

THE EXCAVATIONS AT UR

BY G. B. GORDON

THE Preliminary Report of Mr. C. L. Woolley in charge of the work of the joint expedition of the British Museum, University Museum to Mesopotamia, has by mutual agreement been published in *The Antiquaries Journal*. This Report covers the first season's work at Ur (1922-23). A brief summary and paraphrase of the contents of this report in less technical language together with some additional illustrations made by the Expedition will be of interest for readers of the JOURNAL at this stage of the work. It is as follows.

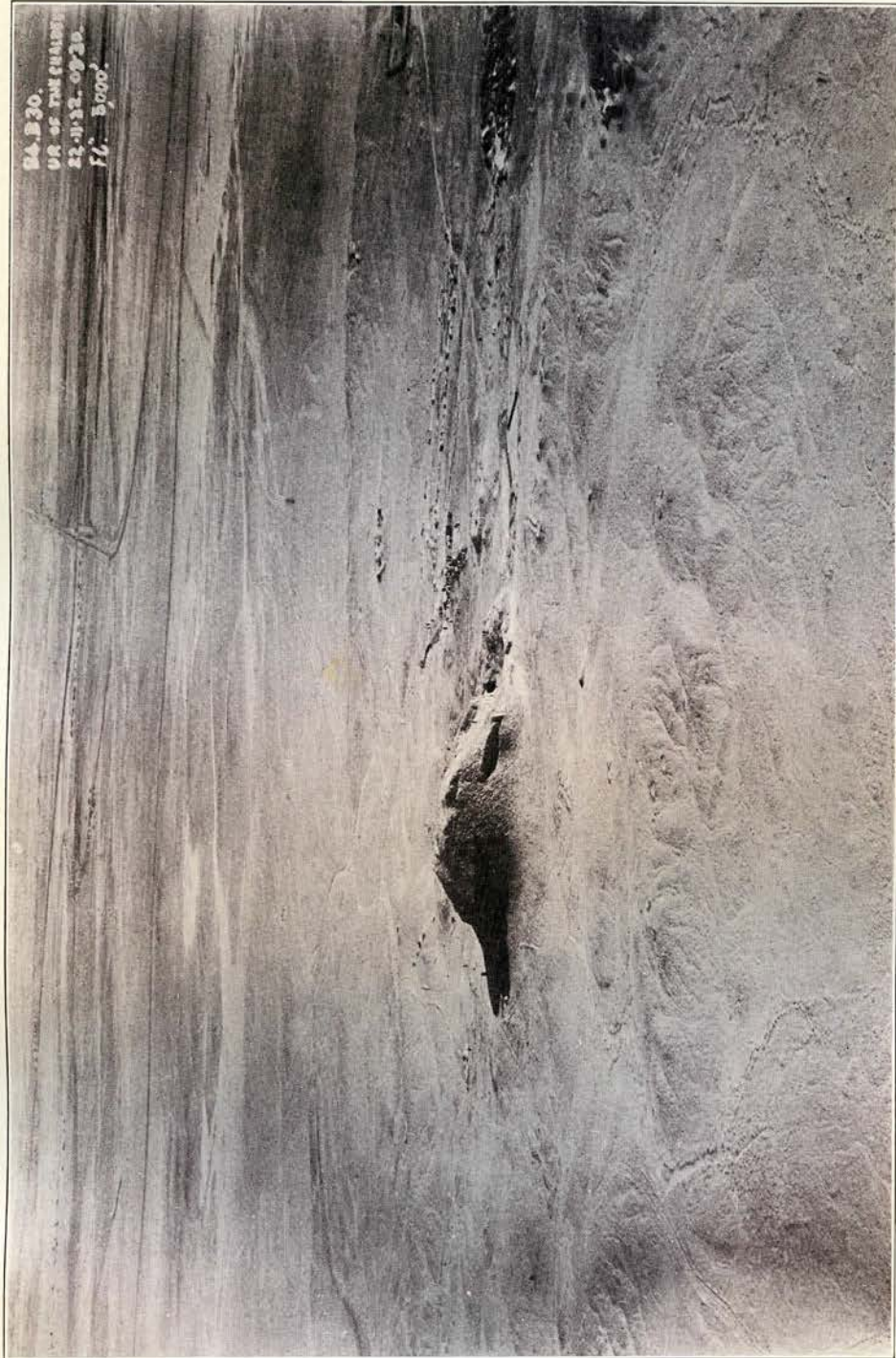
The most interesting feature of the last season's excavation was that conducted upon the Temple of the Moon God, in an effort to lay bare what remains of its structure. The members of the Expedition, in addition to Mr. Woolley, were Mr. F. G. Newton, Mr. Sidney Smith and Mr. A. W. Lawrence, and the labour was recruited from the Muntafek Arabs of the district.

