



Puabi's Diadem(s): The Deconstruction of a Mesopotamian Icon

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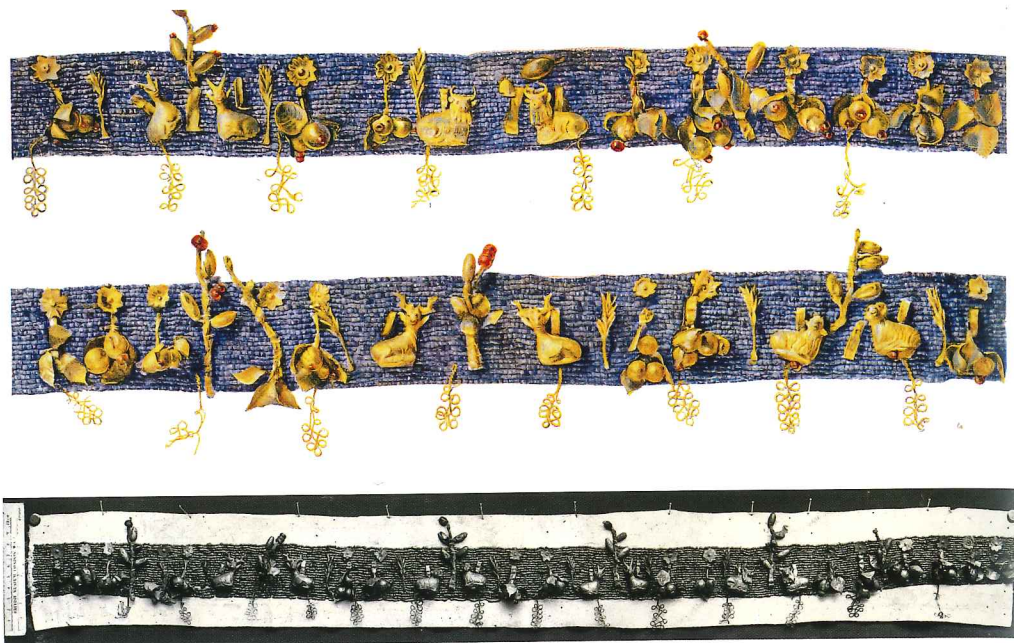


Fig. 4-1a. Watercolor of Puabi's "diadem" (Woolley 1934: pl. 146).

Fig. 4-1b. The original reconstruction of U. 10948, Puabi's "diadem." Photograph, ca. 1928–29. Penn Museum: 1131A. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Together with her famous headdress and cape, Puabi's "diadem" was one of the most widely recognized finds from Royal Tomb PG 800 at Ur (figs. 4–1a, b). By the time it was discovered in December 1927, Charles Leonard Woolley and his small team had already uncovered unimaginably rich concentrations of jewelry along with ritual equipment and weapons that had been buried with the deceased and the sacrificed in both royal and private graves. Even so, the overwhelming density of material in Puabi's tomb was stunning, including tens of thousands of beads, pendants and amulets, cylinder seals, and other items of gold, silver, lapis lazuli, carnelian, shell, copper, calcite, and steatite. On her head, Puabi had an elaborate headdress including strands of beads arrayed across her forehead as a diadem. Among the spectacular finds was a dense concentration of beads and pendants that Woolley ultimately constructed as the queen's second "diadem." For decades this "diadem" stood in the literature and in the galleries of the Penn Museum as a comprehensible work of art that was comfortably incorporated into the grave's larger symbolic program. A reconsideration of this canonical object ultimately led to its deconstruction as a monolithic piece, and gradually to its current reconstitution as seven individual diadems (fig. 4–2). No other object from the Royal Cemetery has undergone such radical reassessment during the cumulative processes of retrieval, conservation, curation and exhibition, and research examination. The assemblage can now be appreciated as an entity potent in the Sumerian world of the second half of the third millennium BCE, as well as a work of art that transcends its context and elicits an aesthetic response across space and time.

