal burial site at Ur. Through months of careful excavation, Woolley uncovered the tombs of a Sumerian king, A-bar-gi, and his queen, Shub-ad. Woolley found the remains of the queen and about ninety members of the royal court, plus many priceless artifacts. From his findings Woolley was able to draw conclusions about the burial customs of Sumerian royalty.

.... In 1927–1928, soon after our disappointment with the plundered stone tomb, we found, in another part of the field, five bodies lying side by side in a shallow sloping trench; except for the copper daggers at their waists and one or two small clay cups, they had none of the normal furniture of a grave, and the mere fact of there being a number thus together was unusual. Then, below them, a layer of matting was found, and tracing this along we came to another group of bodies, those of ten women carefully arranged in two rows; they wore headdresses of gold, and elaborate bead necklaces, but they too possessed no regular tomb furnishings.

At the end of the row lay the remains of a wonderful harp, the wood of it decayed but its decoration intact, making its reconstruction only a matter of care; the upright wooden beam was capped with gold, and in it were fastened the gold-headed nails which secured the strings; the sounding box was edged with a mosaic in red stone, and white shell, and from the front of it projected a splendid head of a bull wrought in gold with eyes. Across the ruins of the harp lay the bones of the gold-crowned harpist.

By this time we had found the earth sides of the pit in which the women's bodies lay and could see that the bodies of the five men were on the ramp which led down to it. Following the pit along, we came upon more bones, which at first puzzled us by being other than human, but the meaning of them soon became clear. A little way inside the entrance to the pit stood a wooden sledge chariot decorated with red, white, and blue mosaic along the edges of the framework and with golden heads of lions and shell on its side panels.

Close to the chariot were an inlaid gaming board and a collection of tools and weapons, including a set of chisels and a saw made of gold, big bowls of grey soapstone, copper vessels, a long tube of gold which was a drinking tube for sucking up liquor from the bowls, more human bodies, and then the wreckage of a large wooden chest adorned with a figured mosaic which was found empty but had perhaps contained such perishable things as clothes.

The perplexing thing was that with all this wealth of objects we had found no body so far distinguished from the rest as to be that of the person to whom all were dedicated; logically our discovery, however great, was incomplete. Therefore we were delighted when we soon discovered another chamber. At the foot of the ramp lay six soldiers, orderly in two ranks, with copper spears by their sides and copper helmets crushed flat on the broken skulls; just inside, having evidently been backed down the slope, were two wooden four-wheeled wagons each drawn by three oxen—one of the latter so well preserved that we were able to lift the entire skeleton.

Against the end wall of the stone chamber lay the bodies of nine women wearing the gala headdress of beads from which hung golden pendants in the forms of beech leaves, great earrings of gold, silver "combs" like the palm of a hand with three fingers tipped with flowers whose petals are inlaid with gold and shell. Their heads were leaned against the masonry, their bodies extended onto the floor of the pit, and the whole space between them and the wagons was crowded with other dead, women and men, while the passage which led along the side of the chamber to its arched door was lined with soldiers carrying daggers, and with women.

Inside the tomb the robbers had left enough to show that it had contained bodies of several minor people as well as that of the chief person, whose name, if we can trust the inscription on a cylinder seal, was *A-bar-gi*. Against the wall we found two model boats, one of copper now hopelessly decayed, the other of silver wonderfully well preserved; some 2 feet long, it has a high stern and five seats, and amidships an arched

support for the awning which would protect the passenger. It is a testimony to these crafts that boats of an identical type are in use today on the marshes of the Lower Euphrates, some 50 miles from Ur.

The king's tomb chamber lay at the far end of his open pit; and continuing our search behind it we found a second stone chamber built up against it. This chamber, roofed like the king's with a vault of ring arches in burnt brick, was the tomb of the queen.

Source: Excerpt from *Ur of the Chaldees* by Leonard Woolley, in *Eyewitness to Discovery*, edited by Brian M. Fagan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp.132–140. Reprinted by permission of A&C Black (Publishers) Limited

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