The Temple of the Moon God as revealed by the work of the Expedition divides itself into three main historic periods. The first begins in a remote prehistoric time of unknown antiquity and runs through the third and the second millennium B. C. down to the close of the 7th century B. C.

THE EARLY TEMPLE

This first period shows a long succession of builders whose restorations always left the ancient edifice unchanged in plan though improved in methods of construction. In the lowest levels reached in the excavations the walls were found to be of mud. Later construction on the same lines was of sundried brick, and later still came burnt brick. The earliest construction to which even an approximate date could be assigned belonged at the end of the fourth millennium B. C. This was of the plano-convex form of burnt brick with finger marks at the place which, in bricks of later periods, is occupied by stamps. The earliest stamped bricks found in the temple walls are those of King Bur-Sin (2250 B. C.). Above this the walls showed an obvious change indicating the reconstruction

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UR OF THE CHALDEES
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Ur of the Chaldees from the air. By courtesy of the R. A. F., Baghdad.



The west corner of the Ziggurat or staged tower at Ur.

by King Kudur-Mabug (2000 B. C.). The whole temple stood on a platform faced with brick. This platform was about 8 feet high.

All of the repairs and reconstructions applied at different times to the temple during the long early period of its history were presumably rendered necessary by the wars by which Ur suffered so much. One of these was the Elamite War when King Ibi-Sin (c. 2150 B. C.) was carried captive to Elam. After Kudur-Mabug there are evidences of another sacking of the City and destruction of the temple and another rebuilding of it. Beneath the pavements of some of the rooms were found many evidences of a victorious enemy, such as smashed stone vases and other objects of fine workmanship, often inscribed with royal names.

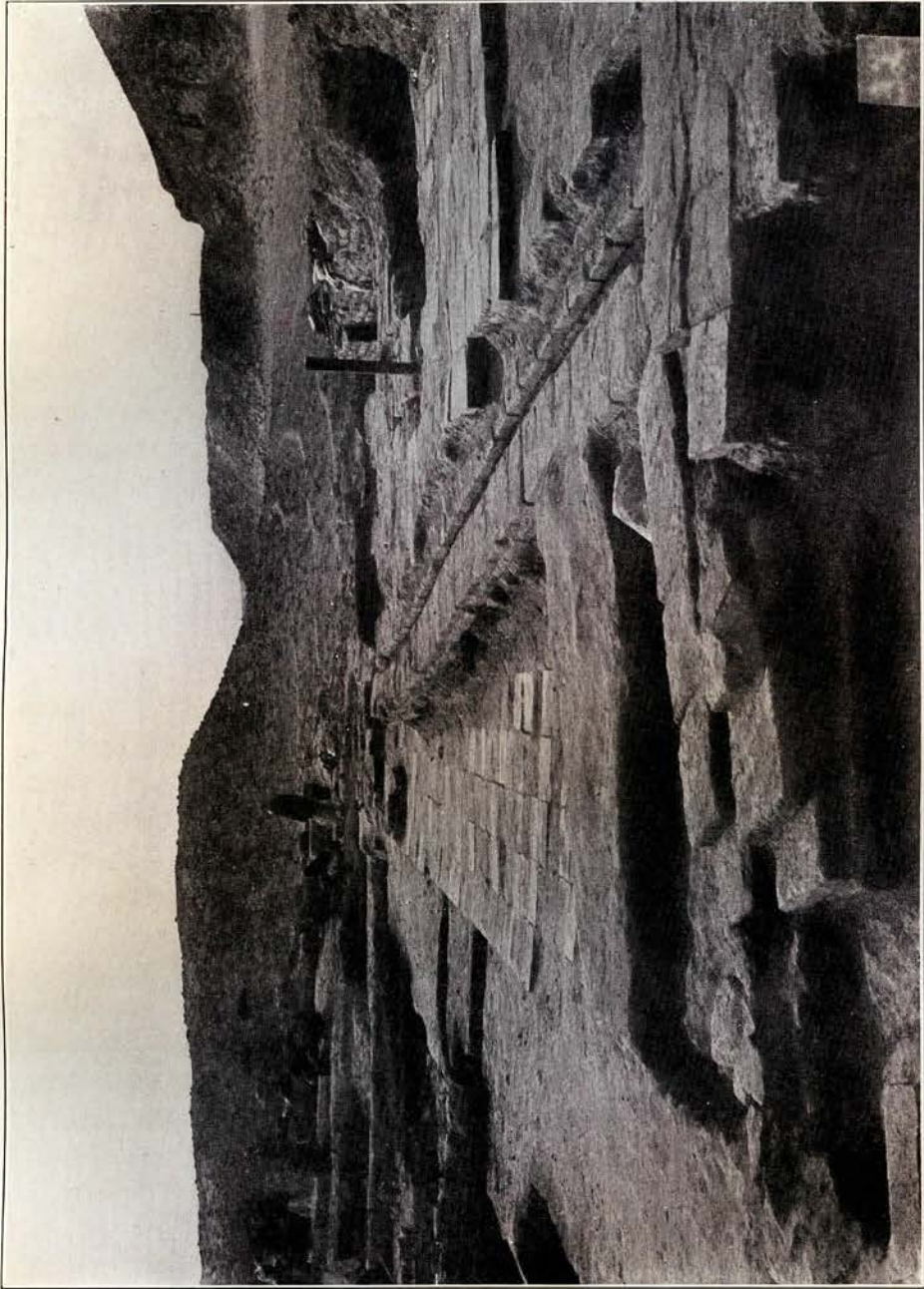
This temple was the house of the Moon God and his consort where he and she were worshipped and attended by the priests whose apartments formed part of the sacred structure occupying the platform. There was no room on that platform or in the temple for the public. When the god made a public appearance he went in procession through the streets of Ur.