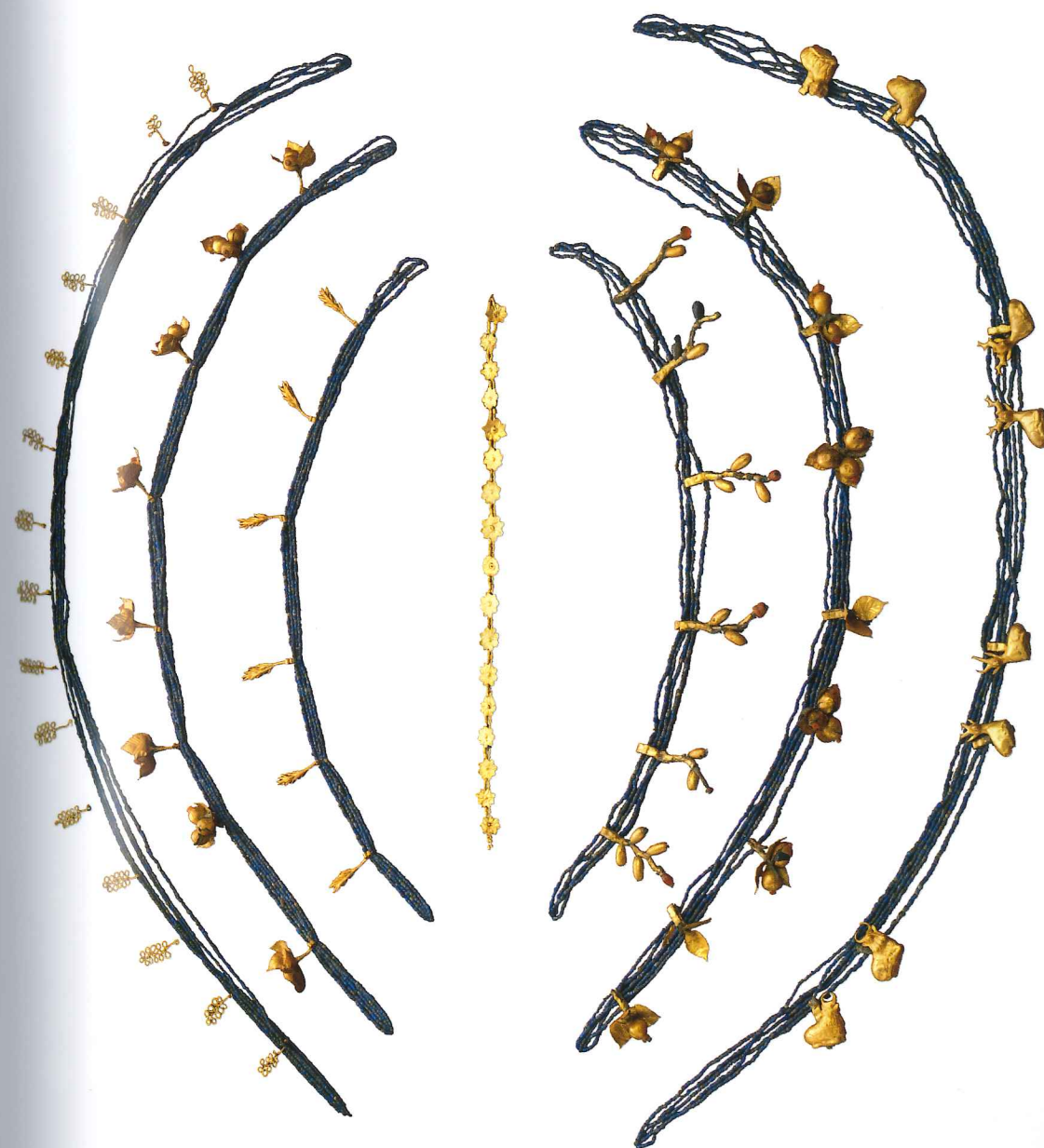


Fig. 4-2. Current reconstruction of Puabi's "diadem." Gold, lapis lazuli, bitumen. Ur, Tomb PG 800, ca. 2500–2300 BCE. Joint Expedition of the British Museum and of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania to Mesopotamia, 8th season, 1929–30. Checklist no. 137.

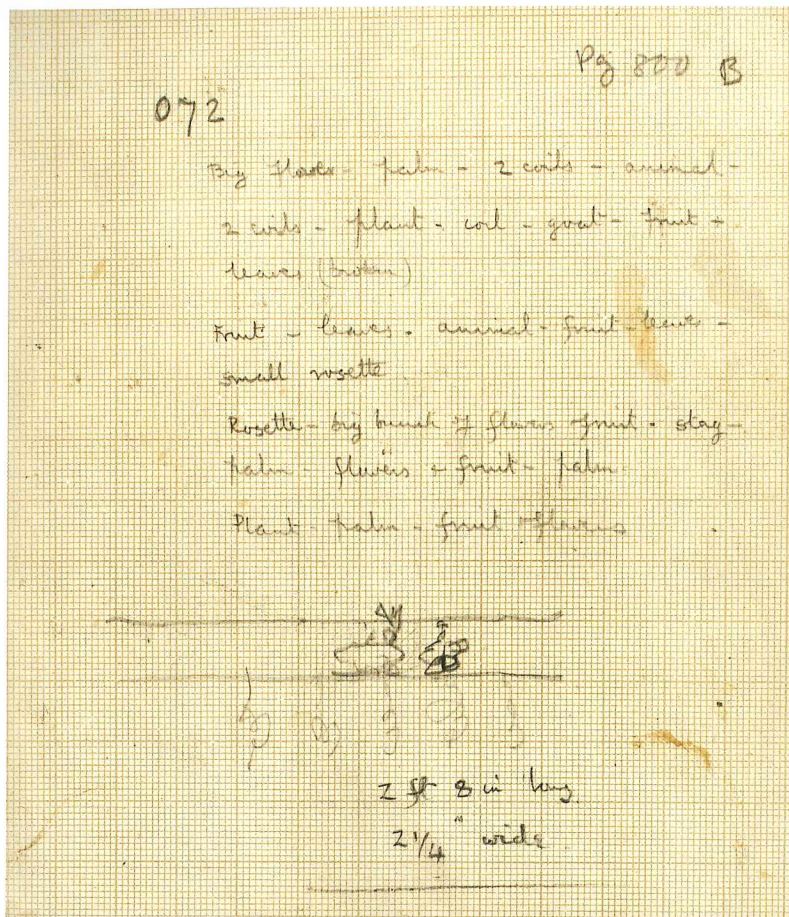


Fig. 4-3. Field card with a sketch of elements of Puabi's "diadem" in situ. BM: RC778-803, 226. Courtesy of the British Museum.

Excavation and Recording

When first uncovered, the "diadem" was a closely grouped concentration of gold, silver, and stone elements floating in the fill above the floor of the tomb. The assemblage was assigned two numbers in Iraq (object card 072 and U. 10948), but when it arrived in Philadelphia it was given the inventory number B. 16684. As of this writing, the assemblage has been renumbered as B. 16684.1 through B. 16684.71.

The jewelry elements assigned to the "diadem" were found beneath an intact white calcite vase (U. 10927; no. 065 on the field plan), one of a cluster of vessels, tumblers, and bowls against the northwestern wall of the tomb chamber (see fig. 3-7). Woolley gave this collection of jewelry three field numbers: Field card 070, which became U. 10980, was described in the final catalogue as "Beads: gold and silver double conoids. From the queen's cloak PG/800, Pl. 130 (v. 10975)." Field card 071 became U. 10981

and was similarly described in the final report as "Beads: large carnelian cylinders and date-shaped beads. From the queen's cloak. PG/800. Pl. 130. (v. U. 10975)" (Woolley 1934, 2: 566). Although found some distance from Puabi's body, these two groups of beads were probably assigned to her cloak because they were much larger than the other elements comprising the final group of beads and pendants.¹ Finally, field card 072 briefly described "a series of animal figures, flowers and plants set on minute beads of gold and lapis (U. 10948)." This group became U. 10948, and it is these elements that Woolley defined as a "diadem."

The first step in Woolley's thinking about this mass of jewels can be traced through the object cards, which identified 072 as a:

Gold Crown formed of beads and figurines, etc. sewn onto a fillet of leather. The background was composed of minute beads of lapis and gold—the latter short tubular lengths. Against them stood out

- A. 4 pairs of animals viz. 2 antlered stags ht .0035; 2 bearded bulls ht .003; 2 gazelles ht 0035; 2 rams ht 0025
- B. small 8-petalled rosettes dia 0015
- C. plant ornaments, viz. Ears of corn l. 0035; Pomegranates, bunches composed of 3 fruits and 3 leaves l. 004; plants with simple stems (gold leaf over silver) and gold and carnelian pods l. 006;
- D. 8 Twisted wire palmettes l. 0035. For the order of them see Field Notes

The field notes report more detail and probably reflect the order in which Woolley observed the objects in the ground:

072

Big flowers—palm—2 coils—animal—2 coils—plant—coil—goat—fruit and leaves (bottom)

Fruit—leaves—animal—fruit and leaves—small rosette

Rosette—big bunch of flowers fruit—stag—palm—flowers and fruit—palm

Plant—palm—fruit and flowers

The sketch beneath this list depicts a long narrow strip with squiggles representing various elements; hanging from the strip are six further squiggles certainly denoting the palmettes. Below this drawing appear the measurements: "2 feet 8 inches long and 2 1/4 inches wide" (fig. 4-3).

This list and sketch—which records the figural pendants on a background of small lapis beads—offer the most detailed account of what Woolley saw in the ground and thus are the single most important records for the elements' subsequent reconstruction. In direct contradiction to his drawing, however, Woolley reported in the catalogue section of the excavation's final publication that the diadem "coiled in a circle and collapsed on itself (PG 800. Pls. 140-1. [P. CBS 16684])" (Woolley 1934, 2: 565). Thus, sometime between the initial sketch and the final publication, Puabi's gold crown had been transformed into a "diadem."

