

Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey Project

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1997-1998 Season

Occasional Newsletter

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Citizen's discovery leads to identification of new site

Thanks to the keen eyes of a local citizen and the interest of HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Butti Al Hamed, Chairman of the Abu Dhabi Municipality and Town Planning Department and Ruler's Representative in the Western Region, ADIAS was able this month to record for the first time a previously unknown archaeological site in the deserts of the Western Region at Tawi Beduwa Shwaiba. The site, lying in a hollow between dunes around 60 km south west of Abu Dhabi, was first brought to the attention of Sheikh Mohammed by Mubarak Mohammed Al Mansouri, a citizen who had known the area since his childhood. On a recent trip to the area, Al Mansouri noted that recent dune movement had led to a number of pottery vessels becoming exposed, as well as extensive scatters of potsherds. He collected the vessels and brought them to Sheikh Mohammed. In discussion with Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, it was suggested that ADIAS be brought in to investigate.

A visit was made to the site earlier this month, escorted by Mubarak Al Mansouri, during which samples of potsherds on the site were collected. A preliminary assessment suggests that all are of Late Islamic date, probably from the 17th Century AD onwards. Ten species of mollusc shells were also identified during the visit, including species known to have been used for food, as well as pearl oysters. Al Mansouri described the site as having been five days camel ride from Liwa on a route to Abu Dhabi, and added that he remembered it as having been in use during his childhood, around fifty years ago, and that he had been informed that it had been in use as far back as the time of his grandfather's grandfather.

A study of the collected pottery will now be undertaken, and should help to provide a chronology of pottery use over a two to three hundred year period. The site is particularly valuable, because it is the first undisturbed desert camp-site we have been able to examine.

There was no evidence of structures on the site, suggesting that excavation would not yield any valuable evidence, but, with the support of Sheikh Mohammed, ADIAS hopes to maintain a watching brief on the area in case further pottery vessels are uncovered.

ADIAS has now suggested to Sheikh Mohammed that instructions be given to workers in the Municipality and the Western Region that they report any discovery of potsherds, so that the sites can be further investigated.

ADIAS is grateful to Sheikh Mohammed for his support and interest, also shown earlier this year in assistance provided on his instructions for the fencing and protection of sites identified by ADIAS on the islands of Ghagha' and Yasat al-Sufla, off the coast in the far west of Abu Dhabi.

Sites such as Tawi Beduwa Shwaiba are unlikely to contain much worth excavating, since they are habitation sites of an essentially transient community. They do, however, offer the chance of recovering valuable information on types of pottery in use and on ancient desert routes.

Other such sites have been recorded in the past near Al Khatam, on the Abu Dhabi-Al Ain road and on a cross-desert route from Al Ain to Dubai, and more are likely to be awaiting discovery. ADIAS welcomes the receipt of any more information that will fill in the picture of past patterns of human occupation in the desert areas of the Emirate.

Plans for 1997-1998 season under way

An outline of projected work for ADIAS over the period from late November this year until the end of April 1998 is now being drawn up.

While final dates have yet to be worked out, possible work includes the following:

- further examination and mapping of the Late Stone Age site, MR-1, on the island of Merawah
- a further excavation of cairns on Merawah,
- sondages and limited excavations on Dalma to obtain more material to facilitate Carbon 14 dating of the important 'Ubaid site excavated in previous seasons

- preliminary excavation work on the 3rd and 4th Century AD sites on Yasat al-Ulya and Yasat al-Sufla.

- further examination of the Late Islamic fortified structure at Mantiqa As'sirra, east of Medinat (Bida) Zayed.

As reported elsewhere in this issue of the ADIAS *Occasional Newsletter*, some preliminary surveys have already been undertaken over the summer months, and will continue alongside the more detailed surveying, mapping and excavations.

Further details of ADIAS plans for the winter will be announced in a subsequent issue of the Newsletter.

New 1st Millennium AD site found on Qarnein island

Over the course of the last few years, a number of visits have been made by the Project Co-ordinator and others involved in study of the country's heritage and environment to the island of Qarnein, around 130 km. north-west of Abu Dhabi.

During these visits, pottery scatters have been identified on the western coast of the island, adjacent to the remains of an offshore fish trap.

At the beginning of July, a further visit was made to Qarnein by ADIAS environmental consultant Simon Aspinall at the invitation of the island's owner, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

While the main purpose was to study the island's bird life, the opportunity was taken of collecting some of the pottery for examination.

Project Director Dr. Geoffrey King made a brief study of the pottery during an early July flying visit to Abu Dhabi, to find that most of was of early First Millennium AD date, comparable to

other ceramics of the period identified by ADIAS on Ghagha', al-Ufzai'iya, Yasat al-Ulya and Yasat al-Sufla, all in the extreme west of Abu Dhabi, and also at Ras Bilyaryar, on the mainland north-east of Abu Dhabi, and at Abu Dhabi International Airport.

The Qarnein ceramics, therefore, belong to a period which was until recently unknown in the archaeological chronology of Abu Dhabi. While other ceramics of the period have been found on and close to the coast, the Qarnein site is the furthest offshore, providing useful evidence of the use of the island during the first centuries of the Christian era.

