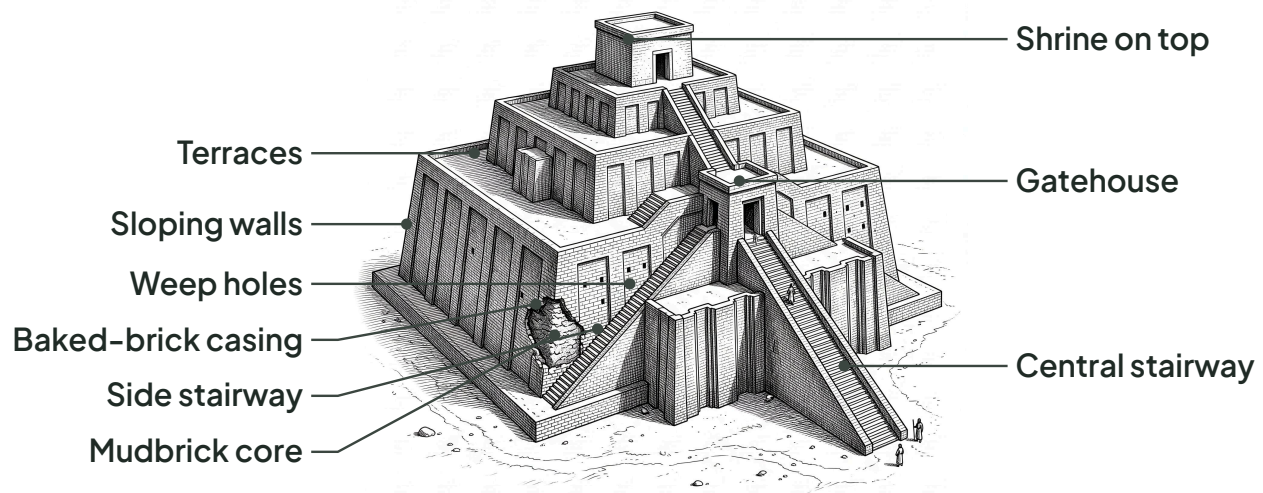




THE GREAT ZIGGURAT OF UR



About 2100 BC, King Ur-Nammu of Ur began a huge stepped tower for Nanna, the moon god; his son Shulgi finished it. Its base was about 64 by 45 meters (210 by 150 feet). Only the lowest stage survives. Its front face and three stairways were rebuilt in the 1980s, so photos today show modern brickwork. This picture shows the whole tower as the archaeologist Leonard Woolley reconstructed it from his digs in the 1920s and 1930s; the upper stages are an educated guess.



◆ THE PARTS ◆

Mudbrick core The inside of the tower was a solid mass of sun-dried mudbricks. There were no rooms inside: a ziggurat was not a tomb or a house.

Baked-brick casing A thick outer skin of kiln-baked bricks, set in bitumen, a natural tar. It protected the soft mudbrick core from rain and wind.

Central stairway A great stairway of about 100 steps ran straight out from the middle of the front, at a right angle to the wall.

Side stairway Two more stairways, one on each side, ran up against the front wall. Each also had about 100 steps.

Gatehouse All three stairways met at a gateway above the first stage. From there, a single stairway led higher.

Weep holes Small holes through the baked-brick skin let moisture out of the mudbrick core so it could dry. Drains in the terraces carried away winter rain.

Sloping walls The walls lean inward as they rise and are strengthened by shallow buttresses. Woolley noticed they also bulge very slightly outward, so the tower looks strong.

Terraces The tower rose in stages, each smaller than the one below. Archaeologists think there were three stages.

Shrine on top Archaeologists think a small temple for Nanna stood on the top stage. It has not survived, so no one knows exactly what it looked like.