Gold Crown to Diadem—The Final Report

Woolley continued to consider the collection to be a headdress or "Gold Crown" in his report from the field of January 3, 1928.² Following his presentation of the queen's headdress, he introduced the crown, which was found "by the side of the bier," suggesting that it was closer to Puabi's body than he had previously recorded in the field report. He described the headdress as consisting of a fillet of thin leather on which small beads of gold and lapis were stitched. The beads created a backdrop for small gold rosettes, thin twisted wire, carnelian and gold representations of fruit and foliage, and four pairs of gold animal figurines.

It appears that the evolution from a gold crown to a diadem had occurred in London in preparation for the exhibition of the finds at the British Museum in June 1928, as reported in the *Illustrated London News* on June 22. Although we have no image of the object, the registration entry dated March 1, 1929, records that the Penn Museum received the diadem assemblage restored on a white ground in a long strip, but we do not know whether in London the strip was displayed flat, or in a circle to suggest its use as an ornament for the head.

When Woolley returned to work at the southwest end of the cemetery in 1929, he discovered an analogous find, in what would become PG 1618, that led him to understand the function of U. 10948 in Puabi's tomb as an extra diadem that had been arranged on a wig. In a letter from the field dated December 31, 1929, he described finding the remains of a wig to which were attached a gold earring and a gold frontlet, and then connected it to U. 10948.³ This appears to have been the moment when Woolley concluded that if U. 10948 was indeed a diadem, then it must have been attached to a wig, and there must have been some kind of support (a shelf or small table), although nothing of the kind was observed in the initial excavation. By the time he composed

the final report, Woolley was unqualified in his description of the wooden support near Puabi's bier on which he found the jewels making up a "magnificent diadem," such as the numerous small lapis lazuli beads that lay against a strip of white powdery material, which was presumed to be leather at one point, and which Woolley interpreted as the background to which the beads were sewn. He also described a number of gold ornaments that had retained their sequence and spacing in situ on top of the background of lapis lazuli beads. Based on what was found in PG 1618, but without specific archaeological parallels in Puabi's tomb, Woolley concluded that this was her spare diadem and was originally fixed to a wig placed alongside the queen in the grave.

Woolley's catalogue entry, as cited above, confirms that he embellished the field records, situating the diadem close to the body and adding the remains of a table and leather, neither of which were noted in his initial descriptions. The entry also reports that the diadem was coiled in a circle, although in the physical reconstruction Woolley had chosen to restore the elements in the configuration of the strip that he found and recorded (fig. 4-1b).

Other Diadems in the Royal Cemetery

The diadem found in PG 1618, which served as the functional archetype for U. 10948, was for a male and consisted of simpler elements than those of Puabi's assemblage. In the final report Woolley elaborated on the description provided in the earlier field report, providing the exact find spot of the man's diadem in the southeast corner of the coffin, behind the skull and on top of a fibrous dust, which he believed to have been human hair. Additionally, Woolley listed the diadem's components, including a fillet of gold ribbon (U. 13790) and two hair rings of spirally coiled gold wire (U. 13791; Woolley 1934, 2: 129-30).

Woolley also reported that fragments from a diadem similar to Puabi's were found in PG 777, but "there the workmanship was distinctly poorer" (Woolley 1934, 2: 89). Although Woolley did not include a photograph or illustration in the final report, he recorded the individual elements of the headdress of the deceased: a silver broad-palmed comb ending in balls of lapis lazuli, silver hair ribbons, a wreath of carnelian and lapis lazuli beads with gold ring pendants, and the remains of a diadem that closely resembled Puabi's made up of small cylindrical lapis lazuli beads, gold and silver flower rosettes attached to pairs of gold leaves, and small silver-wire palmette pendants, all of which were crushed and decayed but which were undoubtedly, in his view, used in a diadem (U. 9786-7; Woolley 1934, 2: 57; see fig. 4-4 as displayed at the Penn Museum in the 1930s). PG 777 was badly disturbed and looted in antiquity so it was not possible to determine whether the diadem was worn by the primary deceased or by a female attendant. Woolley felt it was likely to have been worn by the primary deceased because the diadem is comparable to Puabi's and because no attendant was found wearing

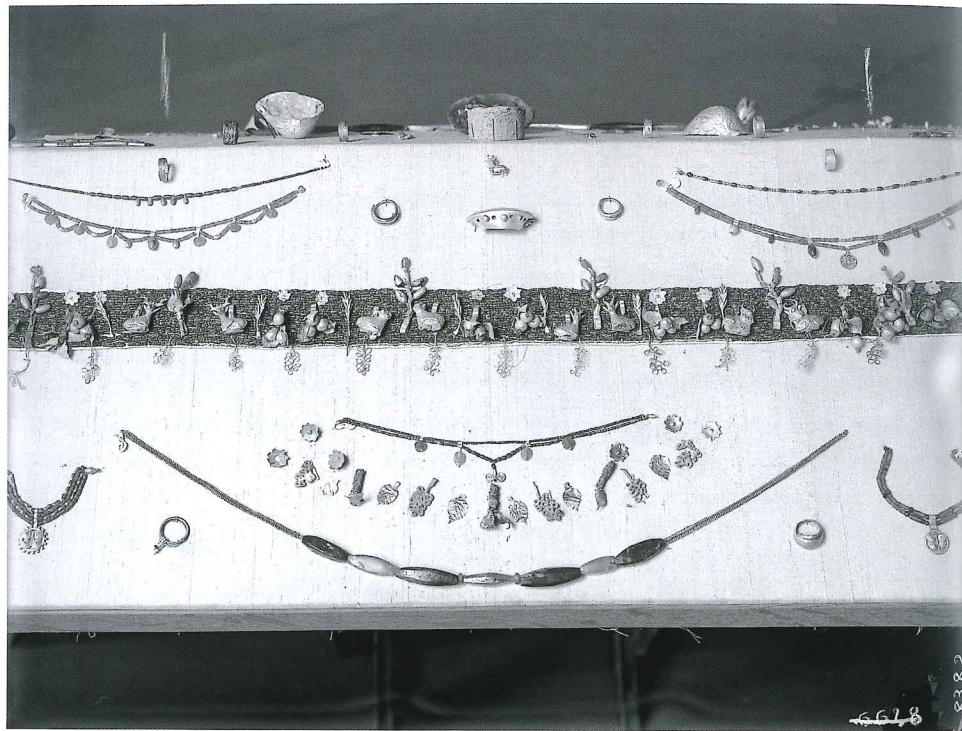


Fig. 4-4. Showcase for Puabi's "diadem" and the diadem from PG 777, at the Ur Gallery, Penn Museum, 1930s. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Penn Museum: 8382.

anything similar (Woolley 1934, 2: 57). Although there were no animal pendants, the vegetal elements on the object seem comparable to those of U. 10948, and the small palmette pendants in silver wire are identical in form to those found in Puabi's tomb.

