

Old Babylonian Ur: Portrait of an Ancient Mesopotamian City

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Research on Mesopotamian urbanism is still in its infancy, and one of the major obstacles to our understanding of the role of the city in this ancient culture is the scarcity of comprehensive studies on individual towns. The lack of such studies is not due to indifference but results from the limitations of the sources available to the researcher. The portion of an ancient Mesopotamian city exposed by archaeological excavations usually represents a very small percentage of the entirety of the settlement, which is due to the enormous amounts of time and money needed for this type of research. Although the site of Uruk, for instance, has been under investigation for several decades, only a tiny fraction of the whole city has been exposed. When textual material is available, it may be plentiful, but its usefulness is restricted as the documents of one site usually derive only from one of the great organizations—the palace or the temple—or only from private archives. These texts thus shed extensive light on only one segment of the society, while information on other sectors has to be gleaned from sparse references. The Pre-Sargonic texts from Girsu,¹ for instance, give a detailed image of the temple establishment of the goddess Bau but permit little insight in the city of Girsu. As long as these limitations on sources persist, it will be impossible for us to obtain a balanced view of these cities.

Although various research projects have been set up in recent years with the intention of obtaining broader coverage of some settlements (e.g., at Abu Salabikh, Abu Duwari, Tell ed-Der) and to formulate a more comprehensive image of an ancient Mesopotamian town, their goals will only be reached in the distant future and the study of available material is more promising for current research. Among the great expeditions of the past, the excavations by Sir Leonard Woolley at ancient Ur in the very south of modern-day Iraq provide us with a wealth of information that documents the five-millennia-long history of that city. Not only did the excavator uncover the various phases of the monumental architecture on the site, but he also unearthed extensive portions of the residential areas of the town, and gave information about its suburbs. Moreover, he was fortunate to discover texts from every period of prosperity in the history of the city. Not all centuries

1. For these texts, see Anton Deimel, *Sumerische Tempelwissenschaft zur Zeit Urukaginas und seiner Vorgänger*, An.Or. 2 (Rome, 1931).

are equally well documented, of course, and the textual sources are not always of a sufficiently varied background to detail the various sectors of society. The numerous tablets of the twenty-first century, for instance, derive all from the palace administration and ignore the private citizenry.

However, for the first three centuries of the second millennium B.C.E. the textual sources are both plentiful and of diverse origin. They document the activities of the temples of Nanna and Ningal, the main sanctuaries of Ur, of the palace, and of numerous private citizens whose houses were excavated. Owing to the fact that Ur was at the height of its economic development and attained the largest geographical extent of its entire history in the beginning of the second millennium B.C.E., many of the archaeological remains excavated date to this period as well. Thus we have a mixture of documentation for the city in this period that permits us to reconstruct the daily affairs of Ur in a more balanced way than at other sites.

An additional benefit of the use of Ur in the study of Mesopotamian urbanism is the exemplary nature of earlier publications and studies on the site. The excavation results of the early second millennium remains were published posthumously in 1976 by Woolley and Sir Max Mallowan in *Ur Excavations Volume VII: The Old Babylonian Period* (Publications of the Joint Expedition of the British Museum and of the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania to Mesopotamia). The manuscript of this volume, prepared by Woolley before his death in 1960, was extensively revised by the editor, T. C. Mitchell, who was able to remove some of the inconsistencies in the text, and greatly enhanced the information on the provenance of objects, especially of tablets. Most of the texts were published in 1953 by H. H. Figulla and W. J. Martin in *Ur Excavations Texts Volume V: Letters and Documents of the Old Babylonian Period*. The copies presented there are of an incredible accuracy, and only a few corrections have to be made.²

As soon as both the archaeological and textual materials became accessible, they were analyzed by Dominique Charpin in two substantial monographs. In his study and analysis of the tablets catalogued in the British Museum as coming from Tell Sifr, Charpin showed beyond a doubt that a number of them had been excavated at Ur in the mid-nineteenth century.³ In 1986 he published an extremely detailed study of the priesthood at Ur, analyzing several private archives found at the site.⁴ Simultaneously I. M. Diakonoff examined a number of private archives and studied the living conditions of the citizens of Ur. His results were published in 1990 in Rus-

2. I was able to collate all but a few misplaced texts in that volume thanks to the generosity of Dr. Muayed Said and Dr. Bahija Khalil of the Iraq Museum, Baghdad, of C. B. F. Walker of the British Museum, London, and of Prof. Åke Sjöberg and Prof. Erle Leichty of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Travel to these collections was made possible partly through grants from the Columbia University Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences in 1986 and 1987.

