

The Third Dynasty of Ur. The Stela of Ur - Nammu

The stela of Ur-Nammu, the largest sculptured slab recovered at Ur, is a monumental record of the building activities of the founder of the third dynasty. After the Guti had been driven out of the land by Utukhegal of Uruk, the royalty passed to Ur, and for over a century Ur-Nammu and his successors ruled as kings of Sumer and Akkad, extended their dominion over Ashur and Elam, and claimed the empire over the four corners of the world, like Sargon of Agade before them and Hammurabi after them. Magnificent constructions, replacing smaller and older buildings, attested the wealth and power of the new capital. Most of them were begun by Ur-Nammu and completed by his son Shulgi: first, the temple of Nannar and Ningal, the moon-god and his wife, with its great brick tower resting on the artificial platform, surrounded by a strong wall, enclosing the main shrines; next, the great gate and hall of justice (Dub-lal-makh) giving access to the platform; then, outside the wall, three important buildings, the treasury (E-nun-makh), the royal palace (Kharsag-kalama), and the so-called Egipar, the fortified palace of the high priestess, built southwest of the temple on a spot named Nannar-karzida. The stela of Ur-Nammu stood in the courtyard below the hall of justice, and was raised there by Shulgi in honour of his father, the builder of the Ziggurat which dominates the ruins of Ur to the present day.

The great slab, as now restored in the Babylonian Section of the University Museum, is 10 feet high, 5 feet wide, and 1 foot thick. Front and back are divided by raised bands into five registers. At the rounded top are seen the emblems of the gods of Sumer and Akkad, the crescent moon below the radiating sun. On a larger band is inscribed a list of the canals opened by royal command to insure the fertility of the land and its connection with the sea. Many fragments of the original slab are missing. We know that at the time of Ibi-Sin, the last of his dynasty, city and temple were ruined and plundered by the Elamites and their allies from Mari. The king himself and the statue of Nannar were taken prisoners to Susa. The stela was broken and its fragments scattered over the pavement of the courtyard, where they have been found and restored as far as possible. The main portion in front illustrates the actual building of the Ziggurat, the stage tower. On the back are ritual scenes



Figure 39. Stela of Ur-Nammu, King of Ur, circa 2120 B.C. The King worshipping the gods of Ur before the building of the tower



Figure 40. Stela of Ur-Nammu. Ritual sacrifice of bull and lamb

connected with it. Register after register shows in low relief carved in the smooth limestone, the enthroned figures of Nannar and Ningal (*Figure 39*) opposed in marked parallelism. Ur-Nammu stands in turn in front of each. His name is inscribed on his fringed shawl. He pours a libation over green palms and bunches of dates in a tall vase shaped like an hour-glass. He receives the command to build the tower. Preceded by his patron god and shouldering the mason's tools he goes to lay the foundation brick. Workers carry baskets of mud and climb ladders to the top of the wall. Youthful aerial figures pour from heaven the fertilizing rain, a reward for the pious work. Ritual scenes (*Figure 40*) follow on the back. A bull is sacrificed. The priests open its body, perhaps to read in the liver the signs of the divine will. A kid is beheaded and the blood is poured on the ground, while a piper, standing on a small base in front of a sacred grove, plays on the double pipes. Prisoners with hands tied behind their backs are led from one enthroned deity (?) towards a second. Two men beat huge drums with short round-headed sticks, a loud accompaniment to the sacrifice. In the last register a libation is poured over palms and date bunches, in front of an altar, and perhaps the statue of the deified king.

The Isin-Larsa Dynasties

The cult of the moon-god survived the ruin of the city. After forty years the statue of Nannar was brought back to Ur. Temple, tower, courts and shrines were rebuilt in turn by the new kings of Isin, Larsa—and Uruk—who had portioned out the Sumerian land. In the Akkadian north the power of the Amorite kings of Babylon was daily growing. At Ur, inscribed bricks and clay cones, door sockets and foundation tablets witness the building activity and devotion of the rulers of Isin and Larsa to the ancient shrine of Nannar. In keeping with an honoured tradition, Enannatum, a prince of Isin, was appointed high priest. There is in the Babylonian Section a charming statuette of a seated Ningal presented by him to the Egipar shrine. Three sides of the square stool bear a votive inscription. The goddess wears a long flounced sleeved robe. Her hands are clasped. Long locks fall on her shoulders and a now missing metal crown once adorned her head. (*Figure 41.*)