

Wall Plaque from Ur



White limestone, 23x26cm, 2500BCE, Ur, Iraq; British Museum, London

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This is a roughly square limestone carving from Mesopotamia. It has a smooth bar running horizontally across the centre of the plaque in the middle of which there is a square hole. There are two sets of carvings on the plaque either side of this central bar.

The upper carving shows a seated God on the right who wears a horned headdress and holds a bowl. A man stands opposing him pouring a libation from a spouted vessel into a tall vase. This appears naked apart from a sash or similar cloth draped over his right shoulder. He is followed by three worshippers, each of slightly diminishing height from left to right, each are wearing similar clothes and head coverings. They are depicted as markedly shorter than the leading priest who is, himself, smaller than the god. All of the characters are shown in profile.

The carving on the lower panel shows a similar scene but with the libation being poured outside a temple door rather than before a god. The three worshippers following the priest are, this time, shown as the same height as him. Again the priest is naked and this time has no sash over his shoulder. The priest and two of the worshippers are shown in profile but the first worshipper behind the priest is depicted face on. One of the worshippers is carrying an animal perhaps as an offering or sacrifice. Two of the worshippers are wearing headdresses but the central figure of the three is not (although this may be that the carving has become damaged over time).

The exhibition label states that "Square stone plaques with holes through the centre and carved in relief, were dedicated in temples to the gods. A peg or nail would be driven through the hole to attach the

plaque to the temple wall". The label describes how the plaque was discovered at Ur in the ruins of the residence of the High Priestess of the moon God Nanna.