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## Ziggurats in Ancient Mesopotamia

Ziggurats were part of a temple complex, a set of buildings devoted to the care of the gods and to all the businesses of the temple. The temple complex was one of the economic centers of the city. Large temples employed hundreds or even thousands of people, from priests and priestesses to humble shepherds, carpenters and weavers. The ziggurat, however, was dedicated to the city's patron god or goddess; it was sacred ground, off-limits to any but the hierarchy of priests.

A series of chambers and rooms within the ziggurat were used for priests to care for the god or goddess. Special priests prepared sacred meals for the god. Each ziggurat contained an altar to the god and a statue of the deity as well. Mesopotamians believed that if the people cared sufficiently for the gods, and if the sacred meals pleased them, the gods would inhabit the temples or shrines prepared for them.

Since ziggurats were made with sun-dried mud bricks, they would deteriorate with age. Kings would regularly rebuild the ziggurat, often building the new on top of the old.