Unpublished material was made available to me by Jeremy Black and Marcel Sigrist. Darlene Loding allowed me to study unpublished tablets in the University Museum. To all these people I would like to express my gratitude.

3. *Archives familiales et propriété privée en Babylonie ancienne: étude des documents de "Tell Sifr"* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1980).

4. *Le clergé d'Ur au siècle d'Hammurabi* (Genève-Paris: Librairie Droz).

sian and are unfortunately only accessible to me from the English summary and from two articles published separately in English.⁵ The results of these investigations can be combined with an analysis of the remaining private archives and of those of the great organizations of palace and temples. When placed in their archaeological context, these sources can provide us with a good view of the city of Ur as it existed in the first three centuries of the second millennium. In the present article I shall describe some of the conclusions that can be drawn from my analysis of the material. I will devote special attention to the physical outlook of the city as well as to the existence of neighborhoods whose inhabitants have common professional interests.⁶

The city of Ur in the early second millennium was much more extensive than the present-day mound with which it is identified, Tell al-Muqayyer. The tell covers only the remains of the inner city, which in antiquity was surrounded by large suburbs stretching out in all directions. Unfortunately, little is known about these suburbs, the remains of which were mostly destroyed by later erosion. To the north of the tell traces of settlement are visible for about a mile, and it is clear that numerous domestic dwellings were located there. The northernmost point of these suburbs was probably the so-called Diqdiqqah site,⁷ where a large fortified building was partly excavated. Since many inscriptions referring to canals were found in that area, it is very probable that the sea harbor of Ur was located here,⁸ and the monumental building may have had some function in the protection of the harbor installations. The Diqdiqqah site was, however, also a manufacturing district. Numerous clay figurines were picked up there, as well as stone working tools, gemcutters' trial pieces, and cylinder seals. A mile to the east of the inner city of Ur a number of mounds covered with slag were noticed, possibly indicating that a metal-working industry was located there.⁹ It is no surprise that industrial activities would be located outside the city walls as these areas provided easier access to raw materials and water, and may thus have drawn certain types of craftsmen. At present no more information is available on the suburbs of Ur.

The inner city itself was located like an island in between the Euphrates River and a canal (see figure 1). It had an oval outline and measured some 1200 by 800 meters. No remains of a city wall were excavated, leading Woolley to suggest that protection was provided by the aligned backs of houses and buildings on the edge of the tell. In their inscriptions the kings Sin-iddinam (reigned 1849–1843 B.C.E.) and Warad-Sin (reigned 1834–1823 B.C.E.) boasted, however, that they had built the

5. *Men of Ur* (Moscow), English summary on pp. 424–28; "Extended Families in Old Babylonian Ur," *ZA* 75 (1985), 47–65; "Women in Old Babylonia not under Patriarchal Authority," *JESHO* 29 (1986), 225–38.

6. In this article I will only rarely give references to specific textual and archaeological documentation. All of that information is presented in detail in my book *Society and Enterprise in Old Babylonian Ur*, *Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient* 12 (Berlin, 1992).

7. The location of this site was never exactly indicated by the excavators.

8. The plan of Ur shows two harbors within the city walls, but these are not to be identified as the harbor district (*kārum*) referred to in the texts. The latter was certainly located outside the city walls as certain inheritance divisions make a distinction between property inside the city and property in the harbor.

