

KISH

Kish ([Sumerian](#): Kiš; transliteration: [Kiš](#)^[k]; cuneiform: ^[1] [Akkadian](#): kiššatu^[2]) is modern **Tell al-Uhaymir** ([Babil Governorate, Iraq](#)), and was an ancient city of [Sumer](#). Kish is located some 12 km east of [Babylon](#), and 80 km south of [Baghdad](#) ([Iraq](#)).

History

Kish was occupied beginning in the [Jemdet Nasr period](#) (ca. 3100 BC), gaining prominence as one of the pre-eminent powers in the region during the early dynastic period.

The [Sumerian king list](#) states that it was the first city to have kings following the deluge,^[3] beginning with [Jushur](#). Jushur's successor is called [Kullassina-bel](#), but this is actually a sentence in Akkadian meaning "All of them were lord". Thus, some scholars have suggested that this may have been intended to signify the absence of a central authority in Kish for a time. The names of the next nine kings of Kish preceding [Etana](#) are all Akkadian words for animals, e.g. [Zuqaqip](#) "scorpion". The [Semitic](#) nature of these and other early names associated with Kish reveals that its population had a strong Semitic component from the dawn of recorded history.^[4]

The 12th king of Kish appearing on the list, [Etana](#), is noted as "the shepherd, who ascended to heaven and consolidated all the foreign countries". Although his reign has yet to be archaeologically attested, his name is [found](#) in later legendary tablets, and Etana is sometimes regarded as the first king and founder of Kish himself. The 21st king of Kish on the list, [Enmebaragesi](#), said to have captured the weapons of [Elam](#), is the first name confirmed by archaeological finds from his reign. He is also known through other literary references, where he and his son [Aga of Kish](#) are portrayed as contemporary rivals of [Dumuzid, the Fisherman](#) and [Gilgamesh](#), early rulers of [Uruk](#).

Some early kings of Kish are known through archaeology, but are not named on the King list. These include Utug or Uhub, said to have defeated [Hamazi](#) in the earliest days, and [Mesilim](#), who built temples in [Adab](#) and [Lagash](#), where he seems to have exercised some control.

The Third Dynasty of Kish is unique in that it begins with a woman, previously a tavern [keeper](#), [Kubau](#), as "king". She was later deified as the goddess [Kheba](#).

Afterwards, though its military and economic power was diminished, it retained a strong political and symbolic significance. Just as with [Nippur](#) to the south, control of Kish was a prime element in legitimizing dominance over the north. Because of the city's symbolic [value](#), strong rulers later added the traditional title "*King of Kish*", even if they were from [Akkad](#), [Ur](#), or [Babylon](#). One of the earliest to adopt this title upon subjecting Kish to his empire was King [Mesanepada](#) of Ur. A few governors of Kish for other powers in later times are also known.

[Sargon of Akkad](#) came from the area of Kish. The city's [patron deity](#) was [Zababa](#) (or Zamama) in Akkadian times, along with his wife, the goddess [Inanna](#).

Kish continued to be occupied through the old Babylonian, [Kassite](#), and [Neo-Assyrian](#) periods, and into classical times, before being abandoned.

Archaeology



[Murex](#) bearing the name of "[Rimush](#), king of Kish", ca. [2270 BC](#), [Louvre](#)

The Kish archaeological site is actually an oval area roughly 5 miles by 2 miles, transected by the dry former bed of the Euphrates River, encompassing around 40 mounds, the largest being Uhaimir and Ingharra. The most notable mounds are:-

- Tell Uhaimir - believed to be the location of the city of Kish. It means "the red" after the red bricks of the [ziggurat](#) there.
- Tell Ingharra - believed to be the location of Hursagkalamma, east of Kish, home of a temple of [Inanna](#).^[5]
- Tell Khazneh
- Tell el-Bender - held [Parthian](#) material.
- Mound W - where a number of [Neo-Assyrian](#) tablets were discovered.

After illegally excavated tablets began appearing at the beginning of the last century, François Thureau-Dangin identified the site as being Kish. Those tablets ended up in a variety of museums.

A French archaeological team under Henri de Genouillac excavated at Kish between 1912 and 1914, finding 1400 Old Babylonian tablets which were distributed to the [Istanbul Archaeology Museum](#) and the [Louvre](#).^[6]

Later a joint [Field Museum](#) and [Oxford University](#) team under [Stephen Langdon](#) excavated from 1923 to 1933, with the recovered materials split between Chicago and the [Ashmolean Museum](#) at Oxford.^{[7] [8] [9]? [10] [11] [12] [13]}

The actual excavations at Kish were led initially by E. MacKay and later by L. C. Watelin. Work on the faunal and flora remains was conducted by [Henry Field](#).^{[14] [15]}

More recently, a Japanese team from the [Kokushikan University](#) led by Ken Matsumoto excavated at Kish in 1988, 2000, and 2001. The final season lasted only one week.^{[16] [17] [18]}