

A GREAT TEMPLE OF BABYLONIA

BY C. LEONARD WOOLLEY

Director of the Joint Expedition of the British Museum
and the University Museum, to Mesopotamia

MORE and more clearly as the work of excavation goes on at Ur of the Chaldees do we see the real nature of the Moon God's temple. To understand it one must rid one's mind of all ideas derived from the self contained and isolated unity of the temples of Greece, of Rome or of Egypt; here there is a different conception of the deity and corresponding to that a different conception of how he should be housed. The Babylonian god was a king, the Lord of his city; he controlled its destinies much as did the temporal ruler and therefore he must have his ministers and his court; he was a great land owner, and therefore he needed stewards to manage his estate: there are preserved lists of the functionaries attached to a temple which have a curiously mundane sound; of course there is a High Priest and a body of priestly satellites, but we find too the Sacristan, the Choir Master, the Treasurer, Ministers of War and of Justice, of Agriculture and of Housing, a Controller of the Household, a Master of the Harem, and Directors of Live Stock, Dairy Work, Fishing and Donkey Transport. All these carried on their duties in the Temple precincts, and so the Temple is not a single building but a huge complex which is at once temple and palace, government offices and stores and factories.

At Ur this complex, called E-gish-shir-gal, covered an area some four hundred yards long by two hundred yards wide, surrounded by a heavy wall. In the west corner of the enclosure was a raised platform also defended by walls, whereon rose the ziggurat tower, and below the ziggurat stood the particular private house of the God. If in some respects we might compare the whole temple to a rambling mediaeval monastery, in others we might find the best parallel in a mediaeval castle, with the ziggurat and its platform representing the keep, the walled temple enclosure the inner baily, and the walled city beyond the outer baily; for the god of the Babylonian city was a War Lord, and his house was a house of defence, the final stronghold of his people.

Just as in a cathedral there are chapels dedicated to many saints, so in E-gish-shir-gal there were many shrines where subordinate gods received their worship, but these buildings are relatively unimportant: even E-Nannar, the Moon God's own house on the terrace, was not very large and in mere area was completely outdone by the more secular buildings which crowded the sacred Temenos. Upon the character of these a vivid light is thrown by the inscribed tablets found in the ruins, and fortunately, just as our plans of the site grow more complete and more complicated, tablets have turned up in far greater number. Apart from isolated finds, which are common enough, we have this season hit upon one small hoard of documents dating from the time of the Larsa kings (about 2000 B. C.) and a very large hoard, which indeed we have only started to unearth, dating from the last years of the Third Dynasty of Ur, about 2200 B. C., both series being business records of the Temple. As well as tithes, the God as landowner received either rent or a part share in the produce of the soil, and since money was unknown these were all paid in kind; and since the temple was also a fortress enormous quantities of food stuffs were stored within it, ready to meet the normal requirements of the temple staff but also to act as a reserve in case of war. For everything that was brought in a receipt was given, a little clay square carefully dated recording that so-and-so has paid in six pounds of butter of the best quality, so many bushels of barley, so much oil, sheep, cattle or what not; and every month a full balance sheet of all returns was drawn up with parallel columns shewing every farmer's contribution under separate headings. Just below the Ziggurat terrace there is a very large building exactly like the modern *khan* of the Near East, with a great courtyard surrounded by store rooms and with living quarters above its main gate; there is already some evidence for supposing that this was the Ga-nun-makh, the Great Storehouse, and it is easy to picture the countrymen driving in their donkeys laden with sacks of corn and piled baskets of cheese and butter and round-bottomed oil jars, crowding the courtyard, weighing and counting and disputing the tally, and going off at last with the clay receipt of which a duplicate had been duly filed by the chief clerk in his office over the gate. The Baghdad Customs House today must bear a very fair resemblance to the Great Storehouse of Ur four thousand years ago.

While the farmers and cowmen paid in country produce, the townsfolk used another currency; there are receipts for all sorts of

hides, for gold and silver from the jewellers, for copper from the smiths; and in one of the store chambers we find a furnace for melting copper, big jars full of copper scrap, and ingots of the metal presumably of some standard weight.

But if the revenues of the temple are carefully recorded, the outgoings are not less scrupulously checked, and these are just as illuminating for the life of the time. Naturally the temple officials drew their rations from the stores, and the issue vouchers were all preserved in the registry; every man had his regular allowance of food-stuffs, flour and oil, etc., for which he or his servants had to sign, and special issues were made in cases of sickness. But the most interesting records are those of the industrial side of the establishment. Numbers of women devotees were attached to the temple, and these were employed in regular factories; there were slaves similarly employed, and piecework was given out to others who had small workshops outside the temple precincts, and all these had to be supplied with the raw materials and with the food which was their wage. The main industry was weaving. In the building E-karzida alone 165 women and girls were kept at work, and we have the monthly and yearly accounts of the quantity of woollen thread supplied to each, and of the amount of cloth produced, each sort distinguished by quality and weight with due allowance for the wastage of thread in weaving. The rations are in proportion to the output, the older women receiving less than the young ones who would have larger appetites and could do better work, no more, in fact, than did the smallest children; thus if four pints of oil a day was the standard allowance for adults, children of different ages got two pints, one and a half or one, and the old women one also: for the sick there were special rates; if any one died, her name was kept on the books until the end of the financial year, but the date of death was recorded and an entry made against the name to the effect that thenceforward no rations were drawn! Temple servants sent on a journey were furnished with letters of credit enabling them to get supplies at the towns through which they passed. The whole system was thoroughly businesslike—cold bloodedly so, in fact—and it is hardly surprising that these servants sometimes ran away from their divine slave owner, so that we find letters issued for their extradition; but the records of it, which here I have very briefly summarised, have their dramatic side and wonderfully recreate the life which was led within the now ruined walls and courts of the Moon God's Temple.