

ROYAL TOMBS OF



ANCIENT TREASURES FROM MODERN IRAQ

Facts

The City of Ur

- In its earliest known period, Sumer was divided into several independent city-states, whose limits were defined by canals and boundary stones. Ur was one of 20 such city-states flourishing in the valley between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers between 2,900 and 2,350 B.C., each with its own ruler and protective deity.
- Ur was protected by the deity Nanna, the god of the moon.
- Ur was located in southern Mesopotamia, near the mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers on the Persian Gulf. Due to marine regression, the remains of the city are now inland in present-day Iraq, near the city of Nasiriyah and south of Baghdad.
- Ur is cited by the Bible as the location of the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:10-15) and as the home of the patriarch Abraham (Genesis 12:4-5).
- Ur developed complex trading networks stretching all the way to Pakistan. They imported lapis from Afghanistan, carnelian from Turkey, translucent stone from southern Turkmenistan, carved beads from the Indus Valley, seashells from the Gulf of Oman, and silver and gold from Nubia or Egypt. Many of these materials are used in the stunning objects on display in the exhibit.

The Royal Tombs of Ur

- These tombs were discovered by C. Leonard Woolley in the 1920s, around the time Howard Carter made headlines around the world for the discovery of the tomb of King Tut. Each dig rivaled the other for the major headlines of the day.
- Both digs drew tourists from around the world, including the writer Agatha Christie, who would go on to set her novel *Murder in Mesopotamia* in the region, and marry Woolley's assistant, M. E. L. Mallowan.

- 1,850 intact burial sites were found, and Woolley estimated that two or three times that number had originally existed in the area.
- The magnificent art found in the tombs, on display in the exhibit, was created in preparation for the deceased's journey into the underworld.

Sumerians

- The adjective 'Sumerian' was given to this culture by the Akkadians. The Sumerians called themselves *sag-gi-ga*, or "the black headed people" and called their land *ki-en-gir*, or "place of the civilized lords."
- Sumerians were the first to build cities, conceive the idea of centralized government, institute a code of law and establish an irrigation system. They invented mathematics, astronomy, writing, the wheel, the sail and government bureaucracy. They were the first to use a 60-second minute and a 60-minute hour.
- Sumerians invented pictograms (a form of rebus drawings), which later developed into a script called cuneiform. It is the first known written language and is unrelated to any other known language. It is said to predate Egyptian hieroglyphs by 75 years.
- In order to live in Mesopotamia, a people would have to master the Tigris and Euphrates rivers to ensure water for agriculture and drinking year-round. The Sumerian language is full of words for canals, dikes and reservoirs, indicating that they were farmers who moved south after perfecting the art of irrigation.
- One of the major crops in Mesopotamia is barley, which isn't good for making bread, but it does make very good beer. Mesopotamians were avid beer drinkers, and had a hymn to a beer goddess *Ninkasi* that praises beer as the drink that makes the liver happy and fills the heart with joy.
- The Sumerians practiced a polytheistic religion in which gods and goddesses represented forces in the world, similar to the deities in Greek mythology. These gods originally created humans as servants, but freed them when they became too much to handle.
- Sumerians believed that the universe consisted of a flat disk enclosed by a tin dome. The Sumerian afterlife involved a descent into a nether-world to spend eternity as a *gidim*, or ghost.
- Sumerian women were protected by late Sumerian law and were able to achieve a higher status in Sumer than in other contemporary civilizations. In fact, the oldest and most powerful gods of the region, including Ana, who ruled the sky, and Inana, deity of love and war, were not gods, but goddesses. However, the culture was still male-dominated.