9. Unfortunately there are no indications about the date of these deposits.

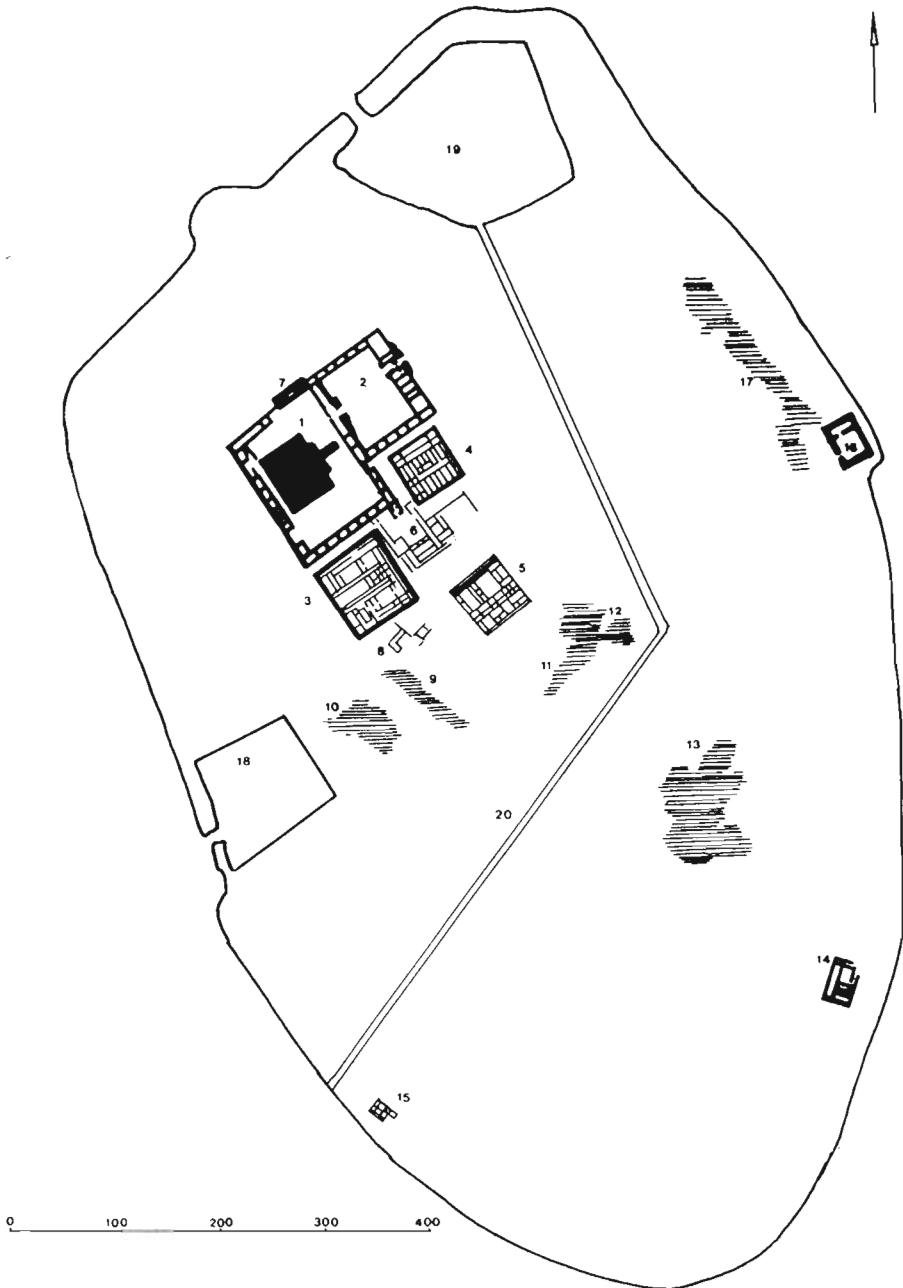


Fig. 1. The inner city of Ur (based on Woolley, *Ur Excavations* VII: pl. 116; scale in meters). 1 = Nanna temple; 2 = Nanna courtyard; 3 = *Giparu*; 4 = *Ganunmah*; 5 = *Ehursag*; 6 = *Edublamah*; 7 = Bastion of Warad-Sin; 8 = SM site; 9 = EH site; 10 = EM site; 11 = BC site; 12 = Mausoleum site; 13 = AH site; 14 = Enki temple; 15 = Ningizzida temple; 16 = Kassite fort; 17 = CLW site; 18 = West harbor; 19 = North harbor; 20 = canal.

walls of Ur. As there is no reason to doubt this claim, we should assume that their work was razed by the troops of the conquering Samsuiluna of Babylon in 1739 B.C.E. There was only one place where one could enter the town overland, a gate in the eastern wall with a bridge that crossed the water. But access could also be gained by boat through two small harbors at the northern tip and in the western side of the town. The northern harbor provided entrance to a canal that ran through the center of town. Other canals may have run through the city, greatly facilitating the transport of bulky items. Overland transport must have been much more difficult. All the remains of streets uncovered show that they were extremely narrow—some 2.5 to 3 meters wide—and wound through the town. Only a few areas were excavated, and we cannot determine how extensive the habitation was within the walls; but, as the excavators noticed early-second-millennium remains wherever they looked, it seems likely the entire surface of the mound was inhabited. The narrow streets were bordered by the windowless walls of adjoining houses, interrupted only by small doors. As litter was thrown on the streets, the street level rose constantly, at times, necessitating the construction of a few steps to get down into the house.

