

## EXCAVATIONS AT UR

### THE PALACE BUILDING OF NABONIDUS

BY M. E. L. MALLOWAN

In November 1930 the Expedition uncovered a mud-brick building with abnormally deep foundations on the north-east side of the ancient harbour. This proved to be larger than any building yet discovered at Ur. Unlike any other building in Ur, its size and ground plan bear a striking resemblance to the huge palace at Babylon. The burnt brick of the pavement had stamps of Nabonidus referring to the building of the E-Gig-Par. Similar bricks had in previous season been found in the Neo-Babylonian restoration of E-Dublal-Mah where there was also evidence of a school and museum belonging to the king's daughter Bel-Shalti-Nannar, sister of Belshazzar. The absence of adequate housing accommodation therein is explained by the discovery of the palace building. Here we have a magnificent cloister designed to enhance the dignity of the king's vice-regent at a time when Babylon was in sore need of the ever-doubtful allegiance of its southern dependencies.

On excavation, the building was discovered to be for the most part ruined down to floor level, but the mud-brick walls had foundations over three metres below pavement level, and this enabled us to obtain a complete ground plan. The abnormal depth of foundation seems to have been due to the damp character of the soil, for the palace lay adjacent to the site of the now disused harbour. At the same time this use of deep foundations was in keeping with the ancient traditional 'ush' building<sup>1</sup> whereby the foundations were made one-third of the total height of the superstructure. Here also the foundations of the building were filled up solid with earth and rubbish, and a raised floor was thus erected high and dry over the low-lying and damp site. The "ush" method of construction, though not hitherto discovered at Ur in the Neo-Babylonian period, has an excellent parallel in the Ishtar gate at Babylon — yet another constructive link with the Kasr.

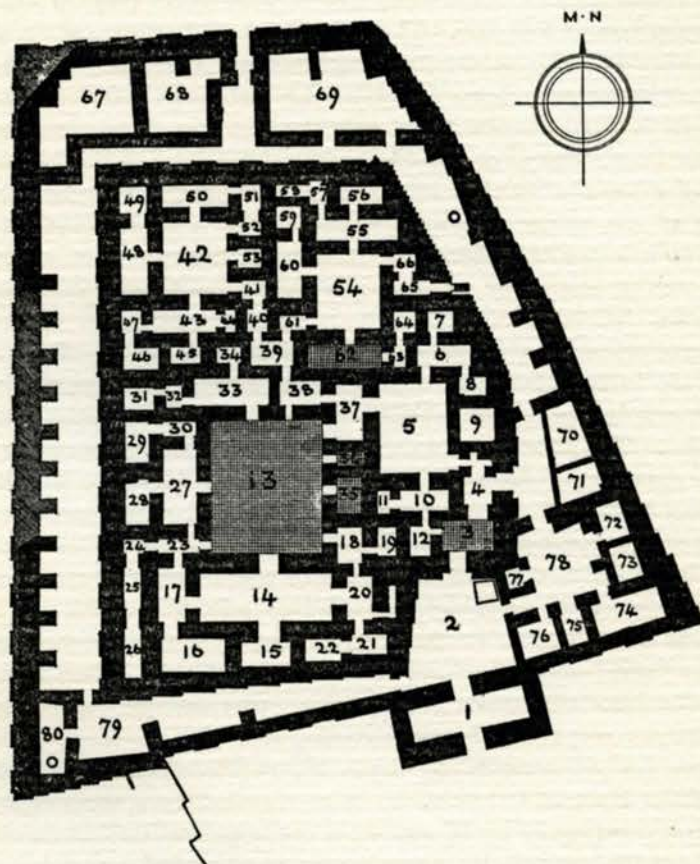
In area the site occupied by the buildings [Plate XXXI] is second only to that of the Kasr at Babylon. It is approached by a great square court or campus measuring 80 by 80 metres, and the palace itself has a maximum length of over 96 metres and a maximum breadth of 94.

<sup>1</sup> Foundations ran down 3.2 m. below pavement level. At 2.2 m. below the pavement there was a layer of matting. This was evidently the foundation of the "ush" proper. All the soil below it was damp and water-logged — the original surface into which the foundations of the wall had been dug. Above the matting rubbish had been thrown in, up to the level of the pavement. There was a considerable amount of burnt-brick rubbish and the interstices between the bricks proved that the rubbish had been deliberately thrown in at one time and was not gradual.

