

Ancient Kingdom Discovered Beneath Mound in Iraq

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In the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq archaeologists have discovered an ancient city called Idu, hidden beneath a mound.

Cuneiform inscriptions and works of art reveal the palaces that flourished in the city throughout its history thousands of years ago.

Located in a valley on the northern bank of the lower Zab River, the city's remains are now part of [a mound created by human occupation](#) called a tell, which rises about 32 feet (10 meters) above the surrounding plain. The earliest remains date back to Neolithic times, when farming first appeared in

[Ancient Lost Army Found?](#)

Has the lost army of Cambyses II been found?

The city thrived between 3,300 and 2,900 years ago, said Cinzia Pappi, an archaeologist at the Universität Leipzig in Germany. At the start of this period, the city was under the control of the [Assyrian Empire](#) and was used to administer the surrounding territory. Later on, as the empire declined, the city gained its independence and became the center of a kingdom that lasted for about 140 years, until the Assyrians reconquered it. ([See Photos of Discoveries at the Ancient City of Idu](#))

The researchers were able to determine the site's ancient name when, during a survey of the area in 2008, a villager brought them an inscription with the city's ancient name engraved on it. Excavations were conducted in 2010 and 2011, and the team reported its findings in the most recent edition of the journal *Anatolica*.

"Very few archaeological excavations had been conducted in Iraqi Kurdistan before 2008," Pappi wrote in an email to LiveScience. Conflicts in Iraq over the past three decades have made it difficult to work there. Additionally archaeologists before that time tended to favor excavations in the south of Iraq at places like Uruk and Ur.

The effects of recent history are evident on the mound. In 1987, Saddam Hussein's forces attacked and partly burnt the modern-day village as part of a larger campaign against the Kurds, and "traces of this attack are still visible," Pappi said.

Ancient palaces

The art and [cuneiform](#) inscriptions the team uncovered provide glimpses of the ancient city's extravagant palaces.

[PHOTOS: Ancient Etruscan Prince Emerges From Tomb](#)

When Idu was an independent city, one of its rulers, Ba'ilanu, went so far as to boast that his palace was better than any of his predecessors'. "The palace which he built he made greater than that of his fathers," he claimed in the translated inscription. (His father, Abbi-zeri, made no such boast.)

Two works of art hint at the decorations adorning the palaces at the time Idu was independent. One piece of artwork, a [bearded sphinx](#) with the head of a human male and the body of a winged lion, was drawn onto a glazed brick that the researchers found in four fragments. Above and below the sphinx, a surviving inscription reads, "Palace of Ba'auri, king of the land of Idu, son of Edima, also king of the land of Idu."

Another work that was created for the same ruler, and bearing the same inscription as that on the sphinx, shows a "striding horse crowned with a semicircular headstall and led by a halter by a bearded man wearing a fringed short robe," Pappi and colleague Arne Wossink wrote in the journal article.

Even during Assyrian rule, when Idu was used to administer the surrounding territory, finely decorated palaces were still built. For instance, the team discovered part of a glazed plaque whose colored decorations include a palmette, pomegranates and zigzag patterns. Only part of the inscription survives, but it reads, "Palace of Assurnasirpal, (king of the land of Assur)." Assurnasirpal refers to [Assurnasirpal II](#) (883-859 B.C.), the researchers said, adding that he, or one of his governors, must have built or rebuilt a palace at Idu after the Assyrians reconquered the city