

The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World



Many writers over time have made lists of “The Seven Wonders of the World,” but the most famous of these, “The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World,” comes from the ancients themselves. Several writers from c. 225 BC to 140 BC identified what they considered to be the most important achievements of their day. Only one of these landmarks, the Great Pyramid in Giza, still stands today; the others were all destroyed. Most are thought to have crumbled in earthquakes, though the Temple of Artemia is believed to have been destroyed in a series of wars.

Which modern nation was home to the most ancient wonders?

- A. Greece B. Turkey C. Iraq D. Egypt

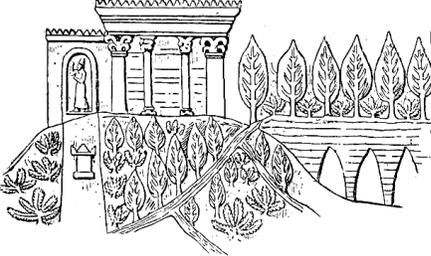
Which of the “Seven Wonders of the Ancient World” was in Mesopotamia?

- A. The Colossus of Rhodes
 B. The Lighthouse of Alexandria
 C. The Great Pyramid at Giza
 D. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon

Which statement **MOST LIKELY** explains why all of these “wonders” were in the area around the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea?

- A. The writers never traveled beyond this small region.
 B. At the time the rest of the world was still unpopulated.
 C. There were no ships to carry people to other places.
 D. Other writers told of wonders in other parts of the world.

What about the places on the list do you think made them “wonders”? _____



The Legend of the Hanging Gardens

Babylon in ancient Mesopotamia grew to become a large and powerful empire under the rule of its famed King Hammurabi. Its capital city was the center of all ancient humanity. Travelers made their way to Babylon from near and far to visit and see its remarkable sites. The city itself was enormous, surrounded by walls 56 miles long, 80 feet thick, and 320 feet high! Once inside, one saw great fortresses and immense statues of gold. The Tower of Babel was the tallest structure, built to reach to the heavens.

Under the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar yet another great structure was built. Nebuchadnezzar II was a good king, who ruled from 605 BC for 43 long years. During that time he led many great victories to increase Babylon's power in Mesopotamia and beyond. He strengthened his empire's hold on Syria and Judah, bringing the holy city of Jerusalem under his rule. Then he crossed into Africa to attack the Egyptians as well.

Nebuchadnezzar was indeed a powerful ruler, and thus he was quite pleased with himself and his life. Still, though, his life held one unhappiness, his beautiful, yet very sad wife, Queen Amytis. The lovely, young princess had come to Babylon from her homeland of Media, wed to the king by her father, the king of Media, to form an alliance between their two lands.

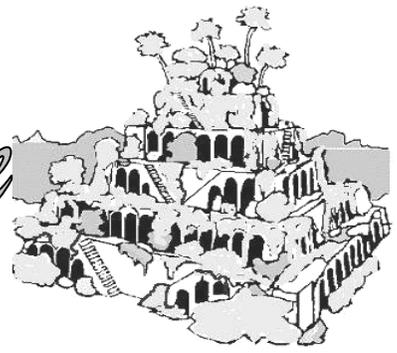
Now Media was a mountainous land with rich and fertile soil. Trees grew everywhere in the kingdom, and an abundance of plants and flowers filled lush gardens or grew helter-skelter along roadsides. The scents of gardenias and jasmine filled the air, and newly-cut flowers always adorned the royal table. At mealtime fresh fruits and vegetables needed only to be picked from the orchard or taken from the kitchen garden and steamed to fill the air with their aromas, so all came to the table hungry for each feast.

This was the homeland the young Queen Amytis knew and loved, but her new kingdom was completely different. While there were farms watered by canals dug from the river to bring water to the fields, most of Babylon was flat and dry. Dust-colored sand mostly met the eye there. To poor Queen Amytis this desolate new land she ruled was truly terrible! She missed her home, its flowers, fruits, and trees, and she missed her family and people. Her misery was impossible to ignore.

Nebuchadnezzar, as most kings, was well-used to everyone always trying to please him; only his young wife did not. Having such an unhappy wife was a new turn of events, and the king thought long and hard about what he could do about the situation. His solution, as it turned out, was to build huge and unusual gardens right inside the city of Babylon. Though they became known as the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon," the plants did not in fact hang at all. Instead the king had built a tall "mountain" with wide terraces for planting along its sides and atop its peak. Each garden was held in its place by large stones, stacked and covered in sheets of lead to form massive boxes, filled with soil in which plants and trees grew. It wasn't long before this amazing, leafy mountain in Babylon became a site attracting visitors of its own.

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Primary Sources on the Hanging Gardens of Babylon



Source #1 - From the Greek geographer Strabo:

“(the gardens) consists of vaulted terraces raised one above another, and resting upon cube-shaped pillars. These are hollow and filled with earth to allow trees of the largest size to be planted. The pillars, the vaults, and terraces of constructed of baked brick and asphalt.”

Source #2 - From the Greek historian Herodotus:

“In addition to its size, Babylon surpasses in splendour any city in the known world. Its outer walls were 56 miles in length, 80 feet thick, and 320 feet high, wide enough to allow a four-house chariot to turn. The inner walls were not so thick as the first, but hardly less strong.” (He doesn’t mention the gardens in 450 BC, 100 years after the rule of King Nebuchadnezzar.)

Source #3 - From the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus:

“The platforms on which the garden stood consisted of huge slabs of stone covered with layers of reed, asphalt and tiles. Over this was put a covering with sheets of lead, that the wet which drenched through the earth might not rot the foundation. Upon all these was laid earth of a convenient depth, sufficient for the growth of the greatest trees. When the soil was laid even and smooth, it was planted with all sorts of trees, which both for greatness and beauty might delight the spectators.”

Source #4 - From the Greek (or Egyptian) Quintus Curtius Rufus:

“The foundations of its turrets are sunk ten meters into the ground and the fortifications rise 24 meters above it at the highest point. On its summit are the hanging gardens, a wonder celebrated by the fables of the Greeks. They are as high as the top of the walls and owe their charm to the shade of many trees. The columns supporting the whole edifice are built of rock, and on top of them is a flat surface of squared stones strong enough to bear the deep layer of earth placed upon it and the water used for irrigating it.”

Source #5 - From the German archaeologist Robert Koldewey (1913):

“Those who approached the capital of Babylon in the days of Nebuchadnezzar coming from the north, found themselves ... before the colossal fortified wall, which surrounded Babylon. It was a c. 21-foot thick brick wall before which at a distance of c. 36 feet stood a c. 23 1/2 foot thick kiln baked brick wall paralleled by the c. 10 foot thick wall of the canal. ... The space between the two walls had been filled with soil up to the top of the outer wall. ... This created a roadway sufficiently wide for one four horse chariot and even wide enough for two of these coming from opposite directions to pass each other. On top of this walled circle stood the upper stories of towers facing each other appearing like little dwellings. The towers are c. 25 feet wide and c. 132 feet apart from each other. Along the entire front line would have been about 90, and surrounding the city, if it formed a square, would have been 360 towers. How many the outer wall had, we don't know.”