

## Tell 'Uqair "Painted Temple"

A still more perfectly preserved example of an early Sumerian temple has been recently (1940) unearthed at Tell 'Uqair, forty miles south of Baghdad, near the ancient city of Cutha devoted to the infernal god Nergal. Its excavation is in progress under the Directorate of Antiquities of Iraq. Like the White Temple of Uruk, it may be dated *circa* 3000 B.C. Its rich fresco paintings which give it its name have been removed to the Baghdad Museum. The temple proper stands on a low platform, supported by a large oval mud brick platform six metres high over the foundations, suggesting the first model of a stage tower. Right and left at the end of the retaining wall, staircases lead to the top of the large platform, and a small stairway leads to the second platform. The temple is entered by a central door in the middle of the long—northeast—side. There is a second door on the left. The walls of both platforms and of the temple are decorated with vertical recesses. A double recess frames the doorway. The top of the platform is paved with bitumen. The edge is decorated with a mosaic of hollow-ended clay cones. The same was repeated on the front of the shrine and is represented in painting on the front of that altar. Geometrical patterns painted on mud plaster decorate the jambs of the central door. A small antechamber leads into a large rectangular hall, with walls in place nearly five metres high. The altar is not in the axis of the door, but on the right, built against the short end of the hall. A flight of steps on the right gave access to the top, the sacred place before the cult statue or the emblem. A niche is cut in the wall at the other end of the hall. Walls and altar are painted in bright colours. A plum-red dado, one metre high, is surmounted by a band of geometric motives in red, yellow, black and brown, and a frieze of human figures and mythical animals. There is a black spotted leopard along the altar stair, and a lion *seyant* on the nearby wall. The front of the altar represents a frieze of mosaic above a recessed wall. Above the altar a procession of dark red cows seems a forerunner of the sacred herd of al-'Ubaid. More paintings are faintly visible in the adjoining sacristy: an enthroned king (?) and a procession of human beings. From here a staircase led to the flat terraced roof.