Woolley excavated various areas of domestic architecture all over the tell. The archaeological information provided is not always of the same detail, as the excavator considered some areas to be typical examples that could be used as representative sites. He only presented us with details on the areas that he designated EM, AH, and Mausoleum sites, while other domestic areas were excavated at the so-called BC, CLW, EH, and SM sites. These restrictions greatly limit our ability to interpret the material; but from what is available we can develop some image of the residential areas of the town.¹⁰

Two types of house were in use: the central courtyard house and the linear house. Both can be found in many different versions, as the changing fortunes of their inhabitants forced them to sell parts or allowed them to acquire rooms from neighbors. Moreover, in the division of parents' property after their death, dwellings were cut up and distributed among several male heirs. The original aspect of the houses was thus soon abandoned as families attempted to adapt to new circumstances within the extremely limited space available. The courtyard house was very similar in shape to the present-day Middle Eastern house. When entering it one stepped into a small vestibule that led to the central courtyard, where most of the household activities took place. The courtyard provided the only means of access to a small number of rooms surrounding it. The rooms had no outside windows, and all the available light entered through doorways leading to the courtyard. Although remains of stairways were discovered, it is highly unlikely that the houses had a second storey, as the walls were much too thin to support such weight. The stairs were used by the inhabitants to go up to the roof for various purposes, among them to sleep. The linear houses did not have a courtyard, only two to four rooms leading one into the other. No remains of stairs have been found in them, but it is possible that the inhabitants reached the roof by means of a ladder. It is unclear how the rooms in these houses were lighted.

10. Woolley provided a popular description of the excavated house remains in *Ur 'of the Chaldees'*, rev. P. R. S. Moorey (London, 1982), 192–213.

The living space available to the inhabitants was extremely limited. Unfortunately, the published plans of the domestic quarters are of such a reduced scale that accurate measurements are impossible, and it seems that the scale of the plans is not always accurate either. In some of these houses sale documents pertaining to rooms or the entire house were found, enabling us to compare the textual with the archaeological information.¹¹ Such comparisons make clear that the Mesopotamians took into account only the area within the walls, not including the thickness of the walls. This was probably the result of an ancient tradition to cover the floors to a certain height with barley in order to determine the sale price. This practice is referred to in a passage from the so-called reforms of Uruinimgina: "Pay me the price I want! My house is a large container—fill it with barley for me."¹² Walls in-between houses were regarded as the common property of the neighbors, and their repair was financed or undertaken jointly. This point is of importance when we compare ancient textual information about house sizes with data gathered by modern ethnoarchaeologists. The latter sometimes include the thickness of the walls in their calculations of dwelling space.¹³ These figures cannot be used for comparison with ancient data, as the area within walls is only around 55% of that of the house measured *extra muros*.

There are differences in house size among the various excavated sites, most probably reflecting variations in wealth. In the AH site a distinction is clear between the houses in the northern part of the site and those in the southern part. The dividing line between them runs East-West through Carfax and along Straight Street. The average size of the twenty completely excavated northern houses is 72 square meters. The twenty-eight dwellings in the South include numerous linear houses, and measure only 40 square meters on the average. In the EM site the average size of the twelve houses is 54 square meters, and in the Mausoleum site, with only four houses, 74.5 square meters. These average numbers are of course easily manipulated, but they show a difference between these areas of town. Everywhere the available space seems very limited, and unfortunately we cannot ascertain from the available documentation how many people had to share the area.

Family sizes varied greatly. From the inheritance divisions at our disposal we see that at the time of a father's death usually only two or three sons were alive, but up to five sons are attested. The number of daughters is never stated, but it was probably in the same range. This would suggest families of somewhere between six to twelve individuals. These numbers are highly uncertain, however, as they do not take into account the presence or absence of grandparents, domestic slaves, or other persons that could increase the family size.

The city of Ur was not entirely made up of domestic architecture. A large part of it was covered with monumental buildings, all seemingly of a religious character. In the northern half of the city stood the temple complex in honor of the city

11. See, e.g., Charpin, *Clergé*, 52–55.

12. Jerrold S. Cooper, *Sumerian and Akkadian Inscriptions, Volume I: Presargonic Inscriptions* (New Haven, 1986), 72, col. XI.

