

# Cult of the Deceased *entu*: The Ur III *giparu* at Ur

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## Why are there tombs in a Mesopotamian temple?

### The *giparu*

At its most basic, the *giparu* was the dwelling of the *entu*-priestess of Nanna.

### Chronology

- Early Dynastic/Akkadian (Early - Mid 3rd millennium BCE)
- Ur III (c. 2112 - 2004 BCE)
- Isin-Larsa (c. 2004 - 1763 BCE)
- Kassite (c. 1595 - 1155 BCE)
- Assyrian/Neo-Babylonian (1st millennium BCE)

### The Plan

The remains of the earlier 3rd millennium plano-convex brick building were leveled for the platform of the Ur III complex. Construction of the Ur III *giparu* was begun by Ur-Namma, and elaborated on by Amar-Sin. However, the remains from the Ur III period mostly consist of foundations, thicker than the Isin-Larsa superstructure built atop them. By following the plan of the Ur III foundations, the reconstruction done by Enanatuma, daughter of Ishme-Dagan, appears faithful to the earlier layout.

### The *entu*

Mesopotamian temples were conceptualized as the houses (*bīt*) of the gods. The priesthood was responsible for the care, feeding and adornment of the gods.

The office of the *en* was the highest rank of the priesthood. According to sacrificial lists, the *en* were second only to the king.

Unlike many women of 3rd millennium Sumer, the *entu*-priestess had her own seal, could bring forth lawsuits, and own and administrate land.

#### Sectioning the *giparu*

The excavators Woolley and Mallowan sectioned the *giparu* into three parts, labeled A, B, and C. A and C were split by a transverse passageway, and each had its own entrance and chapel. A was considered the residential sector, in part for its greater exclusivity. C was deemed the Ningal Temple proper. As although its entrance gave it more public access, its path to the shrine was impeded by benches for offerings.

B, the sectors with which this poster is primarily concerned, was unlabeled by the excavators. Due to it containing the Amar-Sin trilithon and the "cemetery," B's character lends itself to the royal sphere.

### Royal Blood

The appointed *entu*-priestess was always of royal blood. The first recorded *entu* was Enheduanna, daughter of Sargon of Akkad. This tradition continued through the Ur III and Isin-Larsa periods, with Shulgi's daughter Ennirzianna and Ishme-Dagan's daughter Enanatuma. For Sargon and his conquest of Ur, it was important to create a connection to the city's culture and administration. Similarly, the kings who followed, particularly those of the Ur III period, desired to cement their right to rule through a blood tie to a higher authority.

### Sacred Marriage

In this context sacred marriage refers to the *entu* being the human representation of Ningal. Ningal, and thus the *entu*, was the consort of Nanna, whose ziggurat was central to the sacred precinct.

### Ancestor Worship

Mesopotamian household religion appears to mirror temple rituals, as it primarily concerns the care and feeding of the family's ghosts. The practice also used much of the same infrastructure: altars, benches, and podiums. The rituals involved: the *pāqīdu* (the one who attends to), *kispa kasāpu* (making funerary offering), *mê raqū* (pouring water/libations), and *šuma zakāru* (the calling of the name).

I argue that by serving as the *pāqīdu* at the graves of her predecessors, the *entu* reaffirmed her right as successor to her role and the *giparu*.

### The State Cult

The Ur III kings broke with convention when they claimed divinity. Evidence of the royal cult exists in the *giparu*, particularly in B7, the Amar-Sin Trilithon. This bitumen paved room was named for the three stela preserved and bearing Amar-Sin's name. These stela were covered in later periods and had their inscriptions mostly erased. B7 was surrounded by either storage rooms or a circumambulatory, adding to the function or intensive use of the space.