In his letter of December 31, 1929, Woolley also observed a close similarity between Puabi's diadem and the cluster of jewelry found near the body of Meskalamdug in PG 755. In the final report this cluster comprised a gold pin (U. 10005), a number of coiled-wire hair rings (U. 10019), a gold finger ring (U. 10029), silver finger rings (U. 10030), a coil of silver ribbon, gold and lapis triangles (U. 10017), a wreath of gold leaves hung from a double chain of lapis and carnelian beads (U. 10027), a wreath of silver ring pendants (U. 10026), gold and lapis beads (U. 10028), two lapis lazuli amulets (a frog [U. 10008] and a ram [U. 1009]), a copper pin with a head in the form of a squatting monkey (U. 10010), and a lump of silver (U. 10012; Woolley 1934, 2: 158; see fig. 4-5). Woolley described the jewelry as of the kind carried only by women, and further suggested that the individual pieces were offerings made by a woman, since the tomb had no skeletal remains and gave no evidence of secondary interment or human sacrifice. It seems that what linked this collection of jewelry elements to Puabi's diadem was the presence of the two lapis lazuli amulets.

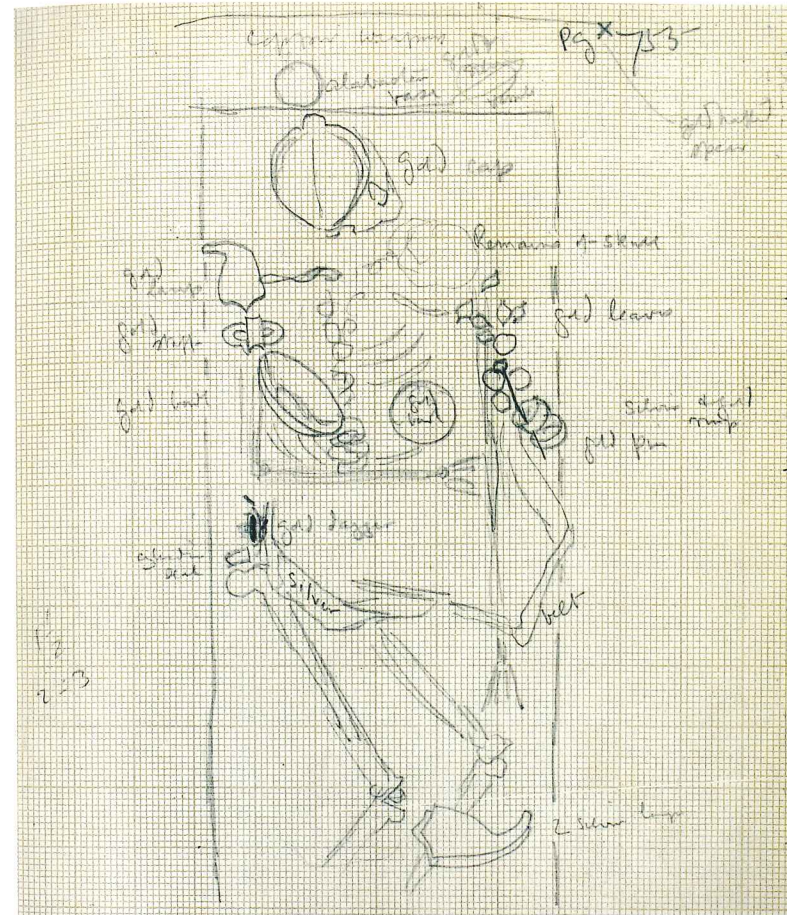
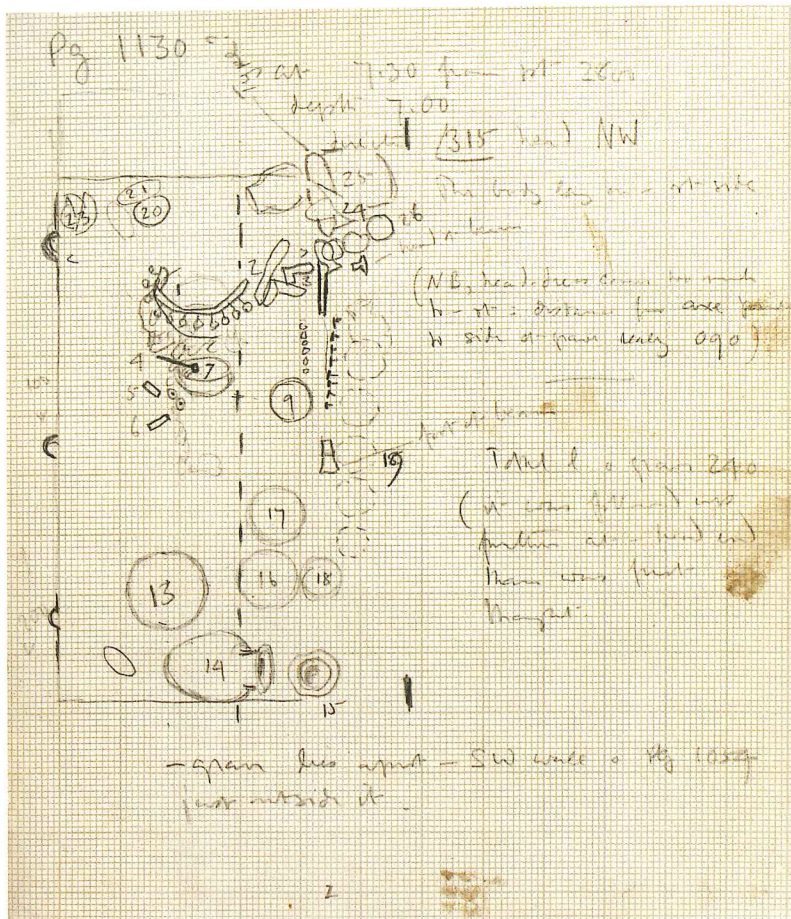


Fig. 4-5. Field card with a sketch of the cluster of jewelry found near the body of Meskalamdug in PG 755. BM: RC686-777, 148. Courtesy of the British Museum.

Several other "private" graves of the Early Dynastic cemetery also had jewelry comparable to the collection found in Puabi's grave. Woolley did not consider these graves "royal" because they lacked structures and sacrificed attendants. However, as with PG 755, some of these graves were certainly the last resting place for members of the so-called elite. One such grave, PG 1068, was that of the "Little Princess," who was interred with elaborate ornamentation surrounding her head (Woolley 1934, 2: 162-63).