13. E.g., Carol Kramer, *Village Ethnoarchaeology. Rural Iran in Archaeological Perspective* (New York, 1982).

god, the moon god Nanna, and his spouse, the goddess Ningal. Nanna's temple was located at the base of an enormous temple tower, the ziggurat that had been constructed in the early twenty-first century by the king of Ur, Ur-Nammu. The temple seems to have been off limits to most of the citizens, and interaction between mortals and the god probably took place in a large courtyard at the temple entrance. Ningal resided in another building, called the *Giparu*, which she shared with the high priestess of Nanna. The latter was always a princess and was endowed with extensive cultic and economic powers. Adjacent to these temples stood the "Great Storage House," in Sumerian *Ganunmah*. This building underwent a change in function during the three centuries under study here. Originally it was used as the administrative center of the temple's daily affairs and as the storage area of food items needed for offerings and for the feeding of the temple personnel. But after the restoration of the building by Sin-iddinam its use became restricted to the storage of silver and of precious objects, the latter mostly given as *ex-votos*. The last building in the religious area was called *Ehursag* in Sumerian, and its function remains in dispute. It was built in the twenty-first century as a temple for the deified king Shulgi, but it is not clear whether that function outlived the collapse of Shulgi's dynasty around the year 2000. All of these monumental buildings were situated close together but were not separated from the rest of the town by a wall. The houses of the citizenry seem to have been built right up against the temple complex.

In three of the areas containing domestic architecture Woolley excavated a number of tablets sufficient for determining what the activities of the inhabitants were. An analysis of the excavated archives shows quite clearly that the inhabitants of different areas had different economic interests.

Just to the south of the Nanna temple complex lies the EM site, which in the early second millennium was one with the EH and SM sites. The textual evidence from the area indicates that the inhabitants here were mainly people in the employ of the temple as high administrators and as cult personnel. Most prominent among the residents was the family of archivists of the Nanna temple, who resided at No. 7 Quiet Street.¹⁴ The texts document that three generations held that office at least from 1833 to 1790. The archivist was a very powerful man in the temple administration. He supervised the management of its landed property, the enormous herds, the fishing industry, and the organization of the daily offerings to the temple. The administrative office was held together with cultic offices that seem to have required the daily attendance of the functionaries in the temple. Several inhabitants of No. 7 Quiet Street were purification priests, and the texts found in the house suggest that every day they had to provide a number of small offerings at various places. These temple dependents were given two types of income: the usufruct of certain fields, and issues of foodstuff that had served originally as the offering materials to the gods.

Other inhabitants of the area held various offices in the temple cult. Their religious affiliations are often expressed in the unusual names they gave to their sons. Instead of adhering to the very common usage of invoking a deity, most

14. The names given by Woolley to the streets uncovered at Ur were inspired by Oxford and have no historical value.

often the Sumerian moon god Nanna or his Semitic counterpart Sin, in the names given to children, many of the inhabitants gave learned Sumerian names which made special reference to the temple. For instance, men were called "Temple that provides a long life" (É-nam-ti-sù-ud), or "Temple, creator of the universe" (É-dim-an-ki).¹⁵ They were thus quite certain that their sons would obtain a position in the temple, and that they would be able to pass on their offices. It can also be shown that one of the inhabitants of the area, Ku-Ningal, acted as teacher of the sons of his neighbors and used his house as a school.¹⁶ Thus the impression we obtain of the residents of the area south of the Nanna temple is that they made their livelihood in the service of the temple, something that is not surprising considering the location of their houses. This characteristic of the area did not disappear with the destruction of Ur by Samsuiluna's troops in 1739. When written documentation reappears in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries B.C.E., we see that this area of town is still inhabited by people working for the moon god, now referred to by his Semitic name Sin.

