minimum, and upon first glance, the piece seems to have been made hastily. In actuality, the stone was engraved with the greatest expertise. All of the important pictorial elements have been rendered in a shorthand but precise representational form.

In treasuring pieces of this sort, Sommerville was clearly ahead of his time.

Only today can we appreciate the value of his legacy, and see the Sommerville collection in its true light. It seems to have taken more than a century for Maxwell Sommerville’s wish, originally uttered in 1889, to be realized: “Then I may hope that an interest will be awakened in my subject, and many may enjoy years of pleasant research.”

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Date Sex in Mesopotamia!

The Royal Cemetery at Ur, a late 3rd millennium BC site in Iraq (Mesopotamia), was excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in the 1920s in a joint expedition of the University of Pennsylvania Museum and the British Museum. Among the Museum’s share of objects from the excavations was an assortment of small ornaments of gold, silver, carnelian, lapis lazuli, and bitumen (a tar-like substance). These were found together with numerous tiny lapis beads near the skeleton of a woman, Puabi, who was clearly a person of great importance. Woolley assembled these items into a single object that he called Puabi’s “diadem” (Fig. 1).

The ornaments are a mixture of abstract, animal, and plant forms. As a paleoethnobotanist, I was most interested in the plant forms. Several resemble stalks of grain, but with a difference: they have little projections all around a central stem, whereas wheat and barley ears have grains on either side of the stalk. A second type looks like a small fruiting bush. But what could they be? When one of the curators of the currently traveling exhibit, “Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur,” asked me about them, I took one last look before the diadem went off display.

What I had never noticed, and what proved to be the key to their identification, was that the “grain” and “bush” had been mounted upside down for years. Double loops at one end show that these items are in fact pendants. Oriented correctly, the “grain” and “bush” could represent, respectively, the flowering and fruiting branches of the date palm (Phoenix dactylifera). Figs. 2a, b and 3a, b.

In ancient Mesopotamia, the date palm played an important role in the economy, and its physiology made it at least as important symbolically. Date pits have been found in the Royal Cemetery itself, and plant remains from other Mesopotamian sites include date pits, as well as wood of the palm (see Ellison et al. 1978). Many texts from this and later periods concern date orchards and related matters; there is even a word, defined in the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary, that refers to an item of jewelry in the form of the flowering branch of the date palm.

Male and female flowers of the date palm grow on different trees. In nature, about half the trees are male and half are female (D. Zohary, pers. com.). In a cultivated date grove, however, the female fruiting trees are pollinated by hand from just a few male trees. It is just a short conceptual step to human sexuality and fertility. Indeed, the Mesopotamian goddess Inanna, known for her part in the “sacred marriage” ritual, considered herself “the one who makes the dates be full of abundance in their panicles (flower clusters)” (Spieberg 1988).

Research for the travelling exhibit led to the reconstruction of Puabi’s diadem; its constituent parts are now thought to be from several different pieces of jewelry (Zettler and Horne 1998). We do not know how the various animals, plants, and abstract forms were originally strung together, nor what the role of the lapis
While many are familiar with the University of Pennsylvania Museum as an archaeological treasure house, few know about its role in Philadelphia culture, the story of its growth as a public museum, or its architectural history. Philadelphia began to expand westward after the Civil War, a growth facilitated by the construction of great bridges across the Schuylkill River at Market, Chestnut, Walnut, and South streets. The University of Pennsylvania participated in that expansion by relocating from Center City to the other side of the Schuylkill River during the 1870s. A museum built on the Schuylkill's west bank, located between the University and the City, served as a metaphorical bridge between the two. This museum celebrates the centennial of its first building in 1999. Photographs enable us to look back at the Museum's foundation, and forward to its future. Using such frozen moments in time as if they were artifacts, we can conduct an archaeological investigation of this archaeological museum, seeing how changing architectural taste has brought it full circle during a century of construction, from the Victorian revivalism and eclecticism of its first architects to the post-modern present. It is due to the Museum's distinguished architecture and decorative embellishments that it has been included in the University of Pennsylvania Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places.

ANTEGEDENTS, 1887–1899

During his provostship (1881–1894) William Pepper propelled the University of Pennsylvania to the front ranks of American universities by founding several departments and erecting additional buildings on its relatively new West Philadelphia campus. It was one of his dreams to bring together under one roof artifacts that evidenced the development and history of humanity from antiquity to the present. In 1887 he persuaded the University trustees to accept artifacts from an upcoming expedition to the ancient site of Nippur (Iraq) and secured their promise to erect a fireproof building to house them. This agreement was the beginning of the University of Pennsylvania Museum.