A Preliminary Note on the ceramics has been submitted to His Highness Sheikh Hamdan, and ADIAS will be seeking permission to undertake further study of the Qarnein site in due course. A short paper on the find will appear in the forthcoming issue of the Emirates Natural History Group bi-annual journal *Tribulus*.

More support from Duty Free...

As sponsors may have noticed in the local press in August, the Abu Dhabi Duty Free has extended sponsorship to the Project for the third consecutive year, on the instructions of Civil Aviation Department Chairman HE Sheikh Hamdan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan.

The support will be used primarily to fund the drawing of flint tools found during the ADIAS excavations at the Airport in the summer of 1995, prior to the completion of a full report on the site. The excavations were also funded by the Abu Dhabi Duty Free.

A report on the pottery from the site, prepared by ADIAS ceramicist Beatrice de Cardi, is to be published soon in the bi-annual journal *Arabian Archaeology and Epigraphy*.

We are grateful to Sheikh Hamdan for his continued interest and support.

... from ADGAS

The Abu Dhabi Gas Liquefaction Company, ADGAS, has also agreed to continue its support for ADIAS for a third successive year.

To them our thanks as well.

We only wish that there were some areas of Das Island that we could survey for them in return, but the development of recent years has meant that there are few remaining undisturbed areas. Through a Das resident, however, ADIAS retains a watching brief for any pottery or other signs of earlier occupation that may turn up on the island.

... from ANZ Grindlays

Joining as sponsors of the project for the first time are ANZ Grindlays Bank plc, whom we are delighted to welcome.

One of the best-established foreign banks in the Emirates, ANZ Grindlays is particularly welcome because of its connections with Australia, where, of course, ADIAS is now collaborating closely with the University of Sydney on our continuing examination of the important Late Stone Age site on Merawah, identified during the first ADIAS season in 1991. We look forward, through ANZ Grindlays, to being able to inform the Australian (and New Zealand) public about our continuing work on the ancient heritage of Abu Dhabi.

... from the Kanoo Group

Another new sponsor for our 1997-1998 season is the Kanoo Group, through its Abu Dhabi office. The Group is one of the longest-established family businesses in the Gulf, and has also shown its commitment to the heritage of the region through the creation of a major collection of Islamic manuscripts and artefacts.

Area Executive Vice President Mohammed Kanoo has long displayed an interest in our work, and we are delighted that his family Group has now decided to join our list of sponsors.

and, of course,

our long-term sponsors, like the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, and British Petroleum, have promised their continued support for another year's work.

Such long-term commitment is of particular value, since it enables ADIAS not only to plan ahead, but also to develop the flexibility that permits the Project to respond to sudden events, such as the discovery of the Tawi Beduwa Shwaiba site. Their support is of enormous importance, and we are, as always, most grateful. More sponsors are always welcome!

Baseline study of Taweela - Ras Sadr area

While the main focus of ADIAS over the last few years, inevitably, has been on undertaking our own surveys to identify archaeological sites on the coast and islands, and then to carry out

mapping and excavation, where appropriate, the Project is always pleased to be approached to inspect particular areas where development of various kinds is planned.

Such work can identify sites that would otherwise have remained unrecorded, helping us to continue with the process of "filling in the blanks" in Abu Dhabi's archaeological record.

As part of this process, the Project Co-ordinator, assisted by Simon Aspinall, undertook brief archaeological baseline studies in July and August of the coastal area between Ras Ghanadha and Ras Hanjurah and Ras Sadr for environmental consultants Dames & Moore.

In terms of sites identified, the results of the survey were relatively sparse, with a few small scatters of potsherds and shell middens being identified, together with five possible raised circular mounds of the type previously identified by ADIAS during work on offshore islands like Balghelam, Merawah and Liffiyyah. All have provisionally been ascribed a Late Islamic date. Details of the sites have been added to the ADIAS database.

In contrast, on nearby Ghanadha island, property of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, sites from the Third Millennium BC, the First Millennium BC and the Late Islamic period were identified during excavations by the Al Ain Department of Antiquities in the early 1980s.

ADIAS teams have also identified Late Islamic sites and evidence of occupation in the First Millennium AD and during the Late Islamic period at Ras Bilyaryar, to the west, as well as on offshore islands like Balghelam and Jubayl.

The paucity of the information found during the Taweela and Ras Hanjurah studies is somewhat surprising, particularly when contrasted with results from the nearby islands, and further surveying along the coast in the area may provide us with some clues as to why.

In particular, we will be endeavouring to assess whether or not there are different patterns of settlement on the islands and on adjacent coastal areas, and to relate these to possible variations in the resources available.

Previous special surveys have been carried out by ADIAS for the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO, on the islands of Jubayl, east of Abu Dhabi, Qusabi, west of Abu Dhabi and along the route of the fourth Main Oil Line from Habshan to Jebel Dhanna, and for ADNOC on the islands of Arzanah and Zirku as well as on a number of privately-owned islands, which have added substantially to the database of archaeological sites being built up by the Project.