

## Ur

Known today as Tell el-Muqayyar, the "Mound of Pitch," the site was occupied from around 5000 B.C. to 300 B.C. In antiquity the city was known as Urim. The main excavations at Ur were undertaken from 1922–34 by a joint expedition of The British Museum and the University of Pennsylvania Museum, Philadelphia, led by Leonard Woolley. At the center of the settlement were mud-brick temples dating back to the fourth millennium B.C. At the edge of the sacred area a cemetery grew up, which included burials known today as the Royal Graves. An area of ordinary people's houses was excavated in which a number of street corners have small shrines. The largest surviving religious buildings, dedicated to the moon god Nanna, also include one of the best preserved ziggurats, and were founded in the period 2100–1800 B.C. For some of this time Ur was the capital of an empire stretching across southern Mesopotamia. Although Ur is famous as the home of the Old Testament patriarch Abraham (Genesis 11:29–32), there is no actual proof that Tell el-Muqayyar was identical with "Ur of the Chaldees."

In the 1920s the University of Pennsylvania and British Museum expedition to Ur, led by Sir Leonard Woolley, discovered the remains of a tall royal stele that had once stood in a courtyard just below the ziggurat terrace and seemed to honor Ur-Namma, founder of Ur's Third Dynasty. Broken into hundreds of pieces, the stele was once more than ten feet high with five registers of relief scenes on each side. The scenes illustrate various aspects of kingship, in part metaphorically, in part literally. On this fragment the king, whose head is missing, pours a libation into a small tree standing in a vessel set before a seated god wearing a heavy crown with four horns and the typical divine robe made of rows of tufts. The god extends his right hand holding a short staff and a coil made of five strands of rope with dangling ends looped up. In the lower register a bald servant at far right, helps a king carry building tools hung over an axe on his shoulder with a basket for making clay mortar and a collapsed plough for digging the earth to make mud bricks. A ceremony to make the first brick for a building is known from texts.