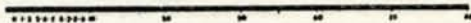
Where the foundations were excavated to their full depth it was seen that below pavement level the walls only had a very thin coat of plaster and had evidently never been exposed, whereas the plaster on the superstructure was often as much as 0.003 m. thick.

For the "ush" method of construction at Ur, cf. the "Gig-par-ku" and the Third Dynasty chambers of the great courtyard of the Nannar temple.

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SCALE OF METRES



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MENS. ET DELT. 1930.

PLATE XXXI.—WOOLLEY: Excavations at Ur, 1930-31.

The main building has an axis that lies north by south. The different line taken by the east and south walls seems to be due to the existence of earlier buildings on the site of the ancient rampart which lay to the east of the palace.

The principal approach to the palace is from the courtyard on the south. It consists of a defensive wall pierced by a monumental gateway which gives access to a large courtyard.<sup>1</sup> This gave approach to a subsidiary house lying about court 78 at the south-east corner of the building, and to the core of the palace proper which contained no less than eighty chambers. This apparent maze of chambers, however, resolves itself into a series of units differing in size but similar in character. The units are clearly residential and consist of open courts surrounded by a series of chambers. The central complex is flanked by a passage surrounding all four sides of the building with subsidiary chambers radiating from it on three sides, and on the north side a smaller postern gate<sup>2</sup> matching the main pylon entrance on the south; the postern gate is flanked by three very large chambers, 67, 68, and 69, possibly magazines.

The nucleus of the building consists of four open courts, Nos. 13, 5, 42, and 54. The fifth court 2 is an annexe to the main residential quarters, and is also the central feature of a rather smaller house necessarily different in character from the other units of the building, owing to its accessibility from all sides. Courts 13, 42, and 54 are respectively the central features of residences, all of which are very similar. Court 13, which measures 17 by 15 metres, is the centre of the largest and most important house, presumably the dwelling of the high priestess herself. The similarity of ground plans is remarkable. Court 13 leads to a large oblong room 14, bearing all the characteristics of the Liwan or reception room, the largest in the house, with a wall on the court side thicker than the other party walls. This gives access to an inner private chamber 15. It will be observed that the arrangement of court, Liwan and inner chamber, 13, 14, and 15 of house 1, corresponds to 42, 43, and 45 of house 2, and to 54, 55, and 56 of house 3, and further, the subsidiary chambers from the Liwan repeat themselves in each case: 16, 17, and 20 in house 1; 46, 47, and 44 in house 2; with a slight modification in house 3, 57 and 58, due to the exigencies of space enforced by the line of the east wall. The arrangement of rooms on the side opposite to the Liwan in each of the three houses also has a curious correspondence: 33 leading to smaller subsidiary rooms 31 and 32 in house 1, 50 leading to 51 and 52 in

<sup>1</sup> Court 2 had a deep bitumen-lined tank in one corner by the north door. This conjunction of doorway and tank has previously been found outside the Temenos wall of Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>2</sup> Under the pavement of the postern gate there were eight burnt-brick boxes containing painted mud Papsukal figures and the five sacred dogs, as well as a bronze dagger blade and an inscribed tablet unfortunately no longer decipherable. Three more boxes were also found in the entrance to room 4 and there were several other looted boxes under other doorways in the interior of the building.

house 2, 62 leading to 63 and 64 in house 3, while in houses 1 and 2 there is a single self-contained chamber on the east side of the court, 35 and 53 respectively. House 1, which has the greatest ground plan, is given four rooms, obviously magazines, 23 to 26.

Not only do these three most important residential units bear a close resemblance to one another, but they bear a further close resemblance to the eastern half of the great house at Merkes<sup>1</sup> discovered by Koldewey in Babylon. The great house in Merkes has exactly the same arrangement of court, Liwan and inner chamber; further, in the Ur building, 21 and 22, and the corresponding chambers in the other houses, find exact parallel in the Merkes house. As at Babylon, in the most important houses the Liwan lies on the southern side of the court, doubtless so situated as always to enjoy cool and shade.

