FIG. 1. THE NEWLY RESTORED PHILADELPHIA "RAM CAUGHT IN A THICKET" from the Royal Cemetery at Ur. The goat—with its fleece made of carved shell and lapis lazuli, head and legs of gold foil, copper ears, and lapis horns, beard, and eyes—is a remarkable example of a composite work of art. It stands on a base of shell and colored stone mosaic in front of a flowering tree fitted into the base, which is comprised of a trunk covered with gold foil, two main branches ending in leaves and floral rosettes all covered in gold, and a single gold leaf atop the trunk. While all of these materials are original, the stomach and sides of the base are covered with modern silver. The core and internal armature of the statue are also modern (see photo essay).
UPM 30-12-702, H. 42.6 cm

Rescue and Restoration: A History of the Philadelphia "Ram Caught in a Thicket"

Yelena Rakic

In 1928 Sir Leonard Woolley unearthed a find that has been described by some as the most beautiful object recovered from the Royal Cemetery of Ur (Fig. 1). Christened by Woolley the "ram caught in a thicket" (later shortened to "Ram in the Thicket"), this composite statue of a goat standing upright in front of a flowering tree is all the more remarkable considering its state at the time of discovery and its subsequent restoration. While its beauty may be a matter of taste, there is no doubt that it is one of the most unusual works recovered from the Royal Cemetery or, for that matter, from any other mid-3rd millennium BC site in Mesopotamia. It is unusual but not unique, since right after its discovery a similar statue was found near the first (Fig. 2).

FIG. 2. THE LONDON "RAM CAUGHT IN A THICKET," the so-called companion piece in the British Museum. Although the statues are often considered a pair, differences can be noted between the two. The stand of the London statue is covered entirely with mosaic, while the sides of the Philadelphia statue's base were covered with silver. Other differences such as the presence of genitals on the London statue, the appearance of the flowering branches, and the difference in height between the two could be accounted for by their states of discovery and restorations. The varied range of materials used in the construction of both goat statues is evidence for long-distance trade at Ur during the time of the Royal Cemetery. For example, a possible source for the lapis lazuli is Afghanistan, a good distance away from Ur (Moorey 1994).
© The British Museum. WA 122200, H. 45.7 cm

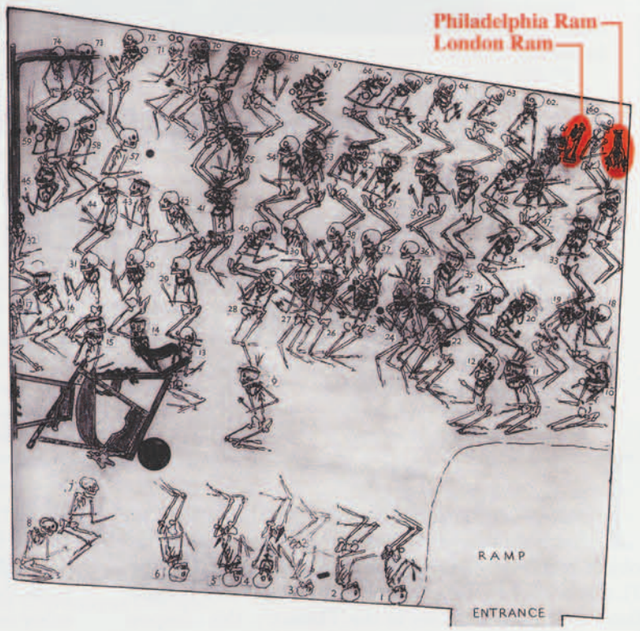

FIG. 3. PLAN OF THE "GREAT DEATH PIT." On discovery of this tomb (PG 1237), Woolley sent a cable in Latin to Frederic G. Kenyon, Director of the British Museum. Kenyon translated it in a letter to Jane M. McHugh, Secretary to the Director of the University of Pennsylvania Museum, dated December 22, 1928: "I have found the greatest death-pit of all yet discovered, containing women more magnificently attired, harps ornamented with beasts in gold and silver, and two statues of goats in gold and mosaic. The grave-chamber itself has not yet been found. Inform Philadelphia" (UPM Archives, Ur Expedition, Box 2).
UPM neg. S4-141592, modified by Paul Zimmerman

