

## 1.30 – 2.4

What would archaeologists do today differently?

- Pay more attention to commoners
  - In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, there was bias in archaeology toward tombs of elites
  - This is because there would be better objects for museum display
  - General bias in historical study towards elites and high culture (kings, palaces, temples, “great men”)
  - Today, we know to study commoners:
    - It provides a more complete view of society
    - Royal tombs are fascinating but not representative of society as a whole
    - Helps “democratize” the archaeological perspective
  - Ex. The commoner cemetery at Ur
    - Commoners were buried in the same location as royal tombs
    - The area was also used as a midden (trash disposal)
    - Who’s in, who’s not? Woolley provided some info on 2000 graves, encountered another 4000 that he didn’t record information on
      - There were 10,000 people in Ur so there should have been more than 6,000 graves. So a lot of the dead did not end up in the cemetery
      - Inclusion was restricted (a privilege?)
      - Who’s missing? Children are not in the cemetery; inclusion depended on a status that only (some) adults could obtain
      - Age dependent treatment is a very strong feature of Sumerian deathways
    - 300 burials date to Early Dynastic III
      - Ordered arrangement, lack of overlap; above ground markers?
      - Many graves are disturbed and show signs of re-entry, which Woolley thought was looting but that seems unlikely because these were commoners... the re-entry could have been part of Sumerian deathways
    - Commoner burial patterns
      - Mostly single burials in pits
      - A few were in coffins or chambers with the body flexed to one side in a sort of fetal position – males had heads facing SW and females had heads facing NW
    - Commoner grave goods
      - ½ of the graves that Woolley found lacked grave goods, which could have been due to lack of preservation
      - Most common grave good that was found was a small conical bowl

- Commoners were not all treated equally; there were some rich commoners, like PG-755 Makscalemdug (spelling)
- The most common commoner grave goods
  - Items of adornment (items on the body):
    - Pins, bracelets, necklaces, earrings, the brim (a fastener that held a headdress on);
  - Personal items:
    - Combs, brushes, cosmetic cases, tweezers;
  - Weapons:
    - Knives, spears, axes
  - Vessels:
    - Bowls
- What are not grave goods?
  - No work related items, such as grinding stones and weaving materials; no ordinary tools
  - No furniture
  - No art, statues, etc., not even religious items
- What this tells us is that ordinary work (occupation) was not relevant at death
- Strong gendering in most commoner grave goods
  - Females:
    - More jewelry
    - Hair ornaments
    - No weapons
  - Males
    - Had brims but generally no other hair items
    - At least one axe or dagger
- Burial Treatment and social divisions
  - No sharp breaks among commoners in treatments = gradient of status differences
  - Qualitative break between commoner and royal treatment = social divide between royals and everyone else
- Much more rigorous investigation (sampling, multidisciplinary, more thorough documentation)
  - Study and keep all material; Woolley discarded a lot of stuff, including skeletons, which was very detrimental
  - Skeletal material could determine age/sex structure of burial population, the general level of their health like disease and stresses, and biological relationships (DNA)
  - Pay more attention to soil filling the Death Pits (the “tomb fill”)
    - The sequence of deposition reveals time and episodes in stage 3, showing how long it took to fill the Death Pit (could have showed how long the intermediary period was)

- Sample for botanical remains (pollen reveals season of burial)
- Grave goods – history and use
  - Made for the grave or actually used? For example, you can look at wear patterns on pottery to see if and how much they were used
  - Vessels = containers (empty now but probably weren't when they were put in the grave; probably contained non-preserved goods like food); vessels not the offering itself but hold the offering
  - How can we study what they contained?
    - Woolley report – food remains visible in 9 jars from commoner tombs
    - Probably remains of a stew
    - 1978 – microscopic analysis of soil samples from vessels from Puabi's tomb and found microscopic fragments of bread, fish, dates, vegetables (chick peas), pig, sheep, goat, beer, etc.
    - Residue analysis – a way of studying residues that fall into microscopic cracks in pottery
  - A lot of grave goods have to do with eating and consumption (food remains + cauldrons + cups, bowls and knives)
    - May also have to do with funerary feasting (feasts at the funeral)
  - Other death feast clues
    - Drinking vessels in Death Pits in the hands of dead, or held near the mouth
    - Can compare to “banquet scenes” of Sumerian art grave vessels same type shown at banquets
      - Queen Puabi seal: a royal banquet; the seal has food and drink
  - Does the arrangement of bodies replicate a banquet?
    - “Tableau mort” – an image created with the dead; use of the dead to stage a scene
    - Deceased meant to be seen as participating in a royal banquet
    - Why is this considered a proper send-off of the dead ruler?
  - Banquet scene cylinder on body in Death Pit 1237 – dancers and musicians; two children are depicted, one child found in the Death Pit
  - Textual evidence for funeral feasts
    - Clay tablet (late Early Dynastic III Period): Uruk Agina's Reform Text
    - Standard burial fee: 7 jars of beer, 420 loaves of bread, 120 quarts of barley
    - Some was given to priest and gravediggers as payment, some placed in grave, and the remainder consumed at funeral
- Pay more attention to how dead dressed
  - Most non-container grave goods are clothing, jewelry, items of adornment (stuff worn on the person)