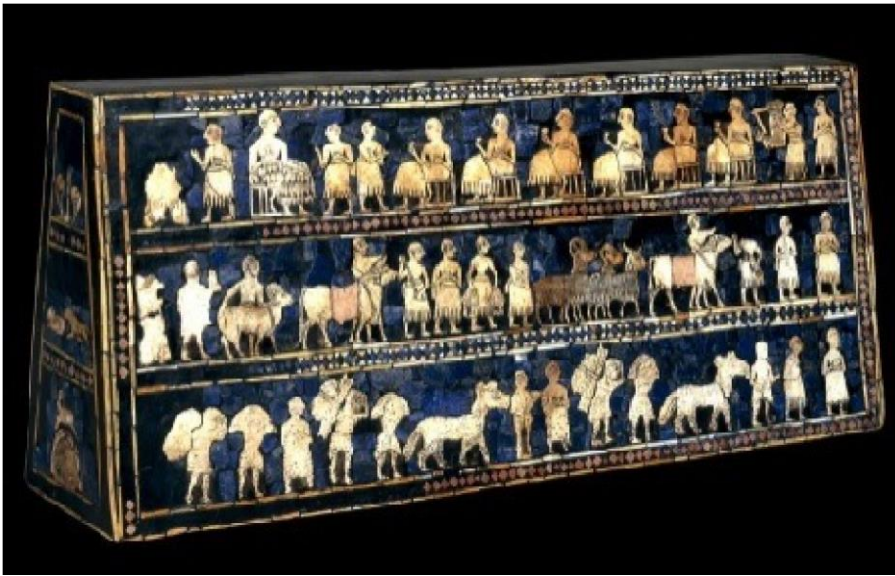


Standard of Ur Narratives, Introduction

An introduction to the complex narrative of events displayed on the Royal Standard of Ur.

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(Hint: press the CTRL key when clicking on a link to make it display in a separate tab.)



The Standard of Ur, peace side, circa 2500 BC.

The Royal Standard of Ur is the icon of Sumerian civilization. It shows the Sumerians in war, the Sumerians in peace, and the Sumerians in the practice of their religion. Every book or website about the Sumerians includes a picture of the Standard of Ur. The word “icon” is much overworked these days (everything is “iconic”) but the Royal Standard of Ur is literally *the* icon of an entire civilization, in the same way the Statue of Liberty is *the* icon of American civilization.

The Standard of Ur was discovered almost 100 years ago. It has always been regarded as a work of art, but it has never received proper credit for what it really is: an historic record. It has been given only a cursory examination by the historians, with very little commentary as to its content. If you do an Internet search on the Royal Standard of Ur, you will find that very little has been written about it (and half of it isn't true).



The king, peace side.

For almost a century, no one ever tried to figure out the message that is conveyed on the Standard of Ur.

That's because the Royal Standard of Ur is classified as "possibly a sound box for a musical instrument." This is how it is described by the British Museum, where the standard is kept. It is difficult to take the standard seriously as an historic record if it's just a music box.

As explained on the page, [What is the Standard of Ur?](#), there was never any chance that the standard was a musical instrument. The Standard of Ur is exactly what Leonard Woolley said it is – a royal standard. The evidence is provided by the standard itself (you may want to read that page before proceeding with this one, although it is not entirely necessary).

It trivializes the Royal Standard of Ur to say it is possibly a music box (it's like saying the Statue of Liberty is "probably a lamp"). It deprives the standard of its proper place in history. Not only is this a *royal* standard, the ensign of a king, but it is the oldest royal standard in the world (by far).

This standard belonged to a king, a great king, one of the first great kings in world history. If archeologists were fortunate enough to find the royal standard of Alexander the Great, it would be a sensational discovery, but it would not be as historically important as the Standard of Ur – because this standard is more than 2,000 years older than Alexander. He died in 323 BC. There's as much time between Alexander and the standard as there is between us and Alexander.



The battle scene on the standard is not just some generic decorations on a music box. It is a highly detailed account of a specific battle, fought by a specific king, against a specific enemy.

In this battle, a Sumerian king of Ur defeated the Akkadian king of Kish in personal combat. He thus became the new King of Kish, the ruler of Sumer and Akkad, the “King of Kings.”

This battle was the king’s greatest victory, the proudest moment of his life, and the fulfillment of his life-long ambition. That is why it is immortalized on the war side of the standard. The peace side of the standard shows us how he ruled his Sumerian and Akkadian subjects after the war was over.

The imagery on the Standard of Ur is not just “symbolic” or “emblematic,” it is a complete narrative. It is a complex and subtly nuanced tale of War and Peace. The war side of the standard shows us exactly how the battle was fought, and how it was won (it was an epic battle, and a bloody one). The peace side subtly illuminates the geopolitics of Mesopotamia, especially the complicated relationship between the Sumerians and the Akkadians. Even the end panels, which are usually described as “fanciful scenes,” are complete narratives. They have their own stories to tell.



The king, war side.

The narrative on Standard of Ur is all about being a Sumerian King of Kish – ruthless in war, but magnanimous in peace.

This royal standard always accompanied the king. Wherever he went, so did the standard. When people saw this standard, they knew they were in the presence of the King of Kings.

For them, the message on the Standard of Ur was clear:

Resist the king and die in war, or accept the king and live in peace.

See the [War Side](#).