PG 1130—which to judge from its location was ancillary to PG 1054 (fig. 4-6)—provides the best evidence to support Woolley's interpretation of the collection of ornaments in Puabi's tomb as parts of a headdress. He described a number of elements that serve as analogs for Puabi's "diadem," most strikingly, the gilded figures of recumbent bulls and pendants in the shape of fruit (Woolley 1934, 2: 165; see fig. 4-7). Interestingly, Woolley described the find in PG 1130 as a "bandeau" in the final report (2: 163) but



U. 11776



Fig. 4-6. Field card with a sketch of the location of jewelry, a diadem, and other tomb items in PG 1130. BM: RC1130-1237, 1. Courtesy of the British Museum.

Fig. 4-7. Watercolor of a detail of a diadem (U. 11776) from PG 1130 (Woolley 1934: pl. 142).

Fig. 4-8. Diadem (U. 11776) from PG 1130. Courtesy of the British Museum.

as a "diadem" in the catalogue: "Gold diadem consisting of a ground of gold and silver tubular beads on which hang figures of two seated gold bulls and bunches of gold and silver, etc, leaves and fruit" (2: 573, pl. 142; see fig. 4–8).

From "Diadem" to Diadems

At some point, probably in London, Woolley constructed the "diadem" with more than 9,500 lapis and about 50 gold beads sewn to a white cloth strip some 2 feet 8 inches long (fig. 4–1a). The pendants were apparently glued or sewn onto this beaded ground. While the arrangement does not exactly match what he described in the field, it does suggest a patterned distribution of pairs of facing animals separated by an upright "branch" with fruit. The "ears of corn" were also oriented upright, while the "pomegranates" were deployed in pairs between the animal sets. Fifteen palmettes dangled beneath the lapis lazuli strip. This was a dazzling display of gold and carnelian on a lapis ground that would have encircled a wig just over 10 inches in diameter. While the iconography was incoherent, it was the abundance of wealth and striking colors that fascinated all who saw it.

Puabi's so-called diadem maintained its integrity as restored by Woolley for more than eighty years. It was first displayed in Philadelphia at the Penn Museum in the late 1920s (see the essay by Azara and Marín in this volume). When the Near East galleries were refurbished in 1983 under the supervision of Maude de Schauensee, that arrangement was retained (fig. 4–9), but for the first time the "diadem" was presented on a circular mount. For more than seven decades, Woolley's reconstruction was never closely examined, but rather was accepted as the most elaborate example of the "diadem" type.⁴ That changed in the late 1990s when research for the traveling exhibition of the Royal Cemetery materials in the Penn Museum's collection called for a major reconceptualization (fig. 4–10).⁵

In preparation for the traveling exhibition, the curators Richard Zettler, Donald Hansen, and Holly Pittman led a graduate seminar that focused on the archaeology of the cemetery and various categories of objects to be included in the exhibition. Participants examined pieces to prepare them for conservation and display. Looking closely at the "diadem," it became obvious that Woolley's reconstruction made no sense. The most obvious clue to the disjunction between the elements and his reconstruction was the relationship between some of the pendants and the lapis lazuli ground on which they had been placed. While the animal pendants were logically arranged so that the bales (loops for suspension) attached to the back of each animal were at the top, it was apparent that the vegetal elements—in particular the "branches of shrubs in gold with gold and carnelian pods or fruit" and "ears of corn in gold"—had been attached to the ground of lapis beads upside down. Their bales were at the bottom, an untenable orientation for objects meant to be suspended from strings that passed through each opening of the multiple-bale system. Thus, it was decided that the pendants would be



Fig. 4-9. Puabi's "diadem" as restored and on view in 1983 (Zettler and Horne 1993: 93, fig. 30).

Fig. 4-10. View of the Ur galleries at the Penn Museum, 1983. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Penn Museum: 148678. Puabi's diadem is on display in the case in the right foreground.

taken off the lapis lazuli beaded ground, and rearranged grouped by type with respect to gravity. This is the presentation that was shown during the traveling exhibit.

It seems that what had informed Woolley's initial reconstruction most closely was indeed the arrangement he had originally seen in the ground, as recorded in his sketch of the jewelry and other artifacts. Indeed this is the most impressive aspect of Woolley's field recording. For the most part he understood that the arrangement in the ground did not represent the original configuration of objects when they were deposited, but rather their arrangement after any of the organic supports had deteriorated and caused the objects to come to rest in what finally became the fill of the tomb. When considered as a single object, Woolley's reconstructed "diadem" conformed to the outline of the crushed skulls that he had saturated with wax and then removed in one solid mass from the ground. Indeed the "diadem" as it had been reconstructed reproduced the drawing that Woolley made in the field.

What Woolley understood to be one object, essentially intact, has proven upon closer examination to more likely be a group of objects that, while related, almost certainly were never meant to be understood as a single "diadem." They have now become the "diadems," each with a different theme defined by their respective pendants (fig. 4-2).

The Pendants

It is the presence of figural pendants that separates U. 10948 from most other examples of jewelry assemblages found in the tombs. As Woolley reported, remarkably few amulets and amuletic pendants were discovered in the Royal Cemetery, and by far the largest concentration was found associated with Puabi. They are in all cases small, usually not more than 4 centimeters in length. Their subjects are animals, plants, and a third type comprising the geometric pattern of a circle of loops—Woolley's palmettes. The first task for the reconstruction that began in 1997 was to accurately identify the real-world referents of these pendants by evaluating the characteristics of present-day and ancient flora and fauna.

Naomi F. Miller, then a research scientist at the Museum Applied Science Center for Archaeology at the Penn Museum, was asked to identify the species depicted on the vegetal pendants. Although her results were not available for the catalogue that accompanied the traveling exhibition,⁶ in a subsequent study she corrected and elaborated on Woolley's identifications.⁷ The plant forms are somewhat stylized but clearly represent specific plants.⁸ Woolley's "ears of corn" represent rather the inflorescence of the male date-palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*), a spadix with multiple branches. Woolley's "branches of shrubs in gold with gold and carnelian pods or fruit," when correctly oriented, are obviously bunches of dates on the stem. Finally, Miller confirmed Andrew Cohen's suggestion⁹ that the three-leaved and three-fruited pendant Woolley described as a cluster of pomegranates with leaves most likely represented apples.¹⁰

The assemblage also includes seventeen gold rosettes (fig. 4-11), a common design element in Mesopotamian imagery from very early times that typically has eight segments, as here. Sometimes rosettes seem to represent a flower and/or a star, as in Puabi's headdress (see fig. 5-11). As early as the fourth millennium BCE, this motif may refer to the goddess Inanna in some instances.¹¹ Cohen argues that the rosettes should be identified as apple blossoms, associating them with the fully formed apples of the larger pendants,¹² noting that ancient Mesopotamians were familiar with apple cultivation. However, they would have known that apple flowers are pentamerous (with reproductive parts occurring in multiples of five). More generally, there are no eight-petaled flowers in nature.