FIG. 4. THE PHILADELPHIA "RAM" AS FOUND in the "Great Death Pit."
UPM neg. S4-142255

FIG. 5. THE LONDON "RAM" AS FOUND in the "Great Death Pit."
UPM neg. S4-142256

Today, the first statue is part of the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. It is the focus of this article. The second "Ram" belongs to the British Museum in London, which is only fitting since the excavations at Ur were a joint expedition of these two institutions. Both statues are extraordinary examples of works constructed of a wide array of materials. Each piece comprises three main elements: the standing goat, a tree with branches, and a base on which the goat and tree stand. In each case, gold, silver, shell, lapis lazuli, and other colored stones are used to create a unified form which is striking and lively. These statues have long piqued the curiosity of those who have seen them and have prompted many questions. How did Woolley put them back together after they were buried for thousands of years, crushed under the weight of the earth? How were they originally constructed? And, ultimately, what do they depict and what was their purpose?

DISCOVERY AND EXCAVATION

During the 1928–29 season, Woolley excavated what was, in terms of human loss, the most extensive of the Royal Cemetery tombs, the so-called Great Death Pit (PG 1237). While the previous season had yielded the human remains and great riches of Puabi's tomb (PG 800) and Meskalamdug's grave (PG 755), it was in the "Great Death Pit" that the largest number of skeletons were found. This pit held the bodies of sixty-eight elaborately dressed women, and six men. Also found were a number of artifacts of great interest, among them

FIG. 6. THE LONDON "RAM" CUT IN HALF before restoration.
UPM Archives

FIG. 7. DETAIL OF A GOAT BEFORE TWO SHEEP ON THE "STANDARD OF UR" from PG 779 in the Royal Cemetery. Mosaic in shell and lapis lazuli. Debate exists over the identification of species of goat and sheep present in the ancient Near East (Zeuner 1963). Further difficulties arise in studying the period of the Royal Cemetery since animal remains are not well documented. Yet the presence of animals with clearly differentiated features in pictorial representations suggests that there were a variety of animals known to the inhabitants of Mesopotamia at the time.
© The British Museum. WA 121201; total dimensions of Standard: 47 by 20 cm

a group of musical instruments and the two goat statues. Woolley found the two statues in the west corner of the pit in early December 1929 and named them both the "ram caught in a thicket." As seen in the plan (Fig. 3), they were separated by a body (no. 60), but were relatively close to one another. Both statues were crushed by the weight of the earth atop them. Due most likely to the way they had either fallen or been placed, each was in a different state of preservation which ultimately aided in the reconstruction of both. Woolley wrote detailed descriptions of the discovery, recovery, and reconstruction of these statues in excavation reports (1929a, 1929b, 1934) and in his more popular accounts (1930, 1954).

When the Philadelphia statue was discovered, it was tilted backwards and broken across the middle into two pieces (Fig. 4). It seems that the pressure of the earth had broken the statue in half and pushed the top half in front of the bottom. The legs were slightly damaged, but recoverable. The head was in fragments and its thin gold leaf broken into eighteen pieces and flattened. One of the horns had broken off and was found the day after the statue had been removed, 30 centimeters away. The shell and lapis locks of fleece were in excellent condition. The silver of the goat's stomach had perished, as had all of the wood that Woolley believed had been used as the core. Powdered remains of bitumen and plaster (probably used as adhesive) were found, but most had perished. Woolley also observed a residue of soft chloride which he believed had been a silver chain used to attach the animal's front legs to the branches of the tree.

The removal of the statue was a complicated matter due to the fragility of the pieces, and demonstrates Woolley's genius as an excavator. Since the positions of the shell and lapis fragments were held in place by the earth around them, Woolley poured hot wax over the entire statue in order to stabilize it. Strips of waxed muslin were then placed on the exposed parts of the statue in order to lift it from the ground. Woolley's description of the statue as "wrapped up as a mummy" perhaps best captures the way it looked during removal (1930:80).