THE NEBUCHADREZZAR TEMPLE

Nebuchadrezzar did not restore, he remade the temple, completely changing its ancient character. The old sanctuary he respected, laying down new brick pavements at the original floor level and putting, in the two central rooms, altars which may perhaps have but reproduced altars of an earlier period; in the entrance hall, immediately facing the outer door, he built against the back wall a platform which was beyond doubt the base for a cultus image. But the surroundings of the sanctuary he wholly transformed. Two small wings were built out from the front of the sanctuary, and between them stretched a brickpaved courtyard in the middle of which, in front of the door, was set up a brick altar; and in front of it is a table of offerings and behind it a stool; the brickwork is covered with a very heavy coating of bitumen, obviously intended as a bedding for metal plates, and the paving from the altar to the back of the threshold is similarly covered with bitumen. Over the ruins of the service chambers in front there was laid another brick pavement at a slightly lower level; the step down from the first courtyard, which ran flush with the facade of the wings, was of sundried brick and was presumably covered with bronze. A big under-



E-Nun-Mah, the Temple of the Moon God.



The Persian pavement and drain laid down over Nebuchadrezzar's Upper Court in the Temple of the Moon God.

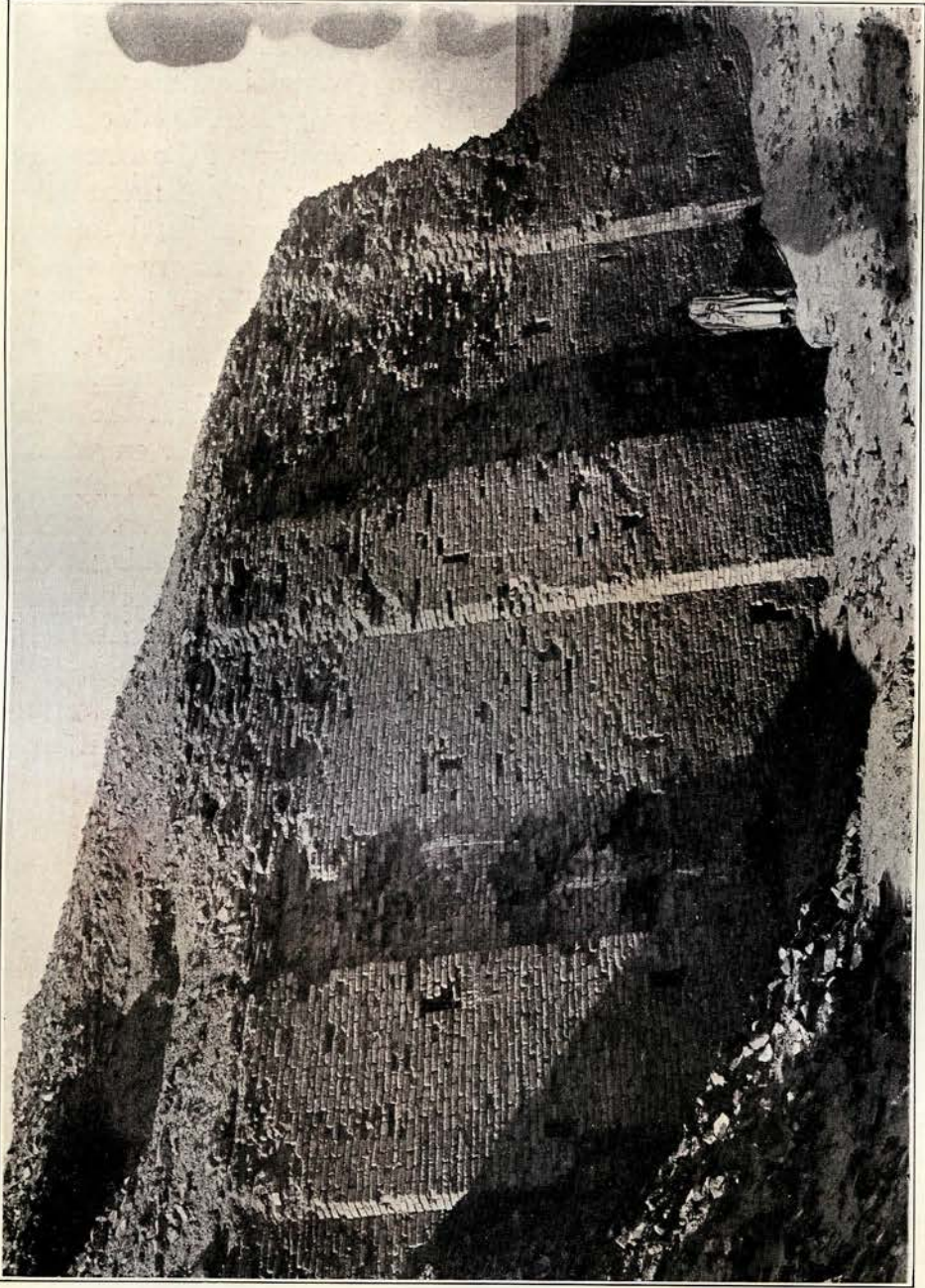
ground drain running down to the Temenos wall is also Nebuchadrezzar's work.