Miller also tackled Woolley's twisted-wire "palmette" (fig. 4-12),¹³ arguing that the form depicts the configuration of rope used to gather sheep for milking.¹⁴ This unusual

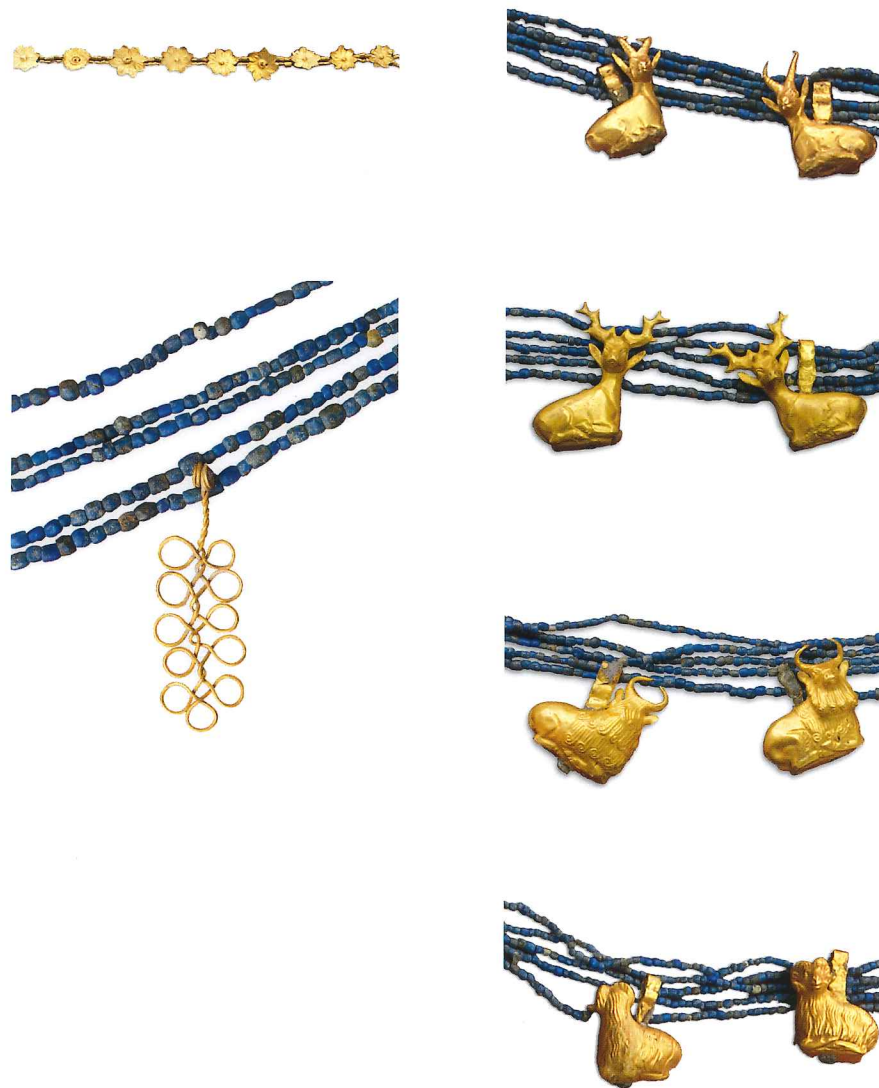


Fig. 4-11. Detail of rosettes on Puabi's headdress. Ur, Tomb PG 800, ca. 2500–2300 BCE. Joint Expedition of the British Museum and of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania to Mesopotamia, 8th season, 1929–30. Checklist no. 137.

Fig. 4-12. Detail of the "diadem" from tomb PG 800 (see fig. 4-2): wire "palmette."

Fig. 4-13. Gazelle amulets.

Fig. 4-14. Bearded stag amulets.

Fig. 4-15. Bearded bull amulets.

Fig. 4-16. Bearded ram amulets.



Fig. 4-17. Detail of fig. 4-2: fruiting female date inflorescences.

pendant type, in silver, was reportedly found associated with only one other burial/grave (PG 777).

Superficially, the animal pendants appear to be nonproblematic representations. They are specific enough so that we can confidently propose identifications of gazelle, stag, bull, and ram (figs. 4-13 to 4-16). The gazelle is rendered in extraordinarily realistic terms, down to the sweet expression on its face. All of the animals are represented with



Fig. 4-18. Detail of fig. 4-2: male date spadix inflorescences.

horns, which signify maleness. Although adult female gazelles do have horns, in most species they are shorter than those of their male counterparts.¹⁵ The bull is intriguing as it is represented with a hairy chest and back but with a beard that is clearly false.¹⁶ Since neither wild nor domestic bulls have beards, the bull pendants are most likely to represent a mythological character. In contrast to the gazelle, stag, and possibly the bull, the ram is recognizably a domesticated animal because of its large horns curved tightly against the skull.¹⁷ It is clear from the artisans' depictions of the other animals that they had the skill to include projecting horns had they wanted to. Note that contemporary depictions of domestic rams on glyptic generally retain the representational tradition of broadly spread horns that had prevailed since the Uruk period.¹⁸

The seven groups that emerged from Woolley's composite make up the current reconstruction, based on the similarity of the bales and the subjects of representation. All of the animal pendants have the same system of suspension, with a long, wide double loop attached to the center of each animal's back, and each hangs from two strands of lapis beads. Although expertly rendered in the round, the pendants were arranged



Fig. 4-19. Detail of fig. 4-2: apple clusters with large bales.

in facing pairs, but the original relationship of each set cannot be determined from Woolley's records. The vegetal pendants are more diverse. The fruiting female date inflorescences (fig. 4-17) are larger than the other pendants, have two loops for suspension, and hang from two strands. The male date spadices (fig. 4-18) have two small suspension loops and hang from two strands. Judging from the size of their bales, the apples belong to two groups. Eight of the clusters have the larger bales (fig. 4-19) that match those of the male date inflorescences. The other eight have smaller bale systems identical to the bales of the female date inflorescences. The rope twists have single suspension loops constructed of wrapped wire. Finally, the rosettes (see fig. 4-11) have a completely different system for attachment, consisting of a single hole in the middle of the blossom, suggesting that, uniquely among the elements, they might have been sewn onto a backing of some sort.

