

Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey Project

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1995-1996 Season

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Balghelam excavation to commence in mid-January

The winter season of fieldwork for the Project will commence in mid-January with four weeks of excavations on the island of Balghelam, north east of Abu Dhabi.

The excavations are to be carried out with the kind permission of Presidential Court Chamberlain HE Sheikh Surour bin Mohammed al Nahyan, the island's owner, following three preliminary surveys in 1993 and 1994.

The surveys yielded extensive evidence of Late Islamic occupation on the island, particularly on its sheltered south-facing coastline, with the remains of fireplaces, of possible dwellings and of a water catchment system, as well as substantial scatters of pottery.

Further evidence of occupation, including shell middens and Islamic graves, were identified elsewhere on the island, although not in such profusion. Of additional interest was the discovery on an apparent raised shoreline, again on the south-facing side of the island, of similar features, including raised circular mounds, and rectangular hearths, to those identified by Project surveyors on the islands of Liffiyah, Merawah and elsewhere during the 1994-1995 winter season.

A trial excavation of one such feature on Liffiyah a year ago suggested that it might date to the first part of the First Century AD, before the coming of Islam, when the prevailing sea level in the Arabian Gulf was up to a metre higher than it is at present.

The purpose of the Balghelam excavation is two fold: first to attempt to provide a definitive dating of the raised shoreline features, which, from their relative frequency on Abu Dhabi's offshore islands, must have represented a period of use by a substantial population.

Until the discoveries made by Project teams over the last few years, virtually nothing was known of

patterns of human settlement on the islands in the pre-Islamic era. ADIAS work has now shown such settlement to have been extensive, and the Balghelam work may begin to answer questions such as dating, commercial relations and economic patterns.

The second objective will be to begin an investigation of what appears to have been a typical Late Islamic island occupation, with a view to discovering as much as possible about the lifestyle of the people during the period from around the Seventeenth Century AD until earlier this century.

Results from ADIAS survey work on islands throughout the Western Region have suggested extensive, if not necessarily permanent, occupation during the Late Islamic period, which corroborates oral tradition and historical records. The extent of the pearling industry is well known, but little published information is available.

Over the past few years, some work has been done on Late Islamic sites in the northern emirates, particularly in Sharjah and Ras al Khaimah, but the Balghelam dig will be the first time that any serious study has been undertaken on offshore fishing and pearling settlements. It will also be the first work on sites from the period on Abu Dhabi's islands, and should add significantly to our understanding of this key period of the country's history.

The month long season offers the opportunity to obtain substantial new information about periods of the UAE's history.

The excavations will be directed by Sal Garfi, assisted by Jakub 'Chas' Czastka and Alexander Wasse, who co-directed research into the Liffiyah raised shoreline site in November 1994. Both also co-directed last summer's work at Abu Dhabi International Airport, while Czastka prepared the archaeological section of a joint report submitted ear-

Visit to Qusabi

Following on from the survey undertaken early this year for our sponsor the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, on the islands of Jubayl and Fahid, east of Abu Dhabi, Project staff were asked last month to inspect part of another island to the west of Abu Dhabi, Qusabi, which lies within the Dhabb'iyah oil field area.

As part of development plans for the field, ADCO will be moving a rig across Qusabi some time next year, and sought advice on the nature of some small stone features identified on one of the possible rig routes.

The features turned out to be a single grave and a couple of rectangular fireplaces, all probably Late Islamic, along with a small scatter of sherds.

In themselves, the finds are not particularly significant. Much more extensive evidence of Late Islamic occupation has been identified on other islands, and there may well be more sites elsewhere on Qusabi. The four small sites add further, however, to the picture of the widespread use of Abu Dhabi's offshore islands during the Late Islamic period.

We are grateful to ADCO for seeking our advice, and are pleased, too, to be able to show that an archaeological baseline study needn't necessarily lead to the discovery of sites that will delay work or cause heavy additional costs.

The company added the preservation of the country's archaeological heritage into its corporate Health, Safety and Environment, HSE, policy earlier this year.

Belgian team leader visits

Professor Ernie Haerinck, Professor of Near East Archaeology at Belgium's University of Ghent, visited Abu Dhabi for a few days in late November for talks with the ADIAS Co-ordinator and to visit ADIAS sites near Abu Dhabi located earlier this year.

Professor Haerinck has been working for eight seasons at the First Millennium AD site at Ad Door in Umm al Qaiwain, and one of the purposes of the visit was to discuss the possible significance of the site found on the coast at Sheleala, which has produced pottery ascribed to the Ad Door period. The visit to the site, on November 23rd, yielded one further pierced sherd of typical heavy black ridged ware of the Ad Door type, permitting Professor Haerinck to confirm the identification. No other sites of the same period have been identified anywhere on the coastline between Ad Door and Sheleala.

Also recovered from the Sheleala site were two

pierced net weights made of beach rock, probably Late Islamic in date.

The site visit was undertaken with the kind permission of the land owner, Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research HE Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak al Nahayan.

A visit was also paid to the Abu Dhabi Airport site. Examining some previously unstudied pottery from the Airport site, collected during surface surveying, Professor Haerinck suggested that some showed parallels to pottery from the late Fourth Millennium BC from eastern Saudi Arabia, underlining the necessity for further detailed study to be carried out of the pottery finds from the Airport site.

Expanding academic ties

As ADIAS sponsors will have realised from the contents of our *Occasional Newsletters* over the last year, the Project has achieved considerable success in identifying new archaeological sites on the coast and islands of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, too many, indeed, to be handled by a single team of archaeologists.

As in other fields of science, moreover, increasing specialisation within archaeology over the last few years has meant that archaeologists have become specialists in particular periods.

With the approval of the Office of our Patron, it has now been provisionally agreed that Professor Haerinck and his team for the University of Ghent will undertake a two season programme of work on behalf of ADIAS on the 'Ubaid period site on Dalma from late 1996, taking over responsibility for this site after our third season of excavations on the site, planned for the spring. Professor Haerinck will visit Dalma during the spring work to discuss his future programme with ADIAS team members.

Besides his work at Ad Door, Professor Haerinck also has experience on 'Ubaid sites elsewhere in the Emirates, as well as extensive knowledge of other periods of pre-Islamic Gulf archaeology.

The partnership between the British archaeologists that have undertaken ADIAS fieldwork so far and the Belgian team should add substantially to the ability of ADIAS to continue its work of unveiling the archaeology and heritage of Abu Dhabi.

The Project will continue to examine other opportunities of strengthening our academic links.

Finally...

would sponsors please note that our requirements lists, both for the Balghelam work and the planned season in March and April are now being drawn up. Offers of support, ranging from cash to various forms of equipment and logistic support, would be gratefully received.