

TEMPLES IN MESOPOTAMIA

Temples were often the most central and important buildings in Mesopotamian city states. They were usually devoted to individual deities and could be quite elaborate if the city was rich. The largest temples were ziggurats.

Morris Jastrow said: “In like manner, the “house” motif prevails in the Babylonian and the Assyrian sanctuaries. Temple and palace adjoin one another in the great centers of the north and south. The temple is the palace of the deity, and the royal palace is the temple of the god's representative on earth—who

as king retains throughout all periods of Babylonian and Assyrian history traces of his original position as the "lieutenant," or even the embodiment of god — a kind of alter ego of god, the god's vicegerent on earth. The term which in Babylonian designates more specifically the palace, ekallu, i.e., "great-house," becomes in Hebrew, under the form hekhal, one of the designations of Jahweh's sanctuary in Jerusalem.

Temple and palace are almost interchangeable terms. Both are essentially houses, and every temple in Babylonia and Assyria bore a name which contained as one of its elements the word "house." The ruler, embodying, originally, what we should designate as both civil and religious functions, was god, priest, and king in one.