When we turn to the AH site in the southern half of the city, we see that the inhabitants were engaged in entirely different activities (see figure 2). This neighborhood could be called the financial district of Ur, as we find numerous transactions that required access to silver. An example of such financial activities is given by the archive of Annû, found in No. 15 Church Lane. According to the preserved records, dating to the years 1802 to 1800, the main protagonist rented a number of fields from various groups of men, up to twelve in number. These rentals were not what they seem to be on the surface. We know that the parties with whom Annû dealt were indebted to him, as they had defaulted on loans granted earlier by him or acquired by him from other creditors. The rental contracts state that the owners of the fields had to pay amounts of fish to Annû, thus revealing to us their profession. They were fishermen who were accorded the use of fields and the right to fish in the marshes by the Nanna temple complex. For these privileges they were required to pay rent and taxes, which the temple demanded in silver rather than in kind. To obtain the silver the fishermen turned to men such as Annû, who advanced them the amounts needed for the pledge that he would later be repaid with fish. When these men were unable to repay their debts, they had to transfer the ownership or usufruct of their fields, boats, and other equipment to the creditor in order to obtain more silver. The creditor allowed them the use of these fields or tools for an additional rental fee, and their indebtedness increased.

Annû was not the only inhabitant of the AH site who was deeply involved with silver. In No. 3 Niche Lane lived the businessman Dumuzi-gamil, who appears in the years 1796 to 1787 as a dealer in three commodities: silver, bread, and wool.¹⁷ He invested the silver in a large number of loans. Fifteen contracts are preserved for a four-year period of time, and the total amount lent comes to 1,030 grams of silver. Much of the silver he used seems to have been granted to him in 1796, when he and his partner Shumi-abiya were given 500 grams of silver to be

