

DISCOVERY OF ROYAL TOMBS AT UR OF THE CHALDEES

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YEAR after year the excavations at Ur of the Chaldees seem to become more important and interesting. But the discovery of royal tombs reported within the last week by C. Leonard Woolley is so wonderful that the readers of the MUSEUM JOURNAL must hear of it while awaiting the complete account of the results of the campaign which will appear in the March number of this magazine. The tombs are so rich in gold that they inevitably recall to mind the treasures of Agamemnon at Mycene. And a remarkable shaft tomb, covering an area of 40 x 17 feet, where the royal person was accompanied in death by his retainers and took with him his chariot with two asses and three grooms, his six bearers of the golden lances and arrows, his women singers and harp player, all bearing their gold crowns; his gaming-board, his wardrobe, and a rich treasury of gold, silver, copper, stone vessels, weapons and ornaments: all this reminds us of Herodotus's account of the burial of a Scythian king.

The first tomb discovered early in November was the tomb of Mes-kalam-dug, with his name engraved in Sumerian characters on his golden bowl. He was found at the same level that yielded last year the famous golden dagger, and he thus belongs to a period centuries prior to that of Sargon and the First Dynasty of Ur. This early period, about B.C. 3500, before unknown to archæology, is now illustrated by examples of art unrivalled by those of any later time in Mesopotamia. The burial is of the normal type composed of a wooden coffin surrounded by vessels and weapons, but distinguished by a spear stuck in the soil at the head. The spear is of copper with a gold-plated shaft. The equipment around the coffin included one gold bowl fluted and engraved, one bowl and one cup of plain gold, and many other vessels of stone, clay and copper; one bowl, one lamp, one libation jug and a patten of silver; spears, axes and daggers, two of the last having gold hilts and one a silver hilt. Inside were found round the body a silver belt with a gold dagger and a silver sheath, the hilt being made of gold and

silver; a whetstone of lapis hanging from a gold ring; an ordinary axe and a double-headed axe of gold; a gold inscribed bowl; two lamps, one of gold, the other of silver; a gold pin; a gold wreath with leaves and beads; necklaces with figurines of a ram, a frog and a monkey in gold; and over the head a complete peruke in solid gold, lifesize.

This first grave, with its wealth of equipment, is one of the finest found in Mesopotamia; but the other, the shaft grave, is unique and throws a new light on the early burial customs of the Sumerians. The grave itself is a vault built of plano-convex bricks and stones, not yet opened at the time of this writing. In the shaft above the grave were placed the general offerings and with these offerings, the bodies of a large number of people, sacrificed to accompany the king to the next world. One part of the shaft contained no objects but a rectangle made of large rough limestone blocks one course thick sloping towards the centre, which may have been the altar where the human victims were offered.

The first object recovered was a wooden harp, inlaid with gold and lapis, the sounding box terminating in a bullock's head in gold with curls, beard and eyes of lapis. More inlay and engraved shell plaques decorated the sounding box. The upright had twelve copper keys, gold-plated, for the twelve strings. Unfortunately all the woodwork has perished and only the soil above keeps the inlay in position. The harp player was buried by his harp, his hand still resting on the strings on which he played his last tune. Behind him ten women and two children were buried in two rows of six, with their golden crowns and beads, crescent-shaped earrings, and the copper pin used to fasten their veils: the choir which sang the funeral dirge.

The state chariot was near, with its team of two asses and the grooms keeping a solemn watch by the tomb. Six small golden heads of bulls and lions and three large lions' heads decorated the side rail, gaily painted in white, blue and red on a black ground. Silver heads of panthers and lions ornamented the front rail. Beard and mane of lapis lazuli and shell were added below the heads. Here too the woodwork has perished. On the pole between the two animals a rein-ring of silver was surmounted by an exquisite piece of realistic art, a donkey in gold. The copper collars of the asses were decorated with an eye pattern.

Four arrows of gold and four spears of copper with shafts bound in gold and silver were planted in the middle of the grave,

not far from a shallow trench with the bodies of six men, probably the bearers.

A gaming-board with its complete set of gaming pieces and dice provided for the amusement of the dead. One set of pieces is composed of seven black squares with five dots; the second is made of seven shell plaques engraved with scenes of animal life.

A long wooden box probably contained the clothes of the dead. Only the mosaic work in shell and lapis and a band of gold decorating the front have been preserved. The keeper of the wardrobe is buried at the end of the chest, wearing his frontlet of beads and gold, his gold chain and his gold earrings.

Many vases, weapons, and ornaments were arranged around the box, among which the most remarkable are thirty silver tumblers and bowls; a charming semicircular box of silver with a lid inlaid with a lion in shell engraved in red on a background of lapis; and four magnificent gold vessels: a lamp with a trough spout, a chalice, an oval bowl with a foot and a spout, and a fluted and engraved tumbler.

The discovery, which bespeaks a high degree of material civilization in Mesopotamia in B.C. 3500 and testifies to the survival of earliest customs, later forgotten, is important for the general history of civilization and supplies fresh information and material for new theories.