SIR LEONARD WOOLLEY

By M. E. L. MALLOWAN

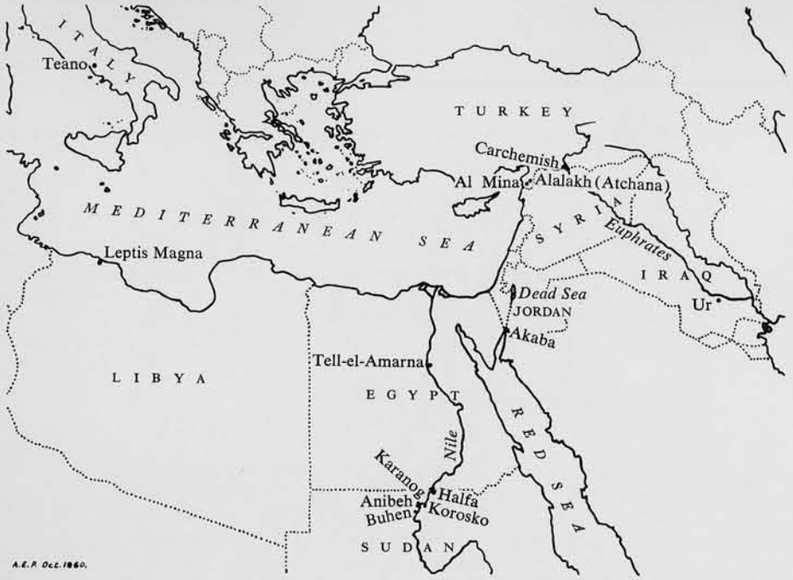
Professor Mallowan, himself a famous archaeologist, writes that in preparing this appreciation of Sir Leonard Woolley for the obituary columns of The London Times, he included two paragraphs from "anonymous hands"—those having to do with archaeological work in India and Pakistan and with the preservation of treasures during the war years of 1943-1946. To Professor Mallowan and to The Times we are most grateful for the permission to use the article. We have made a few slight changes, mainly in regard to Sir Leonard's relation to the University Museum.

Sir Leonard Woolley, internationally renowned archaeologist, died in London on February 22nd of this year. His career as a digger spanned a period of over forty years; his first excavations were on the Roman wall at Corbridge in 1906 and his active work in the field was concluded in Syria in 1949. Thereafter he was fully engaged in completing the publication of his finds. Sir Leonard's association with the University Museum covers nearly the same period, having begun in Nubia in 1907 when he was a member of the University Museum Eckley B. Coxe, Jr. Expedition; this was followed by a short visit to Philadelphia where he worked on the collections obtained by that expedition. In 1922, when the Joint Expedition of the British Museum and the University Museum to Ur in southern Iraq was inaugurated, Woolley was chosen as field director.

Woolley will always be remembered as one of the most successful diggers ever engaged in field archaeology. He had an extraordinary flair not only for choosing a potentially rich site but also for attacking those parts of it which concealed the most important remains. Nowhere was this flair shown more clearly than at Ur where his greatest successes were obtained. The climax of that expedition was the discovery of the famous Royal Cemetery of Ur, which yielded to the spade the incomparable treasures of Sumerian civilization, many of them deposited in shafts with multiple burials, before 2500 B.C. Woolley, though employed by various institutions to conduct excavations on their behalf, remained a free lance throughout his career and was wont to say that he was the first archaeologist who had contrived to make a living out of this profession.

The son of the Rev. George Herbert and Sarah Woolley, Charles Leonard Woolley was born on April 17, 1880, a member of a large family and had to pay for his education through scholarships which he won for St. John's, Leatherhead, and subsequently for New College, Oxford, where he obtained an honours degree in theology. It was Warden Spooner who with a rare discernment told him that he must abandon his intention of becoming a schoolmaster and make archaeology his career. Much of his youth was spent in a poor parish in Bethnal Green and at an early age he acquired an interest in paintings, was a frequent visitor to the Whitechapel Art Galleries, and became familiar with the Old Masters. This taste remained with him all his life and in his retirement he collected begrimed paintings at country auctions, cleaned and repaired his acquisitions, some of which were of a high quality and found their way to important exhibitions and national art galleries. He was deft with his hands and many a delicate and fragile antiquity was salvaged in the course of his excavations by his imaginative methods combined with an exceptional dexterity.