The effect of these changes of plan is to substitute for a crowded complex of buildings where only a private ritual was possible, an open temple suitable for and therefore presumably intended for public worship. The old rites of feeding the god and goddess and so on were probably continued in the inner chambers of the sanctuary which as before would be closed to the profane; but to these there must have been added a new element of congregational service. The upper court with its altar can only have been reserved to the priests, the great lower court is as clearly intended for the lay public. Those would see the sacrifice performed in front of them; they would see the gifts upon the altar, the altar itself, the ministrant priest behind it, standing on his footstool, and through the open door behind the priest they would catch glimpses of the enthroned god himself half hidden in the gloom of his sanctuary. Irresistibly we are reminded of the biblical legend of the Three Children. That Nebuchadrezzar should make a golden image was nothing new, every king had done something of the sort; what brought trouble on the pious Jews who had up to the time of the proclamation lived undisturbed was the order that at the sound of the music everybody should fall down and worship, i. e. that the public was to attend and participate in the service. Such an innovation (and the legend must have had some historical background to give it probability) is precisely what we should deduce from the archaeological evidence—that Nebuchadrezzar introduced a new plan of building to accommodate a new form of worship.

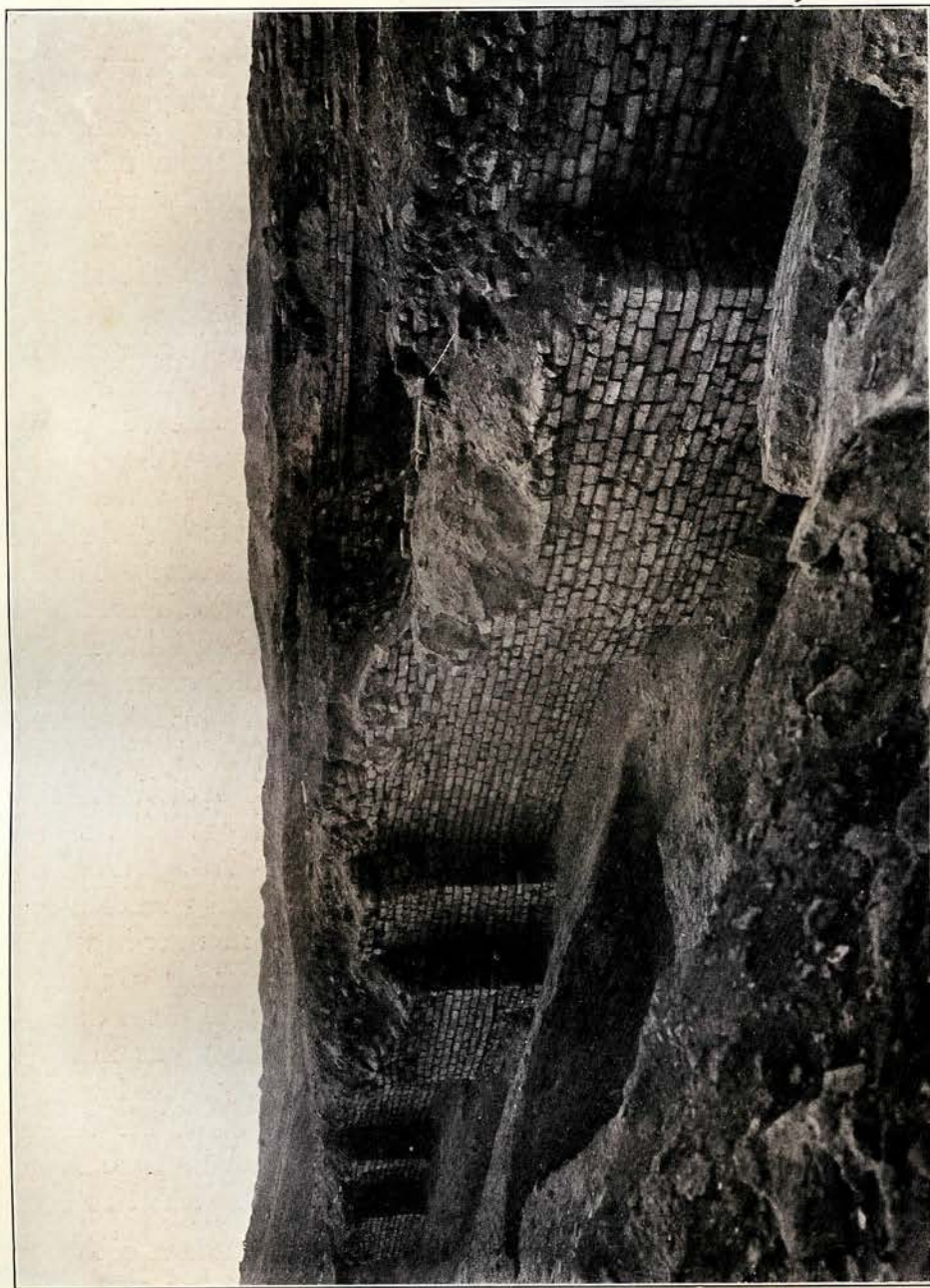
THE PERSIAN PERIOD

After his conquest of Babylonia, Cyrus the Great established Persian rule over all that country. From 538 B. C. he called himself King of Babylon and King of the World. In that year he permitted the Jews whom Nebuchadrezzar had kept captive in Babylon to return to Jerusalem and restore the temple as related in the Bible. About the same time he himself set about restoring the temple of the Moon God at Ur as revealed by the excavations now going on.

Wherever evidence is forthcoming we find that the fittings and altars of the Nebuchadrezzar temple were reproduced in the Persian period. Assuming that this was the case throughout, it answers remarkably well to the description of the great temple of



Southeast face of the Ziggurat or staged tower at Ur being uncovered by the Expedition.



