

COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

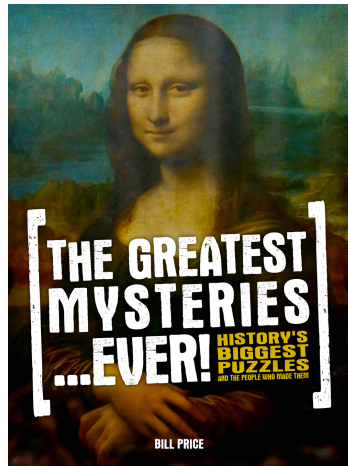
Copyright Regulations 1969

WARNING

This material has been reproduced and communicated to you by or on behalf of Methodist Ladies' College under Part VB of the Copyright Act 1968 (the Act).

The material in this communication may be subject to copyright under the Act. Any further reproduction or communication of this material by you may be the subject of copyright protection under the Act.

Do not remove this notice.



Price, B. (2016). *The greatest mysteries...ever*. Brighton, England: Quid Publishing.

DID THE HANGING GARDENS OF BABYLON EXIST?

ca. 600 BCE

Clue: A Babylonian queen yearns for a green garden

Main players: King Nebuchadnezzar and his homesick wife

Verdict: If the Greek writer Strabo says the gardens existed, then that's good enough for me

The Seven Wonders of the World was a list compiled by the ancient Greeks as a sort of early travel guide for people in the classical world, not unlike those books published today with titles like *Things to Do Before You Die*. Of these wonders, only one remains largely intact – the Great Pyramid of Giza is very obviously still standing in Egypt. Five of the others are well-known to us today, even if they are in ruins or no longer exist at all. The Statue of Zeus at Olympia, the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the Colossus of Rhodes, the Pharos Lighthouse at Alexandria – the locations of all of these have been firmly established and, where the ruins still remain, they have been investigated by archaeologists. That leaves only one, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, about which we know almost nothing beyond

what can be inferred from the name. We don't know exactly where the gardens were, what they looked like, or even if they actually existed at all.

EARLY CLUES

The earliest descriptions we have of the Hanging Gardens are from the classical period, in which Greek and Roman writers, such as Strabo, who was working early in the first century CE, quoted from sources that are now lost. These accounts attribute the creation of the gardens to Nebuchadnezzar, the king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire from 605 BCE to 562 BCE, who, as we have seen, destroyed the Temple of Solomon and sent the Jews into exile. It was a period of great prosperity and the expansion of empire – achievements marked by Nebuchadnezzar with a programme of building works in Babylon.

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were listed by the ancient Greeks as one of the Seven Wonders of the World. We don't know where they were, what they looked like or even if they existed at all.



The Hanging Gardens could have been part of these works, built, so the story goes, by the king in an attempt to ease the homesickness felt by his wife Amyitis. She had grown up in the mountains of what is now Iran and, after she had come down to the hot and arid plain of Mesopotamia, missed the landscape and plants of her youth.

As romantic as the story is, there is no way of knowing if it is based on anything other than attempts to fill in the missing pieces of the story with some colourful anecdotes. No mention of either the Hanging Gardens or of a queen called Amyitis have been found in the Babylonian texts, which were excavated from the ruins of the city and date to the period of Nebuchadnezzar.

GREAT CITY

A lion adorning the Ishtar Gate of Babylon, also built by Nebuchadnezzar.

The Greek historian Herodotus, writing in the fifth century BCE, also has nothing to say on the subject, but does give a lengthy description of the walls of Babylon, considered by some to be another wonder of the ancient world. Modern archaeology has not been able to confirm the story either, although the inaccessibility of the site of Babylon in Iraq has meant that, in recent years, opportunities for further excavations have been limited.

The location of the ancient city of Babylon is well known, lying about 100 km (60 miles) to the south of

'The hanging garden 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 the terraces are constructed of baked brick and asphalt. The ascent to the highest story is by stairs, and at their side are water engines, by means of which persons, appointed expressly for the purpose, are continually employed in raising water from the Euphrates into the garden. For the river, which is a stadium in breadth, flows through the middle of the city, and the garden is on the banks of the river.'