After graduating from Oxford he went to France and Germany in order to study modern languages and a year later was appointed assistant to Sir Arthur Evans, then Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, where he served a valuable apprenticeship before committing himself entirely to field archaeology. His work in the Near East began in 1907 when he excavated in Nubia in



partnership with Randall MacIver, a scholar of high calibre to whose precise methods he owed much and who, at that time, was Field Director of the Eckley B. Coxe, Jr. Nubian Expedition of the University Museum. At Karanog he dug the first big Meroitic cemetery on record; but in spite of the rich finds which included inscribed and painted gravestones, bronze vessels of Greek workmanship, and painted pottery he concluded that "the whole Meroitic civilization was but a backwater, remarkable as an isolated phenomenon in African history, but contributing nothing to the general stream of culture and of art." Such discoveries did not satisfy his original and creative mind, but he also dug at many other non-Egyptian sites between Korosko and Halfa, where he was all the time gaining in experience in practical problems, in the control of workmen, and in fields of discovery which ranged from the Early Dynastic down to Roman times. A brief interlude in Italy, where he conducted a small dig in the ancient baths at Teano on a wooded hill-top in ancient Sabine territory, completed the formative stage of his training as a field archaeologist. He then made plans to dig at Leptis Magna in Tripolitania, but the outbreak of the Turco-Italian war prevented him from realizing this scheme, and it is curious to reflect that he might otherwise have spent the greater part of his archaeological career in North Africa.

Instead, in 1912 he was appointed to succeed Dr. R. Campbell-Thompson as leader of the British Museum expedition to Carchemish, where he was accompanied by a brilliant young man who was later to become famous as Lawrence of Arabia. There he made a number of spectacular discoveries in the temples and palaces of the Neo-Hittite period. A series of orthostats with carvings of north Syrian gods and rulers, many contemporary hieroglyphic inscriptions, and the layout of the town defences were considerable contributions to knowledge at the time.

While he was employed in north Syria Woolley, together with Lawrence, took the opportunity during the off season from Carchemish to make a survey in Palestine of the country stretching northwards from Akaba towards the southern end of the Dead Sea. The time available for the expedition was not much more than six weeks, in January and February, 1914, but it enabled these two archaeologists to obtain a general knowledge of an area which, except for the few centuries of settled Byzantine government, had changed little since the days of Moses. The account of this work under the names of Woolley and Lawrence was published in a book entitled *The Wilderness of Zin* (1915). The discussion of the climatic conditions in the past, the elucidation of the routes from Palestine to Egypt in Biblical times, and the exposition of the way in which the Byzantine Government in spite of the most unfavourable circumstances of soil and climate was able to spread over the whole district a veneer of settled civilization, were indeed a valuable contribution.

The dig at Carchemish was interrupted by the 1914-18 War, in which he served with distinction. He was blown up at sea off the coast of south Asia Minor and for the remainder of the war (1916-18) was in a Turkish prison camp, where once again his manual skill and inventiveness did much for the amenities of the place.

In 1919 he concluded the dig at Carchemish under considerable difficulties, for he found that his camp was in a no-man's-land between the French army and Kurdish irregulars; both sides consulted him at intervals. Subsequently he moved to Egypt and did fruitful work, particularly in a house quarter once occupied by ancient craftsmen on the site of Tell-el-Amarna, for the Egypt Exploration Fund.

Fortified by much experience he began his major work at Ur in 1922 and dug there systematically at intervals for thirteen years. He began by concentrating on the Temenos or sacred area within which lay the principal temples and palaces. Here he established a tremendous sequence of cities which began on water-logged soil, perhaps in the fifth millennium B.C. at what is known as the Al ʿUbaid period, and rose one over the other to form a mound some 70 ft. in height, until the last occupation in the fourth century B.C. Here for the first time he exposed a complete range of town plans which revealed more fully than ever before the architectural achievements which had occurred in south Babylonia from Sumerian times onwards. It was perhaps in the revelation of Sumerian civilization that Woolley did his richest and most productive work.

The documents, which included some of the earliest literature known to mankind, were so prolific that many years will still be needed before their publication can be anything like complete. They are also of extraordinary archaeological interest because of the light they throw on all the buildings and small remains associated with them. The sculpture of these early periods, as well as the metallurgy, is of a very high order and Woolley's remarkable insight into the methods used by ancient craftsmen and builders has been one of his most valuable contributions to knowledge. His understanding of ancient methods also enabled him to follow up clues in the ground with a penetration often denied to skilled diggers.

Woolley however found so much that he was handicapped in finding time to consult other authorities, and academically his work often suffered accordingly; more particularly in his chronology, which was often at variance with accepted criteria. There seems to be little doubt now that his dating of the Royal Cemetery was several centuries too early and similarly at Carchemish there are many who cannot accept his sequence dating for the sculpture. In judging works of art, too, a Victorian outlook was not acceptable to the critics, and his book on *The Development of Sumerian Art* (1935), while invaluable in all matters touching on craftsmanship, appears to be aesthetically defective. His books on *The Sumerians* (1928) and *Abraham* (1935) were out of touch with linguistic and literary problems and thus fell short of being authoritative.

