


Etemenanki

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Coordinates:  [32°32′11″N 44°25′15″E](#)[32.53639°N 44.42083°E](#)



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Etemenanki ([Sumerian](#) É.TEMEN.AN.KI 𒂗𒂗𒂗𒂗 "temple of the [foundation](#) of [heaven](#) and [earth](#)") was the name of a [ziggurat](#) dedicated to [Marduk](#) in the city of [Babylon](#) of the 6th century BCE [Neo-Babylonian dynasty](#). Originally seven stories in height, little remains of it now except ruins.

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[\[edit\]](#) Construction

It is unclear exactly when Etemenanki was first built. A review article by [Andrew R. George](#) says that its builder may have "reigned in the fourteenth, twelfth, eleventh or ninth century" but argues that

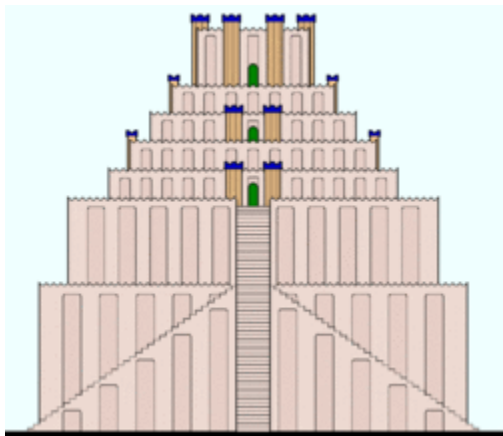
The reference to a ziqqurat at Babylon in the Creation Epic ([Enûma Eliš](#)· VI 63: George 1992: 301-2) is more solid evidence, however, for a Middle Assyrian piece of this poem survives to prove the long-held theory that it existed already in the second millennium BC. There is no reason to doubt that this ziqqurat, described as *ziqqurat apsî elite*, 'the upper ziqqurat of the Apsû', was E-temenanki.^[1]

The city of Babylon had been destroyed in 689 BCE by [Sennacherib](#), who claims to have destroyed the Etemenanki. The city was restored by [Nabopolassar](#) and his son [Nebuchadnezzar II](#). It took 88 years to rebuild the city; its central feature was the temple of [Marduk](#) ([Esagila](#)), with which the Etemenanki ziggurat was associated. The ziggurat was rebuilt by Nebuchadnezzar II. The seven stories of the ziggurat reached a height of 91 meters, according to a tablet from Uruk (see below), and contained a temple shrine at the top.

In Nebuchadnezzar's own words:

The tower, the eternal house, which I founded and built. I have completed its magnificence with silver, gold, other metals, stone, enameled bricks, fir and pine. The first which is the house of the earth's base, the most ancient monument of Babylon; I built and finished it. I have highly exalted its head with bricks covered with copper. We say for the other, that is, this edifice, the house of the seven lights of the earth the most ancient monument of [Borsippa](#). A former king built it, (they reckon 42 ages) but he did not complete its head. Since a remote time, people had abandoned it, without order expressing their words. Since that time the earthquake and the thunder had dispersed the sun-dried clay. The bricks of the casing had been split, and the earth of the interior had been scattered in heaps. [Merodach](#), the great god, excited my mind to repair this building. I did not change the site nor did I take away the foundation. In a fortunate month, in an auspicious day, I undertook to build porticoes around the crude brick masses, and the casing of burnt bricks. I adapted the circuits, I put the inscription of my name in the Kitir of the portico. I set my hand to finish it. And to exalt its head. As it had been done in ancient days, so I exalted its summit.^[2]

[\[edit\]](#) Descriptions



 Reconstruction of Etemenanki, based on Schmid

A Neo-Babylonian royal inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II on a stele from Babylon, claimed to have been found in the 1917 excavation by [Robert Koldewey](#),^[3] and of uncertain authenticity, reads: "Etemenanki^[4] Zikkurat Babibli [Ziggurat of Babylon] I made it, the wonder of the people of the world, I raised its top to heaven, made doors for the gates, and I covered it with bitumen and bricks." The Etemenanki is depicted in shallow relief, showing its high first stages with paired flights of steps, five further stepped stages and the temple that surmounted the structure. A floor plan is also shown, depicting the buttressed outer walls and the inner chambers surrounding the central [cella](#).

Scholars have recently discovered in the [Schoyen Collection](#) the oldest known representation of the Tower of Babel.^[5] Carved on a black stone, *The Tower of Babel Stele* (as it is known) dates from 604-562 BC, the time of Nebuchadnezzar II.^[6]

The Etemenanki is described in a [cuneiform](#) tablet from Uruk from 229 BCE, a copy of an older text (now in the [Louvre](#) in [Paris](#)). It gives the height of the tower as seven stocks (91 meters)

with a square base of 91 meters on each side. This mud brick structure was confirmed by excavations conducted by Robert Koldewey after 1913. Large stairs were discovered at the south side of the building, where a triple gate connected it with the [Esagila](#). A larger gate to the east connected the Etemenanki with the sacred procession road (now reconstructed in the [Pergamon Museum](#) in [Berlin](#)).

In 440 BCE, [Herodotus](#) wrote:^[7]

Babylon's outer wall is the main defence of the city. There is, however, a second inner wall, of less thickness than the first, but very little inferior to it in strength. The center of each division of the town was occupied by a fortress. In the one stood the palace of the kings, surrounded by a wall of great strength and size: in the other was the sacred precinct of Jupiter [Zeus] Belus, a square enclosure two furlongs [402 m] each way, with gates of solid brass; which was also remaining in my time. In the middle of the precinct there was a tower of solid masonry, a furlong [201 m] in length and breadth, upon which was raised a second tower, and on that a third, and so on up to eight. The ascent to the top is on the outside, by a path which winds round all the towers. When one is about half-way up, one finds a resting-place and seats, where persons can sit for some time on their way to the summit. On the topmost tower there is a spacious temple, and inside the temple stands a couch of unusual size, richly adorned, with a golden table by its side. There is no statue of any kind set up in the place, nor is the chamber occupied of nights by any one but a single native woman, who, as the Chaldeans, the priests of this god, affirm, is chosen for himself by the deity out of all the women of the land.

This *Tower of Jupiter Belus* is believed to refer to the Akkadian god [Bel](#), whose name has been [Hellenised](#) by Herodotus to [Zeus Belus](#). It is likely that it corresponds to Etemenanki.

Etemenanki has been suggested as a possible inspiration to the biblical story of the [Tower of Babel](#).^{[8][9]}

[\[edit\]](#) Final demolition

In 331 BCE, [Alexander the Great](#) captured Babylon and ordered repairs to the Etemenanki; when he returned to the ancient city in 323 BCE, he noted that no progress had been made, and ordered his army to demolish the entire building, to prepare a final rebuilding.^[10] His death, however, prevented the reconstruction.^[11] The [Babylonian Chronicles](#) and [Astronomical Diaries](#) record several attempts to rebuild the Etemenanki, which were always preceded by removing the last debris of the original ziggurat. The *Ruin of Esagila Chronicle* mentions that the [Seleucid](#) crown prince [Antiochus I](#) decided to finally rebuild it, sacrificed, stumbled and fell, and angrily ordered his elephant drivers to destroy the last remains.^[12] There are no later references to the Etemenanki from antiquity.