Summary Article: Ur
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(ûr), ancient city of Sumer, S Mesopotamia. The city is also known as Ur of the Chaldees. It was an important center of Sumerian culture (see Sumer) and is identified in the Bible as the home of Abraham. The site was discovered in the 19th cent., but it was not until the excavations of C. Leonard Woolley in the 1920s and 30s that a partial account of its history could be constructed.

Remains found at the site seem to indicate that Ur existed as far back as the late Al Ubaid period (see Mesopotamia) and that the city was an important commercial center even before the first dynasty was established (c.2500 B.C.). Among the most important remains of the first dynasty, which has revealed a luxurious material culture, are the royal cemetery, where the standard of Ur was found, and the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaib, bearing the inscriptions of the kings of the first dynasty. Ur was captured c.2340 by Sargon, and this era, called the Akkadian period, marks an important step in the blending of Sumerian and Semitic cultures. After this dynasty came a long period of which practically nothing is known except that a second dynasty rose and fell. The third dynasty was established c.2060 B.C. under King Ur-Nammu, who built the great ziggurat that has stood, although crumbled and covered with sand, throughout the centuries. An inscription in the Museum of the Ancient Orient in İstanbul was identified (1952) as a fragment of the code of Ur-Nammu. It predates the code of Hammurabi by 300 years and is the oldest known law code yet discovered. The third dynasty of Ur fell (c.1950 B.C.) to the Elamites and later to Babylon. The city was destroyed and rebuilt throughout the years by various kings and conquerors, including Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus in the 6th cent. About the middle of the 6th cent., Ur went into a decline from which it never recovered. A record dated 324 B.C. mentions it as being inhabited by Arabs, but by that time its existence as a great city was forgotten. The change in the course of the Euphrates, which had been the source of the city’s wealth, probably contributed to the final decline of Ur. Ur is mentioned often in the Bible (Gen. 11.28,31; 15.7; Neh. 9.7) and was at one period known to the Arabs as Tall al-Muqayyar [mound of pitch].

See Woolley, C. L., Ur of the Chaldees (1930, repr. 1965).
Excavations at Ur (1954, repr. 1965), and.