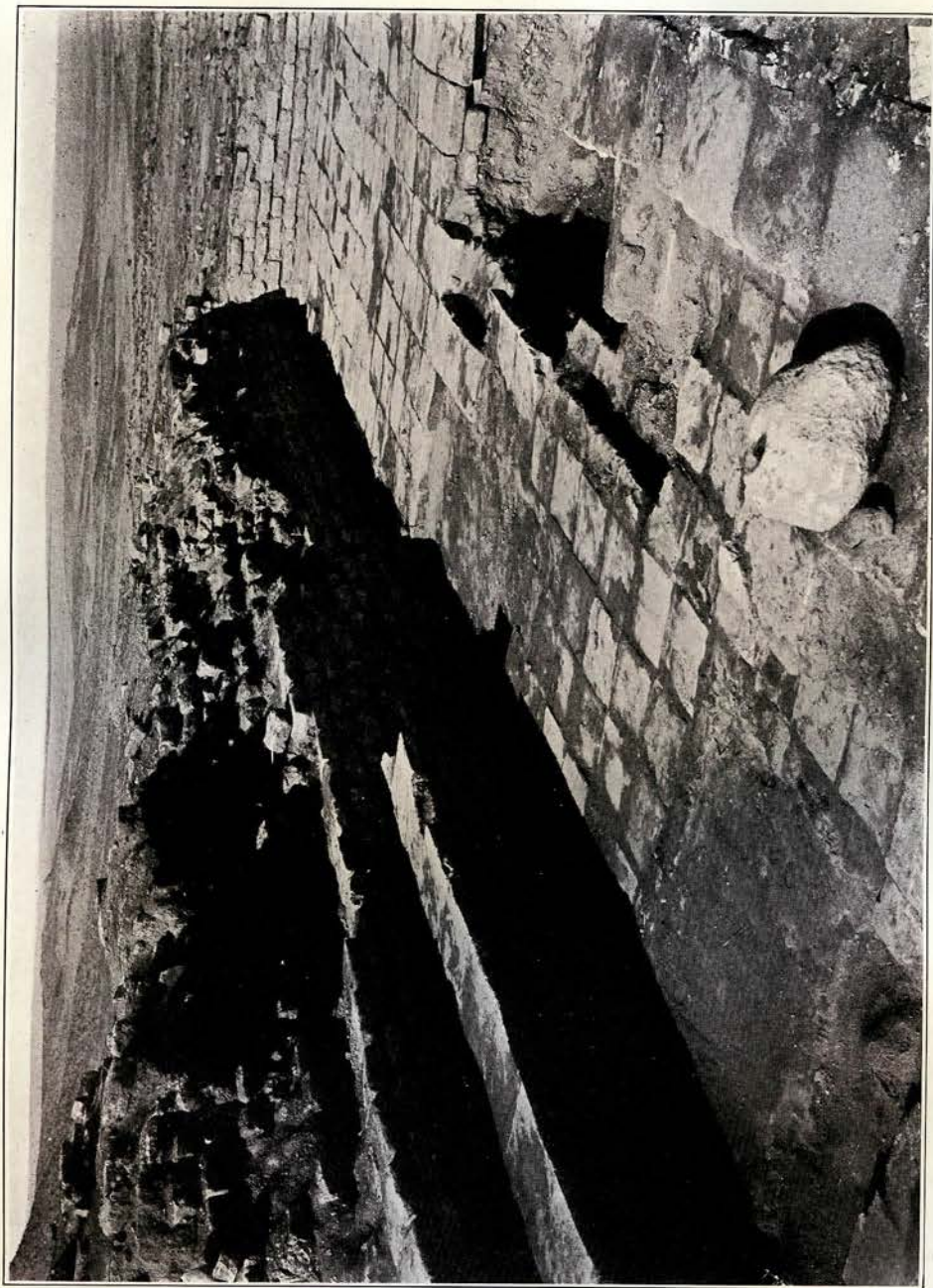
E-Nun-Mah, the Temple of the Moon God. Showing the brick wall of the platform on which the temple stood.

Bel at Babylon as Herodotus describes it in the time of the Persian kings. He says "Connected with the temple of Babylon there is a separate lower shrine wherein is a great seated statue of the god wrought in gold . . . and outside the shrine is a golden altar. And there is also another great altar on which are sacrificed the full-grown sheep, for on the golden altar only sucklings may be offered."

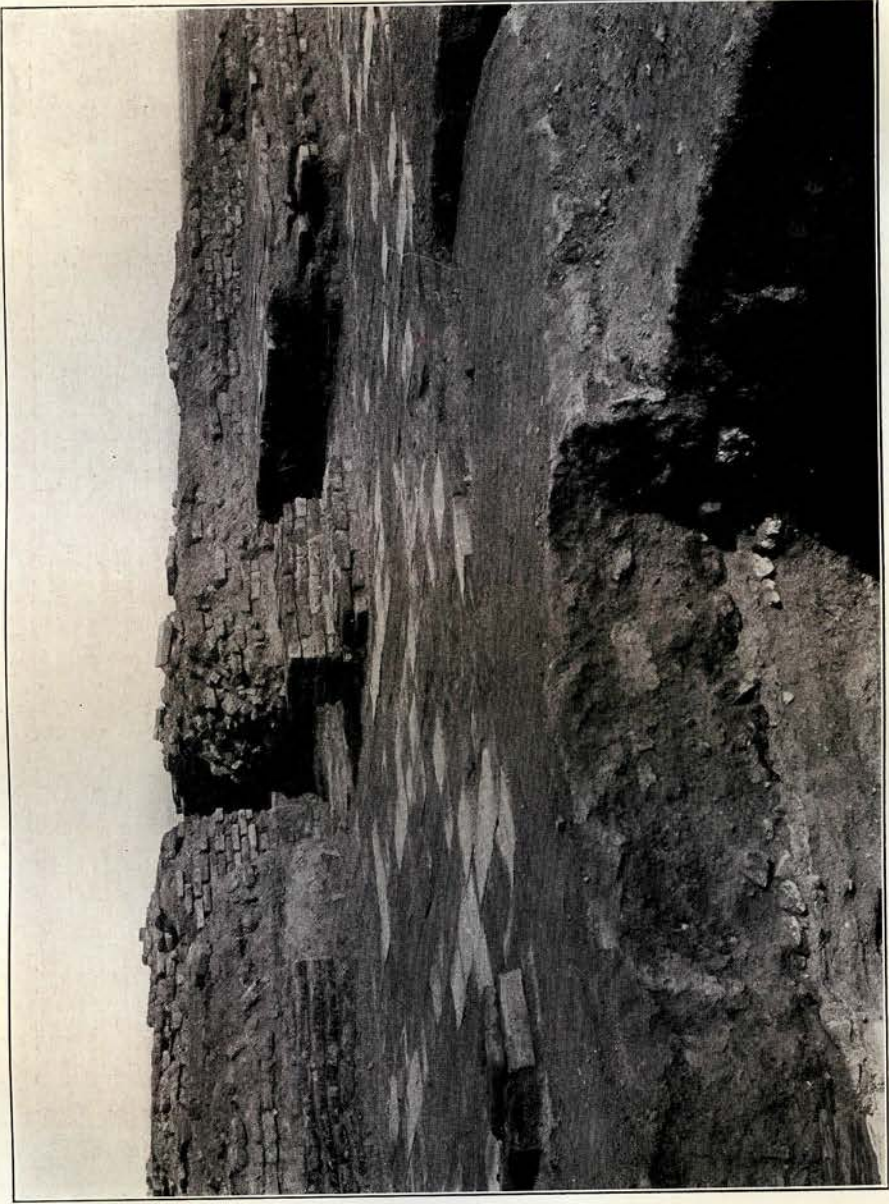
At Ur we have the temple standing in the same relations. Inside the door of the shrine is the base for the image, which probably enough was of gold; in front of the door we have the altar which, as already stated, was certainly overlaid with metal; its small size is suitable to an altar intended only for incense or small offerings. Of the larger altar for blood sacrifice there are no remains, but there may be evidence for it. The drain across the upper court has already been described; that it served as a surface drain for rain water is unlikely, as there is no fall of the pavement level to it, and in any case it seems hardly fitting to run off dirty water by a channel passing right in front of the altar and across the whole of the sacred area. If we suppose that the altar stood where the drain comes to the surface, its presence would accord with Herodotus' account, and it would be quite appropriate that the blood from the sacrifice should run off between the altar and the congregation, enhancing with each act of worship the sanctity of the Holy Place.

