

History of ERIDU – Source Wikipedia

According to the [Sumerian kinglist](#) Eridu was the first city in the World. The opening line reads,

"[nam]-lugal an-ta èd-dè-a-ba

[eri]du^{ki} nam-lugal-la"

"When kingship from heaven was lowered,
the kingship was in Eridu."

In [Sumerian mythology](#), it was said to be one of the five cities built before the [Deluge](#) occurred.

Eridu appears to be the earliest settlement in the region, founded ca. 5400 BC, close to the [Persian Gulf](#) near the mouth of the [Euphrates](#) River. Because of accumulation of silt at the shoreline over the millennia, the remains of Eridu are now some distance from the gulf at Abu Shahrain in [Iraq](#). Excavation has shown that the city was originally founded on a virgin sand-dune site with no previous occupation. P. Steinkeller has hypothesised that the earliest divinity at Eridu was a Goddess, who later emerged as the Earth Goddess [Ninhursag](#) (Nin = lady, Hur = Mountain, Sag = Sacred), with the later growth in [Enki](#) as a male divinity the result of a [hieros gamos](#), with a male divinity or functionary of the temple.

According to Gwendolyn Leick,^[10] Eridu was formed at the confluence of three separate ecosystems, supporting three distinct lifestyles, that led by the Abgallu (Ab = water, Gal = great, Lu = man) came to an agreement about access to fresh water in a desert environment. The oldest agrarian settlement seems to have been based upon intensive subsistence irrigation agriculture derived from the [Samarra culture](#) to the north, characterised by the building of canals, and mud-brick buildings. The fisher-hunter cultures of the Arabian littoral were responsible for the extensive middens along the Arabian shoreline, and may have been the original [Sumerians](#). They seem to have dwelt in reed huts. The third culture that contributed to the building of Eridu were the [Semitic-speaking](#) nomadic herders of herds of sheep and goats living in tents in semi-desert areas. All three cultures seem implicated in the earliest levels of the city. The urban settlement was centered on an impressive temple complex built of mudbrick, within a small depression that allowed water to accumulate.

Kate Fielden reports "The earliest village settlement (c.5000 BC) had grown into a substantial city of mudbrick and reed houses by c.2900 BC, covering 8-10 ha (20-25 acres). Mallowan writes that by the [Ubaid period](#), it was as an "unusually large city" of an area of approx. 20–25 acres, with a population of "not less than 4000 souls".^[11] Jacobsen describes that "Eridu was for all practical purposes abandoned after the Ubaid period",^[12] although it had recovered by Early Dynastic II as there was a Massive Early Dynastic II palace (100 m in each direction) partially excavated there.^[13] Ruth Whitehouse called it "a Major Early Dynastic City".^[14] By c.2050 BC the city had declined; there is little evidence of occupation after that date. Eighteen superimposed mudbrick temples at the site underlie the unfinished [Ziggurat](#) of [Amar-Sin](#) (c. 2047 – 2039 BC). The finding of extensive deposits of fishbones associated with the earliest levels also shows a continuity of the [Abzu](#) cult associated later with [Enki](#) and [Ea](#). This apparent continuity of occupation and religious observance at Eridu provide convincing evidence for the indigenous origin of Sumerian civilization

Eridu was abandoned for long periods, before it was finally deserted and allowed to fall into ruin in the 6th century BC. The encroachment of neighbouring sand dunes, and the rise of a saline water table, set early limits to its agricultural base so in its later [Neo-Babylonian](#) development, Eridu was rebuilt as a purely temple site, in honour of its earliest history.

Possible location of Tower of Babel

The Egyptologist [David Rohl](#) has conjectured that Eridu, to the south of Ur, was the original [Babel](#) and site of the [Tower of Babel](#), rather than the later city of [Babylon](#).^{[15][16]} although this belief is not widely held.^[17]

Other scholars have discussed at length a number of additional correspondences between the names of "Babylon" and "Eridu". Historical tablets state that [Sargon of Akkad](#) (ca. 2300 BC) dug up the original "Babylon" and rebuilt it near [Akkad](#), though some scholars suspect this may in fact refer to the much later Assyrian king [Sargon II](#).^[18]

Architecture

The urban nucleus of Eridu was [Enki's temple](#), called House of the Aquifer (**Cuneiform**: 𒂗𒍪𒂗, E₂.ZU.AB; **Sumerian**: e₂-abzu; **Akkadian**: *bītu apsū*), which in later history was called House of the Waters (**Cuneiform**: 𒂗𒍪, E₂.LAGABxHAL; **Sumerian**: e₂-engur; **Akkadian**: *bītu engurru*). The name refers to Enki's realm.^[19] His consort [Ninhursanga](#) had a nearby temple at [Ubaid](#).^[20]

During the Ur III period a ziggurat was built over the remains of previous temples by Ur-Nammu.

Aside from Enmerkar of Uruk (as mentioned in the *Aratta* epics), several later historical Sumerian kings are said in inscriptions found here to have worked on or renewed the *e-abzu* temple, including [Elili](#) of Ur; [Ur-Nammu](#), [Shulgi](#) and [Amar-Sin](#) of Ur-III, and [Nur-Adad](#) of [Larsa](#).^[21]

House of the Aquifer (E-Abzu)

Level	Date (B.C.)	Period	Size (m)	Note
XVIII	5300	-	3×0.3	Sleeper walls
XVII	5300–5000	-	2.8×2.8	First cella
XVI	5300–4500	Early Ubaid	3.5×3.5	
XV	5000–4500	Early Ubaid	7.3×8.4	
XIV	5000–4500	Early Ubaid	-	No structure found
XIII	5000–4500	Early Ubaid	-	No structure found
XII	5000–4500	Early Ubaid	-	No structure found

XI	4500–4000	Ubaid	4.5×12.6	First platform
X	4500–4000	Ubaid	5×13	
IX	4500–4000	Ubaid	4×10	
VIII	4500–4000	Ubaid	18×11	
VII	4000–3800	Ubaid	17×12	
VI	4000–3800	Ubaid	22×9	
V	3800–3500	Early Uruk	-	Only platform remains
IV	3800–3500	Early Uruk	-	Only platform remains
III	3800–3500	Early Uruk	-	Only platform remains
II	3500–3200	Early Uruk	-	Only platform remains
I	3200	Early Uruk	-	Only platform remains