It seems that the collection Woolley unified through his reconstructed "diadem" was instead an aggregation of separate, probably thematically and functionally related strings

of lapis beads supporting distinct groupings of pendants. If when excavated they were distributed over a length of 2 feet 8 inches with a width of some 2 1/4 inches, it is likely that what he observed in the ground was an ensemble of jewelry that had once been wrapped in leather or cloth. Included in that ensemble must also have been the gold and silver conoid beads (070) and the large carnelian cylinders and date-shaped (i.e., ovoid) beads (071) that Woolley assigned to the queen's cloak. Because they were of an entirely different type, he apparently did not associate them with 072, which had no large beads of any kind. However, once we deconstructed the "diadem" into a number of individual pieces, it was possible to consider them as belonging to the assemblage of jewelry that was not on the body of the dead queen, but was rather deposited under the vessels along the wall of the chamber. Indeed, it is in this new configuration that analogs found within the cemetery can be evaluated, shedding light on the possible function of the ensemble. The closest analog is clearly the "bandeau" found across the head of a deceased in PG 1130. Accurately reconstructed by Woolley, with the bull and apple pendants suspended among lapis and silver beads, this object was indeed worn as a head ornament. PG 777 had a related construction with only vegetal pendants, including the only other examples of the "palmettes," this time in silver. Finally the mass of jewelry found next to the body of Meskalamdug in PG 755 compares to the final deposition of the "diadem" ensemble in PG 800. In both cases, pendants were found associated with masses of small beads in lapis and gold. It seems that as the strings of the various ensembles disintegrated, the small beads fell beneath the larger figural pendants and the pendants all fell in on each other, creating the impression—preserved in Woolley's drawing—of a single item with all of the pendants attached to it.

The Diadem Group as a Work of Art

As a themed group of diadems, the ensemble is a work of art that both provokes an aesthetic response and carries meaning. This was true in the time of Queen Puabi, for whom those strands of beads and pendants were carefully wrapped and placed by her side, and it continues to be the case for modern viewers. There are two ways in which the so-called diadem assemblage can be understood in aesthetic terms. The first concerns its materials and the superb quality of its workmanship. The second delves more deeply into the symbolic meaning that the pendants carried for the Sumerians.

Through textual evidence and selected examples, Irene Winter has introduced the issue of "aesthetics" into our consideration of ancient Mesopotamian artifacts. In a diachronic consideration of the aesthetic value of lapis lazuli, she demonstrates that its deep-blue, lustrous quality was associated with divinity and royalty.¹⁹ Other scholars have noted that lapis was believed to have special magical powers.²⁰ Carnelian and gold also had high aesthetic value for the ancient Sumerians. The goddess Inanna is associated with these materials through the valence of abundance and fertility; her significance in terms of the iconography will be discussed below. The preponderance of lapis in the Royal

Cemetery tell us both that it was highly prized as a material, and that at the particular moment of the Royal Tombs there was an abundance of these prized materials that required they be taken out of circulation in bulk to make way for additional quantities. Charles Redman and Andrew Cohen²¹ have understood the extraction of wealth from circulation among the living as a conscious strategy among the ruling elite during this period, intended to define its status and contribute to the process of the emergent institution of kingship. Certainly what is preserved in the Royal Cemetery is the residue of elaborate ritual processes undertaken at the highly dangerous and liminal moment of the death of a key player in the political and religious hierarchies.

Winter has also considered the positive aesthetic value for the Mesopotamians of craftsmanship of “surpassing” quality.²² While the texts in which these values are expressed do not date to the period of the Royal Cemetery, Cohen observes that “objects such as the spangling diadem (or set of apparel) from PG/800...with its gold and carnelian plant forms and animals sewn to a background of lapis lazuli beads, is captivating to us and must have been equally so when seen on a corpse as part of a larger ensemble of jewelry.”²³

Archaeologists commonly assume that the placement of grave goods in a burial carried cultural meaning. This could include notions of an afterlife in which the items would have been used. Alternatively, burial goods could have reflected the status and position of the deceased in life, perhaps associated with an assumption that they would maintain that status in the afterlife. For Mesopotamia in general, and Puabi in particular, we may ask: were the items meant to signal her elite status in life, or were they included for her personal use after death? Although recorded several hundred years after the Royal Cemetery,²⁴ several Mesopotamian literary texts concern death and the Netherworld, and it is possible that the iconography of grave goods referred to beliefs about the afterlife.

Scholars have occasionally compared the rich jewelry found in the graves of the Royal Cemetery to a Mesopotamian myth that records Inanna’s descent to the Netherworld, in which she prepares for her visit by dressing in her finery—that is, the *mes*, or the fundamental powers of the cosmos. We are told that the gatekeeper to the Netherworld demanded that Inanna relinquish her regalia, one piece at a time. Thus, when she arrived in the presence of Ereshkigal, queen of the Netherworld, Inanna was completely naked, and thereby stripped of all her powers. Dina Katz has convincingly argued that while Inanna arrived in the Netherworld naked, not all deceased are required to be unclothed when they reached the afterlife.²⁵ Thus, there is no reason to think that the diadems of a mortal queen would have been demanded for her entry into the Netherworld.

Another text describes the death of Ur Namma, the founder of the third dynasty of Ur, who brings gifts to the primary gods of the Netherworld so that he can join them in their pantheon. This myth makes no reference to a requirement of naked entry into the

Netherworld, but it does suggest that gifts were presented to the gods by high-ranking deceased. Nevertheless, there are no grounds on which we can argue that any of the materials found in the Royal Cemetery should be considered as gifts for Netherworld denizens. In ritual texts contemporary with the Royal Cemetery, offerings and gifts are presented to the gods by all categories of mortals. However, the arena for this gift giving is always within the context of the temple or the house of the god, and usually such gifts are inscribed with the name of the donor and a dedication to the deity. Nothing from any of the Mesopotamian burials from any period has been identified as a gift that the deceased would bring to the gods of the Netherworld. Gifts to the gods are instead the obligation of the living, and take the form of food and libations accompanied by elaborate and highly prescribed ritual performances.

In her original discussion of the date pendants, Miller commented that “it is perhaps not surprising that so much jewelry symbolic of fertility and renewal was put in a tomb that is practically an advertisement for the good life in the afterlife.”²⁶ Cohen’s compelling 2007 study, *Death Rituals and Royal Ideology*, considers a symbolism for the Puabi pendants that assumes, but does not require, them to be part of a single object. Specifically, he interprets the ensemble as a celebration of abundance and fertility, with reference to Inanna and her consort, Dumuzi. Cohen observes that both dates and apples are associated with Inanna and applied metaphorically to sexuality, abundance, and fertility. Apples are mentioned in the incantations associated with male potency. The apple tree sometimes serves as a metaphor for the god Dumuzi, the lover of Inanna in many Sumerian literary works, who is sometimes referred to as a date farmer as well as a shepherd. Miller suggested that the wire pendants, too, might refer to Dumuzi’s flock.²⁷ Since the Mesopotamians imagined the Netherworld as a dreary place with no food, water, or other joys of the living, it may be that the *absence* of sheep in the underworld is represented, given the funerary context of the objects.²⁸ Although the plant imagery is consistent with tropes of fertility and abundance, the specter of death should not be dismissed in this funerary context. Indeed, the animal pendants bring that idea to the fore.