It is interesting to observe that of the three periods distinguished by Mr. Woolley, the first is measured by millenniums and the others by centuries. This only brings into prominence the fact that our greater proximity to the later periods gives us an exaggerated idea of their relative importance. It also illustrates the manner in which the earlier period would resolve itself into a long succession of shorter periods if we knew the details of its history. Some of these details will without doubt be brought out by the investigations now in progress. The work during the present season is directed partly towards a more complete excavation of the temple of the Moon God, partly to clearing the Ziggurat or Great Tower and partly to other features. Attention is also being given to the small ruin of El Obeid, four and a half miles farther west.

Mr. Woolley in his report makes reference to the help and cooperation of the Iraq Government. He alludes especially to the interest taken by His Majesty King Feisal and his support of the Joint Expedition and concludes as follows. "In thanking particu-



E-Nun-Mah, Temple of the Moon God. Nebuchadrezzar's pavement and at the left a remnant of the Persian pavement, laid down over it.



E-Nun-Mah, the Temple of the Moon God. Nebuchadrezzar's Upper Court and Altar.



Drain pipe below the floor in the Temple of the Moon God.

larly Miss Gertrude Bell, Honorary Director of Archaeology, and Lt. Col. Tainsh, Director of Railways, from whom I received the most substantial assistance, I do not forget the many others who in the most practical manner showed their sympathy with our work."

It should be added that the Royal Air Force has rendered very distinguished service to archaeology by the photographs they have made from the air on behalf of the Expedition. It should also be recorded that the officers and men of the Royal Air Force who may be said to have the country under their watchful eye have shown a keen interest in archaeology which has led them to take note of groups of ruins they observe in their flights. In a country where the archaeological topography is practically unknown, these casual observations will prove of the greatest value.

The collections obtained, to which allusion has already been made in an earlier number of the JOURNAL, were divided according to the terms of agreement between the Iraq Government and the Joint Expedition. An exhibition was held in the British Museum during the summer and at its close the objects pertaining to the share of the two Museums were equally divided between them.

The cooperative plan whereby the two Museums have been enabled to join forces for the exploration of one of the ancient cities of antiquity for the benefit of knowledge and in the equal interest of the two Museums, with the fullest regard for the rights and interests of Iraq, as Mesopotamia is now called politically, has proved satisfactory to everyone concerned. The work of the Expedition was conducted in the most scientific way. It was also done in a way to afford the greatest amount of benefit and information to all who were interested. Visitors were always welcomed at the works and at the house of the Expedition and everything was open for inspection. Moreover at the close of the season's work, Mr. Woolley with the cooperation of Hon. Gertrude Bell, Honorary Director of Antiquities, and Major Wilson of the Ministry of Works arranged a public exhibition of the finds at Baghdad where Mr. Woolley lectured on the results of his work and where the Iraqis and Europeans resident in the country could see the material part of these results for themselves.