WOOLLEY'S RECONSTRUCTION

Once out of the earth, the task was to put the statue back together. Although it seems that no proper conservation records exist, it can be determined from published accounts and photographs that reconstruction occurred some time before July 1929. At that time, a photograph of the restored statue was published in the *Illustrated London News* in an article about an exhibition of finds from Ur at the British Museum. The second "Ram," now in the British Museum, was exhibited in its flattened state alongside the reconstructed "Ram," as can be seen in the *Illustrated London News* of September 1929. The reconstructed statue arrived in Philadelphia at the end of January 1930, and was shown at a Private View at the Members' Fortnightly Tea on February 4th, according to *The University Museum Bulletin* of March 1930.

The recovery of the second goat statue, preserved in an entirely different state, aided in the reconstruction of the first. The London statue was found lying on its side, crushed completely flat (Fig. 5). It was lifted from the soil using similar methods as the first, and later the two sides were separated, pressed out into shape, and mounted on a new core (Fig. 6). Because it had been crushed flat, the silhouette of the statue was maintained, whereas the Philadelphia statue when found had retained the roundness of its shoulder and of one side of the back, as well as the spacing of the branches. Woolley was very cautious about his restoration work. In describing it he writes,

> Of course, methods of this kind cannot reproduce all the *finesse* of the original; to do that one would have to take the whole thing to pieces and re-create; but in doing so one loses something which is of sentimental if not always of scientific importance—the object as exhibited is really a copy, new throughout, of the old work, and no one can be quite certain of its faithfulness. In dealing with the antiquities from Ur we have preferred a restoration which implies the least possible interference with the object to a reconstruction which may give a better appearance but depends more on the modern hand. (1930:81)

In restoring the Philadelphia statue, Woolley softened the waxed muslin with heat, pressed apart the sides, and cleaned out the dirt from inside. He then applied more wax and bandages to the inside while removing those from the outside, and pushed the body out into shape with the fragments of fleece adhering to the inner coating of wax. Tools were inserted into the gold of the legs in order to press them out and then copper wires and a heated mixture of wax and bitumen were added. The body was filled with plastic wood and secured to the wires of the legs. The eighteen fragments of gold leaf of the head were unfolded and worked out into their original curve. They were strengthened from behind and pieced together like "a jigsaw puzzle in three dimensions" (Woolley 1930:81). The gold of the tree trunk was wrapped over a new wood core and copper

FIG. 8. GOAT FEEDING ON A TREE IN ERITREA. Much of what is known about animals in ancient Mesopotamia comes from three sources: excavated bones, textual references such as lists of animal names and economic texts, and pictorial representations.
Courtesy of Debbie Schorsch

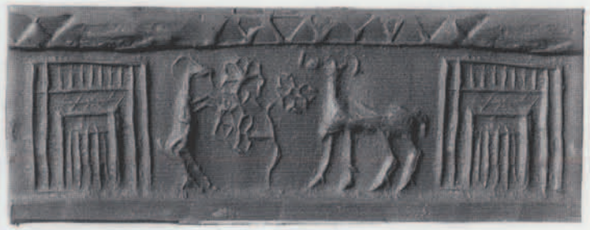

FIG. 9. IMPRESSION OF A CYLINDER SEAL; early 3rd millennium BC. The depiction of animals and plants in the art of the ancient Near East was quite common. Clearly the world of nature captivated the interest of the Mesopotamians. The vast number of pictorial representations of animals are one means of gaining information about them during different time periods (Van Buren 1939).
Khafaje, Sin Temple VII. Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. H. 4.5 cm

wires were used for its branches. Silver paint was applied to the sides of the base and the belly of the goat.

CONSERVATION SINCE WOOLLEY'S INITIAL RECONSTRUCTION

In the summer of 1997 the Philadelphia "Ram" was removed from display and taken to the conservation labs of the Museum, where an exciting new project began under the supervision of conservator Tamsen Fuller. Its aims were to stabilize the statue and prepare it for travel and exhibition, as well as to investigate the accuracy of the first reconstruction and make any changes that might be necessary (see the accompanying photo essay on the conservation of the "Ram").