Perhaps the most remarkable feature of the Ur palace is the extraordinary series of shallow-stepped buttresses running in a long receding line along the east side of the building. On the east wall alone there are over one hundred buttresses. Although the peculiar line of the east wall must be accounted for by the lie of older buildings outside, it is not at all clear for what reason the buttresses were taken out in so shallow a series. It was a common Babylonian practice to break the monotony of a long line of wall by the construction of niches and recesses, as, for example, in the Temenos wall, where the arrangement follows the dictates of strength and convenience as well as the tradition of an older timber-work construction. We cannot, however, find a constructional reason for this shallow form of buttress; but here again Babylon supplies a remarkable analogy. In the Nabo-polassar Palace there are eighty stepped buttresses over a length of 80 metres, and the same feature is to be observed on the south side of the principal court in the Kasr, as well as on three sides of the great house in Merkes. There are moreover further analogies from private houses discovered this season at Ur; and whatever the reason for its existence there is no doubt that this very characteristic feature of the outside of the building completely dominated the whole of the secular Babylonian architecture of the later Babylonian period.

The Ur building reveals this feature only on two sides, east and south. On the west, the flanking passage widens considerably, and on the inside of the outer boundary wall there is a system of piers running very nearly up to the end of the wall. These may have carried the springers for vaulted shelters, which could then be carried up solid, thus nearly doubling the thickness of the western boundary wall. On the other hand, the absence of these piers at the north end of the wall is difficult to account for on this hypothesis.

<sup>1</sup> See *Babylon* by Koldewey, translated by Johns, p. 238. It should be noticed, however that Koldewey surmises that the small room corresponding to Ur 15 may have been a shop and at Babylon this actually had an entrance opening into a street; neither fact is true of the Ur palace room.

No traces of roofing were discovered in the debris, but it seems obvious from the ground plan that the courts were open to the sky and served as light wells; at all events the large majority of the rooms would be roofed. There was a staircase leading to the roof or possibly to an upper floor in room 20 in house 1, and there may have been a staircase in room 58 in house 3. The staircase of room 65 in house 3 was subterranean, and seems to have been a temporary stair erected for the bricklayers during the time of construction. Analogies from Babylon and Ur for this period show that buildings were for the most part not more than one storey high, and the immense area covered by the ground plan tends also to show that this palace also must have been a single-storied building.

It is interesting that there is a considerable discrepancy of levels in the great campus or court that formed the approach to the palace. The pavement level on the north-east side of the campus was indicated by a door socket found in position at the northern end of the boundary wall; and trial trenches revealed that the ground must have sloped gently from the north-east to the south-west, descending from the high-lying ground abutting on the ancient rampart to the low-lying harbour temple area. The foundations of the southern boundary wall of the great courtyard step downwards with the slope of the hill from north-east to south-west. In the southern wall there were a small pylon entrance which projected 1.5 metres from the line of the main wall. Owing to denudation, the southern corner had vanished, and only a very small strip of the western boundary wall was discovered. This enclosed the harbour temple, and by the west corner of the palace there was a very heavy double wall 15 metres thick from inner to outer face, possibly constructed to bridge the weakness in defence at the junction of the harbour temple and palace.

Seen from the south end of the campus the palace must have been an imposing spectacle, rising in a series of stages from the low-lying harbour temple to the high pylon gate, perhaps capped by the lofty walls of the great Liwan on the south side of court 13, where the enormous thickness of party wall seems designed for great height.

The close conjunction of pylon gate, palace, and temple again affords an analogy with Babylon with its conjunction of Ishtar Gate, Nimmach Temple, and Kasr.

By position as well as construction, the Ur building bears the stamp of a palace, for it lay outside the Temenos but sufficiently close to its walls to allow of immediate access, and was almost opposite the gates leading to the moon god's temple.

There seems little doubt from the numerous analogies already demonstrated that the architects of the Ur palace were basing themselves on a royal prototype in Babylon. It is also interesting that, although in many points

of construction the Ur building resembles the Kasr in Babylon, the more intimate features of the ground plan have a closer connexion with the great house of Merkes. This is in accordance with the supposition that the Ur building was the residence not of the king but of the king's daughter. The division of the palace into distinct units may perhaps correspond to the prominent class divisions in the orders of priestesses. But whatever the interpretation of the distinctive units may be, it is obvious that so large a building directly inspired by the capital itself must have come under the personal cognizance of the king.