15. See Charpin, *Clergé*, 396–402.

16. See *ibid.*, 420–34.

17. See provisionally Leemans, *Bi.Or.* 12 (1955), 117–19.

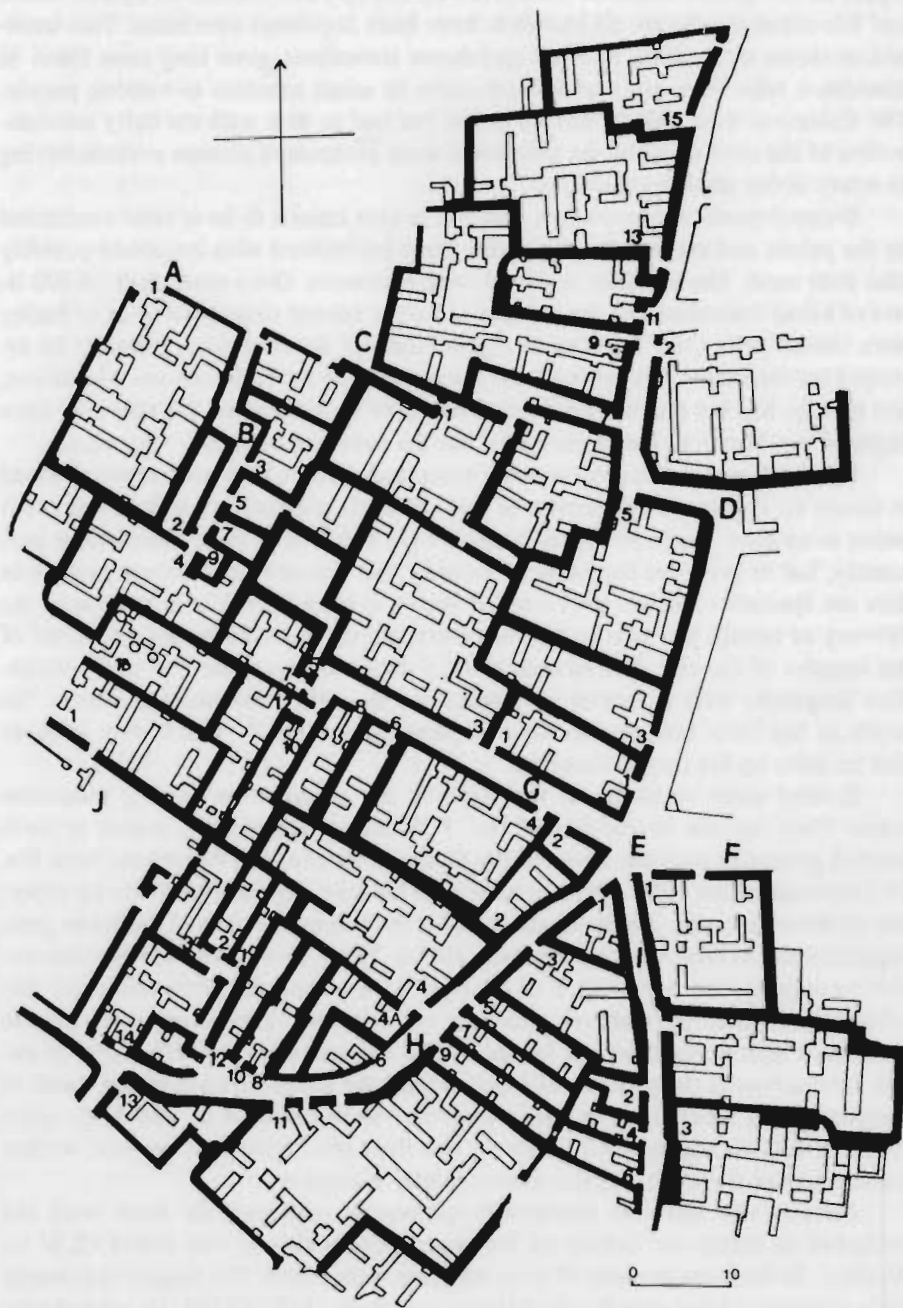


Fig. 2. AH site (based on Woolley, *Ur Excavations VII*: pl. 124; scale in meters). A = Boundary Street; B = Niche Lane; C = Old Street; D = Church Lane; E = Carfax; F = Broad Street; G = Straight Street; H = Paternoster Row; I = Store Street; J = Baker's Square.

repaid in five years. The loan was issued by Sin-abiya but collected by Nūr-ilishu and Sin-ashared, who are all known to have been important merchants. This transaction seems to indicate that the merchants sometimes gave long-term loans to financiers, who were allowed to lend silver in small amounts to various people. The financiers were able to make a profit, but had to deal with the daily administration of the capital, while the merchants were guaranteed income without having to worry about small transactions.

Dumuzi-gamil did more than that. He is also known to have been contracted by the palace and the temples to provide these institutions with bread and possibly also with meat. The amounts involved were enormous. Once more than 14,700 liters of bread (calculated by the amount of barley needed to prepare it) or of barley were issued. It is clear that Dumuzi-gamil did not do the baking himself; he arranged for the barley to be ground and the bread to be baked in unknown locations, and then he had the finished product delivered to his customers. He also may have engaged butchers for similar purposes, but the evidence on that is very scanty.

His third area of activity involved sheep and wool, which were always valued in silver. He organized the transfer of these animals and their wool from one institution to another. Again he probably did not get involved in these transactions personally, but he provided the financial security that was needed. Dumuzi-gamil was thus not specialized in his activities but seems to have known how to arrange the delivery of certain products to his customers, among them the palace and some of the temples of the city. His records show a rather idiosyncratic use of the Akkadian language, with a special preference for the otherwise unusual phrase “as much as has been brought has been deducted (for him),”¹⁸ which may indicate that he drew up his own documents.

Several other residents of the AH site are recorded as issuing numerous loans. They include Warad-Sin of No. 1 Boundary Street, who seems to have worked primarily with the silver of the Shamash temple, and Adad-bani from No. 14 Paternoster Row, who seems to have used his own capital. The financial expertise of these and other residents was used by the Nanna temple and the other great organizations to take care of their daily affairs. These institutions had become unable to organize the exploitation of their possessions and the preparation and distribution of their agricultural income; consequently they contracted private citizens to arrange these affairs for them. The citizens were given the right to enrich themselves in the process, and did so until the administration of the south of Babylonia was transferred to Larsa sometime in the middle of Rim-Sin’s reign (1822–1763). At that time Ur’s citizens lost their privileged position, and written documentation from the AH site almost totally disappears.

Another site that was extensively excavated—although the finds were not published in detail—is located on the eastern city wall and was called CLW by Woolley. In this area remains of three archives were found. The largest documents the activities of Adad-gugal, son of Ilshu-bani, from 1817 to 1788. He owned substantial real estate both in the city and in the countryside, and we see how he

18. *mala ublam ḥariṣ(ma)/ḥarṣūšu(ma)*, UET 5, nos. 226, 404, 405, 450.

expanded that property through various acquisitions. In the countryside he owned date-palm groves whose extent is unknown at the moment, but we know that he was able to expand them through purchases of at least 13,640 additional square meters. His success seems to have caused the envy of others, and lawsuits were filed against him requesting the recovery of some of these acquisitions. The other texts from the CLW site are mostly real estate transactions and loans, showing that the inhabitants were active businessmen. But the emphasis on real estate, especially orchards, may indicate that they were living on the income provided by their possessions in the countryside. They may have been landowners who moved into the city but stayed where they had easy access to their property. The evidence remains too limited, however, to state this with certainty.