Of the four male animals, the bull least resembles an actual creature. In temperate climates domestic bulls do not have hairy chests, but it is not clear whether the gold pendants are meant to depict aurochs (wild ox), which became extinct in the seventeenth century.²⁹ The beard is clearly false, attached by a cord across its nose.³⁰ The sun god, Utu, is commonly depicted as a bull with a false beard. According to Polonsky, “Sumerian verbs used in connection with the lapis lazuli beard express that the beard was ‘worn,’ that it ‘adorns,’ and that it may be ‘affixed’ to the visage” of Utu.³¹ Therefore, the bull pendants represent Utu, whom Enki “placed in charge of the whole of heaven and earth, the father of the Great City [the Netherworld],” as recorded in the myth “Enki and the World Order” (ETCSL c.1.1.3, lines 368–80).³² He is the son of Enki, brother of Inanna, and therefore brother-in-law of Dumuzi. Moreover, Enki is the lord of the Abzu (“[cosmic] underground water”),³³ and his boat is named the “Stag of the Abzu.”³⁴ In

"Gilgamesh, Enkidu and the Nether World" (c.1.8.1.4), Enki's boat goes to the Netherworld, while in other texts it plies the waters between heaven and earth, representing the quintessence of the liminal state between life and death.

The gazelle also figures in mythology related to the Netherworld. Cohen first recognized that it might represent Dumuzi.³⁵ The relationship between Utu and Dumuzi underlies the events of Dumuzi's dream (c.1.4.3): Chased by demons, Dumuzi calls out, "Utu, you are my brother-in-law, I am your sister's husband!...Please change my hands into gazelle hands, change my feet into gazelle feet, so I can evade my demons" (lines 165–73). Rams, too, are mentioned in Dumuzi's dream. As he envisions himself dead Dumuzi cries, "[M]y rams were scratching the earth with their thick legs for me" (lines 25–39). The scratching of the earth is a metaphor for mourning: "that your rams were scratching the earth...for you means that I shall lacerate my cheeks with my fingernails" (lines 56–69). These references suggest that the bearded bull, stag, and gazelle represent characters in the Dumuzi story: Utu, Enki's boat, and Dumuzi himself. In this context the ram may symbolize Inanna's mourning for her lover-consort-husband.³⁶

Cohen also equates the diadem assemblage with a garment called the *suh*, which in the Early Dynastic period is said to be Inanna's head or neck band.³⁷ Texts describe this type as sometimes decorated with lapis lazuli. Since we believe that the individual pieces of jewelry, in their newly reconstructed form, can now be understood to comprise U 10948, and could easily have served as headbands analogous to that found in PG 1130, it is possible that Cohen's interpretation of the *suh* is correct. It is also possible to extend this interpretation to the various sets of pendants. There were at least five annual rituals associated with the agricultural cycle, and there were others associated with the divine and with dead ancestors. From the Lagash texts, we know that elite females frequently sponsored banquets and feasts commemorating and celebrating various occasions. It is possible that the distinct strands of Puabi's diadem were related to distinct rituals in which she participated, some associated with Dumuzi and Inanna, others with the agricultural cycle, and others with dead ancestors. There is nothing to suggest that this jewelry was only for the burial chamber, and it could easily have been worn by the queen in life. In ancient Mesopotamia the themes of abundance and procreation—the primary responsibilities of the newly emerging political and economic elites—were reinforced and reiterated in every aspect of the world of both the living and the dead. Puabi's diadems can now be fully appreciated as a paradigmatic example of how multiple themes were signaled through works of art for the ancient inhabitants of Ur, and how they convey their meanings for the wider public today.

Endnotes

- 1 They continue to be associated with the beads on the cloak, and one (U. 10981) can be identified as the only strands having silver beads.
- 2 Ur, Iraq Expedition Records, Correspondence, Exp. V, Jan.–July 1927, box 2, folder 2, Penn Museum Archives.
- 3 Ibid., box 2, folder 5.
- 4 Maxwell-Hyslop 1971: 5.
- 5 Zettler and Horne 1998.
- 6 Pittman 1998.
- 7 Miller 1999, 2000.
- 8 Miller 2000.
- 9 Cohen 2005: 128–29.
- 10 Miller 2000: 154.
- 11 See the references in Barrett 2007: 25.
- 12 Cohen 2005: 128.
- 13 Among the denizens of the Penn Museum, this object type is fondly referred to as a "rug beater."
- 14 Miller 2013.
- 15 Wronski et al. 2010: fig. 2.
- 16 We are indebted to zooarchaeologist Katherine M. Moore for this observation. Cohen (2005) proposes an identification of the wisent (European bison); that identification is unlikely on morphological grounds as the shoulders of the wisent, like those of the American bison, appear humped.
- 17 According to Katherine Moore (communication with the authors, Oct. 30. 2014), "the combination of the long coat, the tight coiling of the horns, and the placement of the ears within the coil" make it virtually certain that the caprid is a domestic ram. Note that Cohen (2005) asserts that the caprid is a wild ram based on the curvature of the horns.
- 18 See, for example, Amiet 1980: figs. 1143, 1157.
- 19 Winter 1999.
- 20 See, for example, Benzel 2013.
- 21 Redman 1978; Cohen 2005.

- 22 Winter 2009. Woolley often remarked on the high quality of workmanship of the various objects found in the Royal Tombs. While he extolled the superb execution of the pendants in Puabi's "diadem," he observed that although "the craftsmanship of comparable amuletic pendants found in PG 777 was distinctly poor...the little animals from Shub-ad's headdress are exquisitely modelled, the plants and ears of corn are very charming, and the general effect is one of great richness and delicacy." Woolley 1934, 2: 89.
- 23 Cohen 2005: 151.
- 24 We follow Cohen's (2005: 29–36) particularly good discussion of how to apply the later stories to the interpretation of mid-third millennium symbolism.
- 25 Katz 1995.
- 26 Miller 1999: 30.
- 27 Miller 2013.
- 28 Ibid: 132.
- 29 Vuure 2005.
- 30 See also Zettler and Horne 1998: cat. 10 (harp ornament from Ur, St. Louis Art Museum, acc. no. 260: 1951).
- 31 Utu emerges from the Netherworld every morning at sunrise and decrees the fates and renders judgments. Polonsky 2002: 211.
- 32 Kramer 1960.
- 33 "The Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary," <http://psd.museum.upenn.edu/epsd/index.html>.
- 34 The sign form for the animal avatar for Enki's boat is $dara_3$, usually translated as "wild goat" with no further explanation. In the Warka sign list, one variant of $DARA_3$ \approx $ALIM_x$ from Uruk IV is clearly a stag (Green and Nissen 1987: 184–sign 71). The boat-shaped lyre from the Royal Cemetery features a stag (Schauensee 2002); it, too, might represent Enki's boat, given a translation of $DARA_3$ as "stag."
- 35 Cohen 2005: 130.
- 36 Cohen (ibid.), too, points out the maleness of the animals. He identifies the ram as wild, but somewhat contradictorily implies that it is part of Dumuzi's (domesticated) flock.
- 37 Ibid.: 130–31. Cohen's argument holds whether it is based on Woolley's reconstruction or the current view that there are several diadems.

FROM ANCIENT TO MODERN ARCHAEOLOGY AND AESTHETICS

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