For all these defects, however, there was ample compensation in the imaginative treatment

Between him and his foreman, Sheikh Hamoudi Ibn Ibrahim, there was a life-long friendship

throughout his writings of whatever he found. Gifted with an unusually fluent style, an enchanting lecturer, no one has better described the sequence of his discoveries, and many of his popular books have enthralled a very wide public. *Digging up the Past* (1930) ran into many editions, and even more successful was *Ur of the Chaldees* (1930) (subsequently translated into many languages), which took the reader on a tour of the excavations and enabled him to feel at home among ancient Sumerian as well as Babylonian remains. To follow Woolley round the site at Ur and to hear him talk about the private houses was to feel oneself living among a vanished people. If his imagination sometimes outran the facts, this to him was preferable to allowing knowledge to lie dormant and inconclusive.

His industry was prodigious. While on the dig he slept little, rising with the sun and often still at work in his study or in the catalogue room until two or three o'clock in the morning. He could not have published so much had he not

been exceptionally quick in composition, and he used to say that writing was an enjoyment to him. The large definitive publications of Ur came out in a steady stream from 1927 onwards and are still being produced. These volumes include *Ur Excavations,* Vol I, "Al ʿUbaid," in collaboration with H. R. Hall (1927), mostly concerned with prehistoric and Early Dynastic remains; Vol. II, "The Royal Cemeteries" (1934) contained some 600 pages of text, illustrated by 273 plates, a *magnum opus* which no other living archaeologist could have produced in so short a space of time. Vol. V, "The Ziggurrat and its Surroundings" (1939), is a testimonial to his insight into ancient architecture, which deservedly earned him the honour of being made an honorary A.R.I.B.A. Vol. IV, "The Early Periods" (1955), an invaluable summary of discoveries concerned with remains prior to 2000 B.C., could no longer keep pace with collateral evidence from elsewhere. Two more volumes are in MS. and still await publication. For the general reader who is not a specialist in archaeology his *Excavations at Ur, a Record of Twelve Years Work* (1954) is a most readable summary account of these achievements. To have dug so much and left nothing unwritten is indeed a phenomenal record.

When he had completed his work at Ur he went on to dig at Al Mina near Antioch in Syria, where he made many discoveries concerning the import and export trade between the Aegean and Syria. Even more remunerative were his discoveries at Atchana in the Hatay (1937-39 and 1946-49), where the palaces, temples, sculpture and pottery of the second millennium B.C. were of a type hitherto little known. Once again a rich find of associated documents gave us new concepts of the political history and everyday life in the small kingdoms of the time.

The scientific account of this dig was incorporated in a book entitled *Excavations at Atchana-Alalakh* (1955), full of original material and of controversial matter: his early chronology is however not generally accepted. The popular account appeared in a Pelican book entitled *A Forgotten Kingdom* (1953).

In 1938, less than a year before the outbreak of the Second World War, Woolley accepted an invitation from the Government of India to advise them about their programme of archaeological work. Here he made many valuable recommendations on the most promising sites or areas for exploration; on the best methods and agencies for the development of exploration not only by the Government but by universities and learned societies; on the best method of training or selecting officers for exploration work. He completed this task in a remarkably short time with considerable perceptiveness. Many of his recommendations were carried out and the subsequent fruitful developments in India and also in Pakistan owed much to his advice.

From 1939-43 he served as a major in the Directorate of Public Relations and undertook the task of building up a specialized service—the monuments, fine arts, and archives branch of Civil Affairs. The object was to provide whatever protection might be possible to the ancient monuments, works of art, libraries, and collections of archives in the various areas of the war. For this work, owing to his imaginative gift for organization, he was peculiarly well fitted. From 1943-46 he was Lieutenant-Colonel G.S. Archaeological Adviser to the Civil Affairs Directorate, and when Italy became a battlefield he was able to safeguard valuable treasures which had been removed from the Pitti, the Uffizi, and other Florentine galleries during the first days of the war. He immediately arranged with a great measure of success a systematic guarding of other captured deposits.

He was very good company, a delightful *raconteur,* and had a good understanding of his workmen in the Orient. *Dead Towns and Living Men* (1920) contains many reminiscences which well illustrate his sense of humour, ingenuity, and an unaffected *joie de vivre* which was one of the most charming facets of his character. Between him and his foreman Sheikh Hamoudi Ibn Ibrahim there was a life-long friendship. Hamoudi was foreman of all his principal expeditions from the time he went to Carchemish in 1912, and gave devoted service which Woolley would always have wished to be remembered.

In 1927 Woolley married Katharine Keeling. Gifted with exceptional charm and intelligence, she took an active part in his work. Her drawings of the metal objects were of a distinguished competence, and above all she did much to attract financial support for her husband's excavations and enlisted the help of persons who were able to contribute generously. An invalid for most of her life, her exceptional vitality resisted the encroachment of a vital malady and overcame disabilities which would have taken a far heavier toll from someone less courageous. She died in 1945.

Sir Leonard was the recipient of the University Museum's Lucy Wharton Drexel Medal in 1955. Many of the readers of *Expedition* will remember with pleasure his discussion of the problems and aims of archaeology on that occasion.