This survey of some of the textual material shows clearly that the various domestic sites excavated at Ur were inhabited by people with different professional interests: temple officials in the area south of the Nanna temple, financiers in the AH site, and perhaps landowners in CLW. Does this allow us to speak of neighborhoods in Old Babylonian Ur? The existence of neighborhoods in ancient Mesopotamian cities has been argued by Stone on the basis of her research on Old Babylonian Nippur.¹⁹ In her opinion a neighborhood has to show closer ties than just professional specialization. Her definition derives from Muslim cities, where neighborhoods were "tied together by ethnic identity, religion, clientage, or occupation, with internal circulation patterns, the most basic institutions, and their own administration."²⁰ At Nippur she established the existence of "kernel" institutions, i.e., a temple or a family to which the inhabitants were all related through bonds of kinship or clientage.

At Ur we get a somewhat different picture. Although the inhabitants of the EM site are all professionally attached to the Nanna temple complex, those of the AH site do not display any adherence to a kernel institution. There is not a single institution or family with which all of them have bonds. Even if we divide the sites up into smaller areas along a single street or alleyway, we cannot state that these were inhabited by people with close kinship ties. Perhaps the only exception is Bazaar Alley or the southern tip of the AH site. There the existence of an extended family has been documented,²¹ and that family provided the kernel institution. But in the rest of the AH site we cannot document extended families or any special ties among the inhabitants of neighboring houses.

The other aspects of neighborhoods are also difficult to document at Ur. At Nippur neighborhoods were seemingly accessed by straight roads, while internally the streets were isolated from the rest of the town. At Ur the EM site contains three streets. Only one of these is a cul-de-sac, and the others seem to have several points of entry. The AH site is centered around the central square, Carfax, which can be accessed from four streets. Possibly several of them were dead-end streets, but the excavations do not show such limits. Only two culs-de-sac exist: Straight

19. Elizabeth C. Stone, *Nippur Neighborhoods*, *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations* 44 (Chicago, 1987).

20. *Ibid.*, 4.

21. Diakonoff, "Extended Families," 47-65.

Street and Bazaar Alley. Bazaar Alley may have been inhabited by people related to each other, but Straight Street was not.

Finally, the issue of separate administrations is very hard to study. One of the great lacunae in the evidence on cities in ancient Mesopotamia involves the problem of local government. Although we know that there were chief urban administrators and that the cities were divided into districts, with some type of council and separate supervisors, we have no idea about the extent and location of any of these districts in a particular town. We do not know whether the excavated quarters at Ur were considered to be separate administrative units. We could thus not say that there were neighborhoods of the Islamic type at Ur in the Old Babylonian period, although we can state with certainty that people with common economic interests lived near each other.

How can we explain this difference between Ur and Nippur? Perhaps the extent of the available material plays a role. At Nippur only two small areas were excavated, one some 20 by 40 meters, the other some 40 by 40 meters large, and they are only some 30 meters apart. These areas combined could fit into the EM site excavated at Ur, which lies some 200 meters from the AH site. Hence, the image we obtain from Nippur is a microscopic view of what at Ur would only be a fragment of one of the excavated sites. The kinship ties established at Nippur could perhaps also be found at Ur if we had more detailed information from that city. The available evidence shows, however, that they would not extend through larger areas of the town. We should accordingly be cautious about suggesting that the special characteristics of the excavated areas were any farther-reaching than a matter of professional preference.

The above survey of some of the material from Old Babylonian Ur shows that a combined study of textual and archaeological data enables us to obtain a clearer picture of city dwellers in Mesopotamia than if we were to look at only one of these sources in isolation. Cuneiform archives gain enormously in usefulness when they can be reconstructed based on archaeological, rather than internal, evidence. The comparison of archives from different areas of a town shows that the inhabitants had diverse interests but resided near people engaged in similar professional activities. We are fortunate that the excavator of Ur realized already in the 1920's that a city is more than a collection of monumental buildings, and provided us with the source material to study the private citizenry. It is to be hoped that current and future archaeological projects will attempt to gain comparable riches of information on other Mesopotamian cities. Only when we are aware of diverse aspects of the urban society can we gain insight in the role of cities in the life of the ancient Mesopotamians.