The investigation revealed some previously unknown conservation history. While detailed records existed for limited conservation of the statue undertaken in 1977 in which the surface was cleaned and minor repairs made, further evidence of past work was discovered by conservator Fuller and Richard Zettler, Associate Curator of the Near East Section. In the Archives of the University Museum, Zettler found curatorial notes from 1944 by Leon Legrain, curator of the Babylonian section in the 1920s to 1940s and also a participant in the Ur excavations. These notes indicated that the statue had undergone some sort of conservation at that time. Although Legrain did not provide details, he stated that "the Gold Ram in the thicket had been carefully repaired and placed on show" (UPM Archives, Near East Section, Box 6). Through careful examination of and comparison between published photographs of the statue in 1929 and the statue today, Fuller noticed significant differences. Perhaps most notably, it seems that a number of pieces of the shell fleece had been removed and discarded, probably during Legrain's reported repairs.

"The eighteen fragments of gold leaf of the head were unfolded and worked out into their original curve."

The 1997–98 conservation project also revealed new information about Woolley's original reconstruction. One of the most dramatic changes is the repositioning of the forelegs in relation to the branches on the tree. Through microscopic examination of the gold foil on the tree Fuller discovered a number of joins which Woolley had not found. The tree now stands a bit taller and the legs rest on the branches in a fashion similar to the London statue (see Fig. 1). The only existing photograph of the statue in the ground (see Fig. 4) also supports this new reconstruction.

THE ICONOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Woolley named the statue the "ram caught in a thicket" in reference to the Biblical story of Abraham (Genesis 22:13), although he acknowledged the fanciful nature of the name. Contrary to what some have said, he did recognize the animal as a goat, calling it a "ram of the goats." While the term *ram* is most commonly used for a male sheep, it is sometimes used for a male goat as well. The statue clearly represents a goat, as can be determined by the animal's horns and beard. The identification of the species is more difficult. The horns coiled on their own axis, with

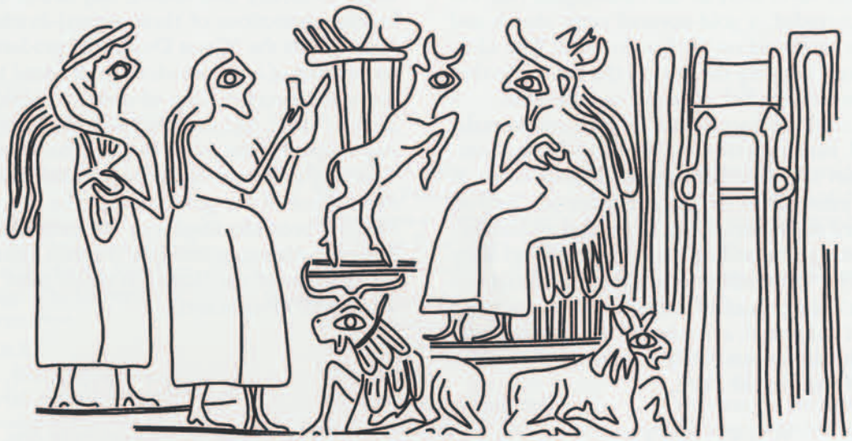

FIG. 10. DRAWING OF A CYLINDER SEAL IMPRESSION; mid-3rd millennium BC. Cylinder seals are a valuable source of information for all aspects of early Mesopotamian life, especially when texts are not prevalent (Collon 1987). The piece of furniture seen in this sealing is a possible model for what the goat statues were designed to support.
Berlin Vorderasiatische Museum, VA 3878, H. 4.3 cm. Drawing by Paul Zimmerman after Moortgat 1940: pl. 22, fig. 144

their tips growing back and in, may indicate a markhor (*Capra falconeri*). The markhor is a wild goat of central Asia and probably would have been somewhat exotic to the inhabitants of Ur. Whether or not this identification is correct, the same type of goat seems to be represented in a scene on the so-called Standard of Ur, also found in the Royal Cemetery (Fig. 7).

