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## Ziggurats in Ancient Mesopotamia

Ziggurats are as emblematic of Mesopotamia as the great pyramids are of ancient Egypt. These ancient stepped buildings were created to be home to the patron god or goddess of the city. As religion was central to Mesopotamian life, the ziggurat was the heart of a city. Starting around 3000 B.C., Mesopotamian kings began building ziggurats and continued to build them up to the time of Alexander the Great circa 300 B.C.

In Mesopotamia, a fine balance of power existed between the secular kings and the high priests of the patron god or goddess. Kings built ziggurats to prove their religious dedication and fervor.

The word ziggurat means raised area. These pyramid-shaped buildings were broad at the bottom, and had two to seven tiers, with each ascending tier smaller than the one under it. The top of the building was flat, and on it was a shrine or temple to the god where only priests could go. The entire building was made of sun-dried bricks in all the interior areas, with glazed fire-dried bricks facing outward. The facing bricks on each successive tier were glazed a different color. A series of staircases led to the top of the ziggurat for the priests to use.