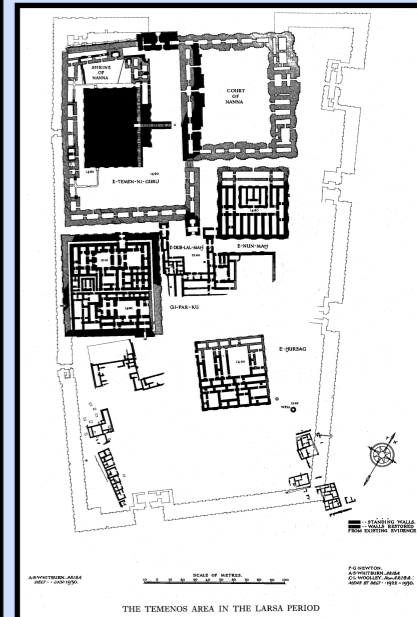
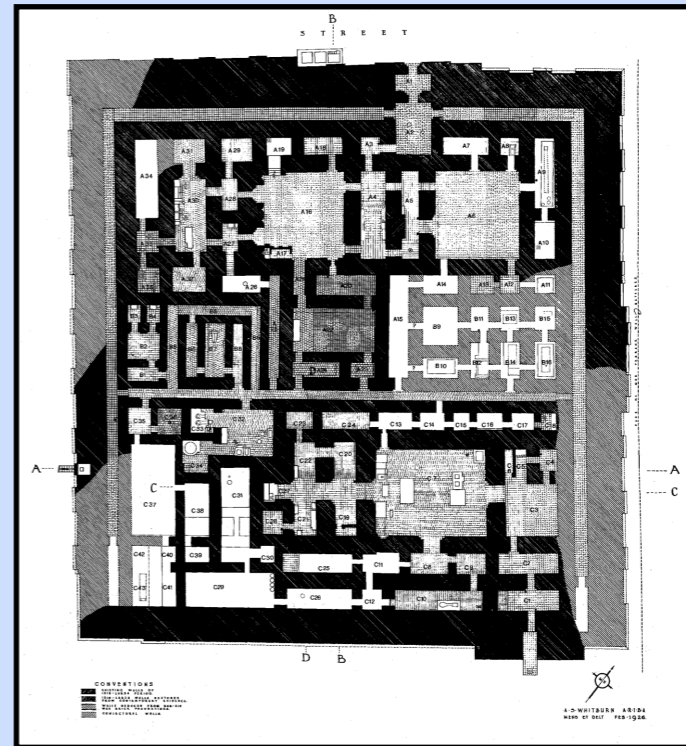
### The Graves

At least six tombs exist in the *giparu*: B10, B12-15, and C43. The cluster of graves in the B sector was highly eroded, and was robbed out in ancient times. C43, the lone tomb in the southern corner, is a much better preserved example, and was photographed by the excavators. The tomb can be dated to the Ur III period by its corbeled shaft. Similarly, the B tombs were also made of brick, and enough remained to show they were likely vaulted.

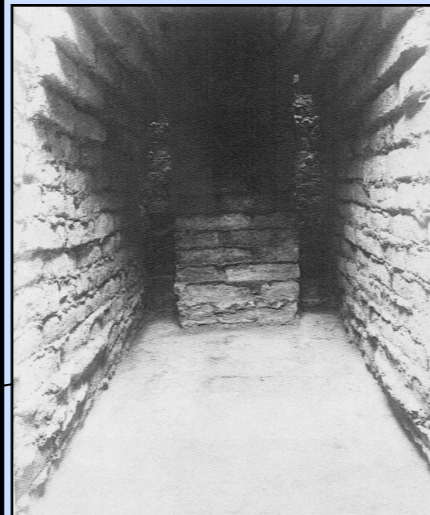
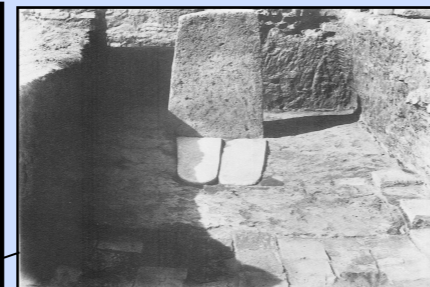
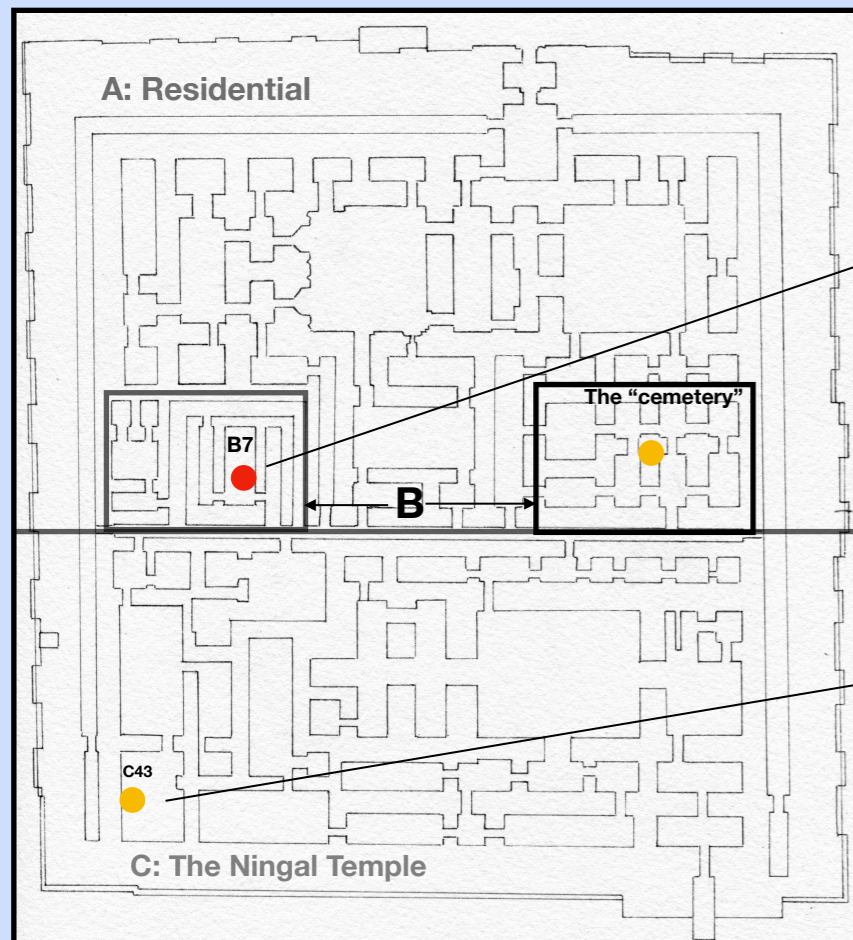
C43 shows clear signs of ritual use, especially involving libations. The tomb was comprised of baked bricks, bitumen paving on the floor, and a drain, along with the two vents that allowed access.