—Strabo, *Geographica*

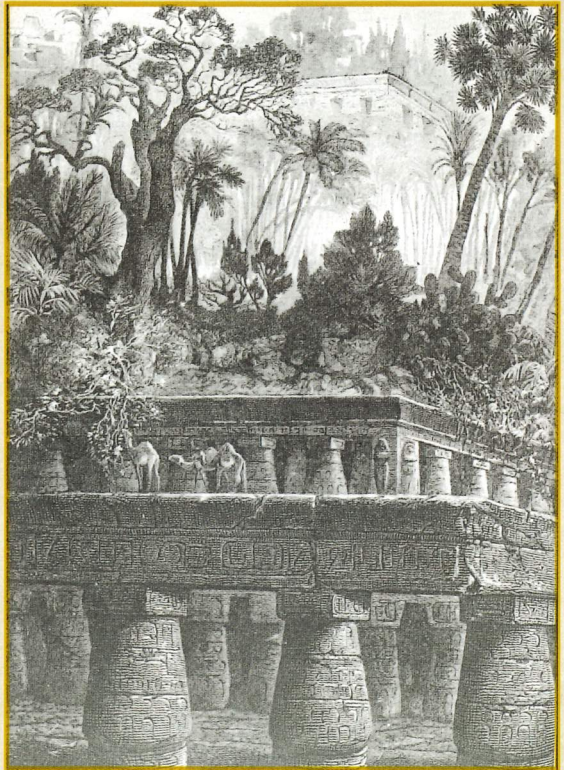
VAULTED TERRACES

Another depiction of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, with trees and plants hanging from vaulted terraces supported by pillars.

Baghdad, on the other side of the Euphrates River from the modern town of Hillah. Ancient sources describe the Euphrates running through the middle of the city in Nebuchadnezzar's time, while today it runs on a different course to the west of the ruins. Unfortunately for any archaeologists hoping to uncover the remains of the king's palace, and any gardens he might have built, the change in the river's course could have resulted in the ruins now being underwater.

PLEASURE GARDENS

We may not have any solid evidence for Nebuchadnezzar's gardens in Babylon, but there are plenty of signs that gardens were an integral part of royal palaces in other parts of Mesopotamia. It is not hard to imagine a king withdrawing from the complexities



of his court and the searing heat of the day to relax in a pleasure garden, where running water and the plants themselves would create a comfortable environment and an atmosphere of tranquility.

The Assyrian King Sennacherib (704–681 BCE) is known to have built a garden in his palace at Nineveh, the ruins of which are near the northern Iraqi city of Mosul. The interior of the palace was lined with stone reliefs, many of which are now in the British Museum, and in one of these a later Assyrian king is shown standing in his garden. He is surrounded by trellises from which luxurious vines hang down around him, an indication that, as wondrous as the Hanging Gardens of Babylon may have been, they could easily have been a much simpler structure than later accounts have made them out to be.

WRONG KING

Some academics have suggested that the classical writers had got the Assyrian and Babylonian kings confused in their accounts of Babylon and were actually describing Sennacherib's hanging garden rather than the one they attributed to Nebuchadnezzar. There are certainly similarities between these classical descriptions and what we know of

Sennacherib's garden. It was laid out in terraces up the side of a hill and was watered by means of a mechanical system, in which water from the river was transported up to the top and then trickled back down through the garden.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the garden at Nineveh gives us an indication that wealthy Mesopotamian kings included such features in their palaces. As well as being a soothing place to relax, a garden could have been regarded as being the height of fashionable living at the time. If this was the case, then surely Nebuchadnezzar would have included a garden when he built a new palace for himself in Babylon, so it is possible that, one of these days, it will be discovered under the waters of the Euphrates.

HANGING GARDENS

The Hanging Gardens were supposedly built by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar for his homesick wife Amytitis.