The composition of the statue comes directly from nature where goats can be seen climbing and eating in trees (Fig. 8). However, this resemblance should not preclude other interpretations of the work. In the *Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur* catalog, Donald Hansen relates the sculpture to the concern of its creators with plant and animal fertility (in Zettler and Horne 1998). He sees the goat in the stance of the sexual act symbolically fertilizing the tree. The product of this act can be seen in the form of the leaf shape which stands upright on top of the trunk; Hansen views this element as a fruit, the simplified and stylized form of a bud. This bud would eventually blossom into the flower or rosette also represented on the tree. While the silver belly of the Philadelphia ram was completely corroded, a gold-covered penis sheath and testicles were preserved on the London ram. The silver chain (now lost) bonding the goat to the branch further reinforces the intimate link of animal and plant life.

Pictorial representations of rampant animals, often horned, flanking a tree, singly or in pairs, are common in the art of 3rd millennium BC Mesopotamia. A cylinder seal excavated at the site of Khafaje (see map on p. 3) and dated to the earlier part of the 3rd millennium clearly shows a goat standing on its hind legs nibbling on a plant (Fig. 9). In addition to glyptic art (seals and sealings), the subject is often represented on engraved shell inlays of the period, a number of which were found at Ur; and it can be seen on a fragment of a carved steatite vessel excavated at Mari.

WHAT IS IT?

While the function of the goat statues is unknown, the presence of a gold-covered pole rising from the back of both statues suggests that they were supports rather than free-standing sculptures. A cylinder seal in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin offers a possible clue (Fig. 10). This seal depicts the presentation of offerings by two figures before a seated god. Directly before the god is an object in the shape of a rampant bull similar in form to the goat statues from Ur. What seems to be a table with goods on top protrudes from its back, suggesting that the object depicted is a stand of some sort. In his personal field notes, Woolley recorded that ash was found in the soil around the Philadelphia statue. If the statue supported a tabletop, perhaps the ash indicates that it carried something that was burned. While Woolley, too, thought that the goat statues were probably supports, he firmly believed that the two were a pair. In the excavation reports he stated that a white substance found under the London statue belonged to the missing feature which linked the two. Yet the location of the two statues in the "Great Death Pit" does not necessarily support this hypothesis.

"the presence of a gold-covered pole rising from the back of both statues suggests that they were supports rather than free-standing sculptures."

Another interpretation which has been presented identifies the statues as parts of some sort of musical instrument. A number of lyres and harps constructed in part with three-dimensional animal sculpture were found in the Royal Cemetery (see Kilmer, this issue). Cylinder seals bearing depictions of these animal-headed lyres also exist. In fact the "Great Death Pit" produced the greatest number of lyres, which were all found together near the eastern corner. One of these, a hybrid instrument made of silver, had constructed in the front a statue of a stag sculpted in the round (see de Schauensee, this issue). This stag and two copper stags found nearby are most reminiscent of the goat statues. The two copper stags have not been identified with any particular instrument, however. Although multiple theories exist concerning the function of the "Ram," it seems most likely that it was a stand of some sort.

CONCLUSION

The "Ram" is undoubtedly one of the most famous artifacts unearthed by Woolley in the Royal Cemetery of Ur. Its survival is due in large part to his genius as excavator and restorer. Those qualities, as well as his sense of whimsy, were recognized by those who worked with him. In a letter dated January 1, 1930, sent by H.R.H. Hall, the Keeper of the Department of Egyptian and Assyrian Antiquities at the British Museum, to Horace H.F. Jayne, the Director of the University Museum, Hall writes:

> The "ram" (really a goat, of the markhor type) "in the thicket" (I think he is merely eating a plant in the usual goat-fashion, but then I am not romantic) is a really wonderful piece of restoration (or rather re-conditioning) of Woolley's; he is easily first in the way he produces his things for exhibition, and so far as technique is concerned I consider him the first of our excavators. He will restore our goat in the same way. (UPM Archives, Ur Expedition, Box 3)

Today we continue to appreciate, learn from, and interpret the "Ram," a testament both to the wonders of the Royal Cemetery of Ur and to its excavator, Sir Leonard Woolley.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my thanks to Richard Zettler for sharing with me his research on the "ram caught in a thicket"; Tamsen Fuller for allowing me access to her conservation work; Jill Weber for her patience in answering my queries about animals in the ancient Near East; and Donald Hansen for discussing his interpretations of the statue with me.

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