### Discussion

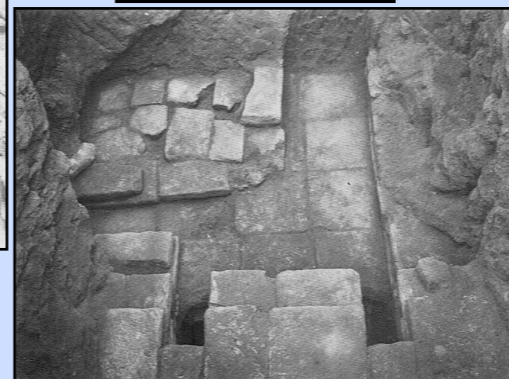
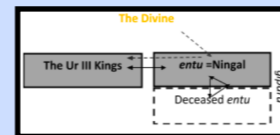
The *giparu* defies Mesopotamian convention by having intramural burials in a sacred space. Intramural burials signal ownership by the family of the deceased, an idea at odds with the Mesopotamian temple, the *bīt*, belonging to its primary deity. Was this allowed in the *giparu* because the *entu* were considered the avatars of the goddess Ningal? Or was the internal space delineated in the ancients' conception to the point that areas like the kitchen and cemetery were not considered part of the sacred area? Exploring that ideology will require further research on the intersection of domestic and sacred spaces in Mesopotamia. Whatever may be the reason for their presence, I argue that the graves served a practical function. As mentioned previously, intramural burials signaled ownership of the space. By returning to the graves of her predecessors to perform rituals, the *entu* solidified her claim to the *giparu* and its estates. Further, the role of the *entu* was always entangled with the royal sphere due to blood ties, but in the Ur III period this connection took on a special significance. As the *entu* strengthened her ties to the *giparu* and Ningal, so too could the Ur III kings strengthen their claim to divinity.



Plates from Woolley and Mallowan 1976. Left: Plan of the *giparu* (edited line art version of which is in bottom left corner of poster) Above: Map of Ur's temple district in the Isin-Larsa period.



Photographs  
Top: B7, the Amar-Sin Trilithon. Above: C43, inside tomb, facing chimneys and showing vaulting. Right: C43, looking down at top of tomb, showing the two vents.  
All photographs from Woolley and Mallowan 1976.



**Abridged Bibliography**  
Bayliss, Miranda. 1973. "The Cult of Dead Kin in Assyrian and Babylonia." *Iraq* 35 (2): 115-25.  
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