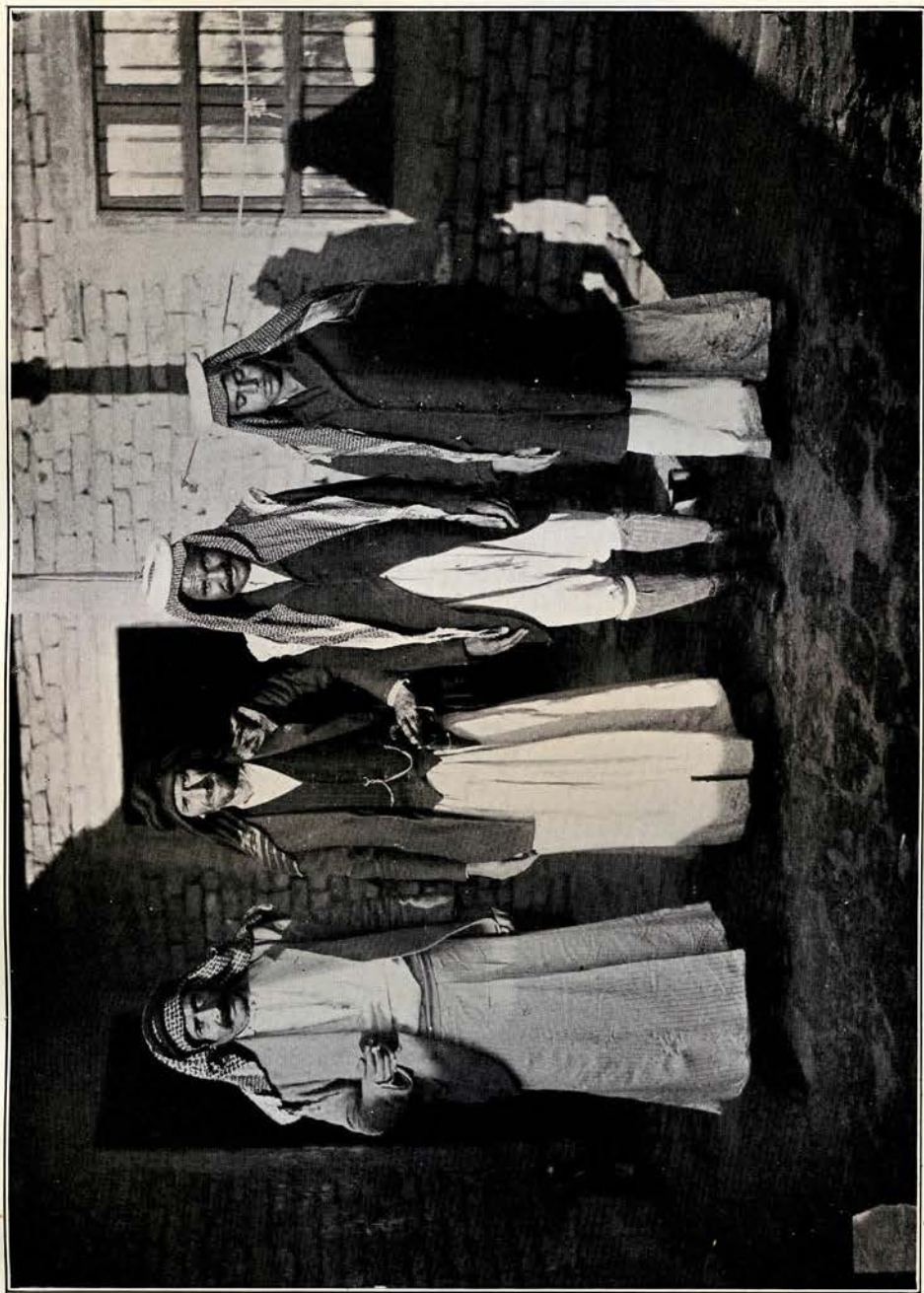
The proportionate share of the collections which, under the agreement, pertains to the Iraq Government will remain stored in Baghdad till a suitable place can be there provided for their preserva-



The Expedition house at Ur.



The Sheik of the local tribe, Munshid, and his following.



The house servants of the Expedition at Ur.

tion and care. Meantime the scholars on the Expedition and in the two Museums have the right and the duty of assuring the scientific treatment, study and publication of the objects so appropriated as well as the objects pertaining to their respective shares.

The Expedition to Ur, the first archaeological mission to be sent to Mesopotamia since the war is now in the second season of its field work. As we go to press the first report from Mr. Woolley announces a successful opening of this second season.