

Winter Excavations at Ad Door

by Peter Hellyer

A fourth season of archaeological excavation at the Ad Door site in Umm al Qaiwain by a Belgian University team took place in October and November 1990.

The key discovery was an undisturbed rectangular covered tomb, dated to the First Century of the Christian era, in which fifteen burials were found, as well as iron weapons, bronze utensils, pottery and beads.. Two camel skeletons were found just outside the tomb. A well was also discovered, which will be excavated in the 1991 winter season.

In the past four seasons, the Ad Door site has yielded a number of tombs as well as a temple building, but no houses or other domestic buildings have been found, and the exact function of the site remains unclear.

The fourth successive season of archaeological work at the Parthian era site of Ad Door in the Emirate of Umm

قام فريق تابع لجامعة بلجيكا في شهري أكتوبر ونوفمبر ١٩٩٠ بإجراء أعمال الكشف عن الأثار في موقع الدور في أم القيوين للفصل الرابع على التوالي.

وكان الاكتشاف البارز مقبرة مستطيلة الشكل في حالة جيدة تعود الى القرن الاول بعد الميلاد تحتوي على ١٥ قبراً وأسلحة حديدية وأدوات برونزية وأواني فخارية وخرز. كما تم العثور على هيكلين عظيمين لجمالين خارج المقبرة وكذلك على بئر سيتم الكشف عنها خلال فصل الشتاء من عام ١٩٩١.

al Qaiwain took place in October and November 1990, carried out by a team from the State University of Ghent



The remains of the Parthian-era temple at Ad Door, Umm al Qaiwain, discovered by the Ghent University team.
(P. Hellyer)

in Belgium, led by Professor Emie Haerinck. In previous years, teams from the University of Copenhagen, (Denmark), the University of Lyons, (France), and the University of Edinburgh, (United Kingdom), have also taken part, with the four teams working throughout the winter months from October to April.

This account is largely based upon information provided by Professor Haerinck, in both the 1990 and previous seasons.

The Ad Door site lies on a range of sand dunes rising to a little over 12 metres above sea level, and adjacent to the shallow and largely silted inlet of Khor (Creek) Yfrah, itself an extension of the larger Khor al Beida, on the southern Arabian Gulf. The main road to Ras al Khaimah runs between the dunes and the Khor. Dated to between 100 BC and 300 AD, though with the main occupation in the First and early Second Centuries AD, the site covers an area of approximately two kilometres square. Evidence of much earlier Iron Age and Third Millennium BC occupation has been discovered from surface examination of surrounding areas, while the 'tell' of Tel Abraq, around four kilometres to the South West, has yielded evidence of continual occupation from the Third Millennium until the middle of the First Millennium BC.

The first excavation, on the site of a fort, was carried out by an Iraqi expedition in 1973-74, but no further work was done until the arrival of the European teams in 1986-1987, despite the presence of very substantial numbers of potsherds on the surface of the site.

The name of the site in antiquity remains unknown. Unclear references in the literature of the period mention the existence of a port called 'Omana' on the Southern shores of the Arabian Gulf, and no other settlement of such a size has thus far been identified between the Qatar Peninsula and the Straits of Hormuz. Aerial and ground surveys have, however, so far failed to locate any evidence of a port near Ad Door, while the purpose of the settlement itself remains open to question.

Besides the fort and number of tombs, the site's most important find in previous years has been a rectangular temple, with plaster on its interior and exterior walls, which was discovered on the south western edge of the site three seasons ago by the team led by Professor Haerinck. Dated to the First and Second Centuries AD, the building is the finest remaining example of Parthian era architecture so far to be found in the lower Arabian Gulf. Four altars were subsequently discovered adjacent to the temple, together with a well.

The major discovery of the Ghent University excavation in 1990 was a previously undisturbed tomb, oriented in a North-South direction, with a vaulted roof, traces of which were visible on the surface of a shallow mound prior to excavation. When it was built, the tomb's roof was probably around 40 cm above the surrounding natural surface. The roof was removed to permit excavation.

The rectangular tomb was constructed of blocks cut from soft deposits on the nearby seashore. The inner measurement of the chamber was 1.70 metres by 2.70

metres, with a peak height of 2.2 metres. The door of the chamber was a single large block of stone, which still retained the shells of barnacles, and which was sealed with plaster.

A low rectangular enclosure extended from the North end of the tomb, sheltering the door, and open at the extreme Northern end, which, from examination of the stonework, had been clearly added at some time after construction of the tomb. Within this enclosure, but below the base of its walls, was a much smaller rectangular tomb, again undisturbed, while a small undisturbed circular tomb was found outside. Both, when excavated, proved to be of children.

When opened, the main tomb proved to contain 15 skeletons of adults, twelve male and three female. There was clear evidence of the tomb having been re-used in antiquity, the most recent burial being near the door, with the others pushed back into the tomb. A total of fifteen carved bone plaques, (one for each burial?), were found placed in a line on one side of the inside of the tomb-evidence of a local burial custom signifying something to do with a belief in the afterlife?

The grave yielded a substantial quantity of funerary goods, including glass bottles and vessels, all dated to the First Century AD, and, in some cases, very finely worked, in, for example, the shape of a bunch of grapes. The collection is the best so far found in the Emirates of glass from the period.

Other finds included iron swords, spearheads and daggers, and bronze sieves and bowls, as well as a strainer and ladle. The bowls were decorated with horse-shaped spouts. Of similar design to others found in the Arabian Peninsula, in north eastern Saudi Arabia and at Samad, in Oman, they are believed to have been made in the region. Both the ladle and the sieve, decorated with birds and floral designs, were of a style indicating they were imports from the Eastern Mediterranean area.

Other finds included around 500 beads, made of frits, quartz, cornelian, agate, natural pearls and amethyst, as well as one in the shape of a scarab, indicating an Egyptian origin. Only one coin was found this season, very debased, but of the typical Ad Door style. Excavations carried out near Mileiha, in the Emirate of Sharjah, have previously located the site of a possible mint.

Outside the tomb, but adjacent to it, the skeletons of two camels were found in a single pit, which were probably slaughtered as a part of funeral rites. A similar camel burial was found two seasons ago by the University of Lyon team working elsewhere on the Ad Door site, though in this latter case, a dagger was found between the ribs of the dead camel. No such weapon was found in the Belgian excavation.

Other finds during the 1990 excavations by the University of Ghent team included a well of around 1.70 metres in diameter, which will be completely excavated in the 1991 season. The other well found by the Belgian team near the temple a couple of years ago proved to be 1.2 metres across, and around 6 metres deep. Deposits on its sides indicated that the fresh water table

in antiquity was probably only around 4.5 metres above the prevailing sea level. This first well is now dry, suggesting a desiccation of the climate in the past 1,900 years.

A number of the small stone platforms typical of the site were also cleared. As on previous occasions, they were found to have no evidence of walls, while the surface is very uneven, unsuitable for the floor of a dwelling. Although no evidence has yet been discovered to prove their use, Professor Haerinck speculates that they may have had some connection with local burial customs.

The nature of the Ad Door site as a whole remains unclear. The extensive surface scatter of pottery suggests occupation over a considerable period, but the only structures so far excavated, apart from the 'fort' are tombs or the temple. No houses have yet found, although it is, of course, possible that the inhabitants used perishable materials, like 'barasti', for their dwellings.

Although adjacent to the sea, no evidence of a port has been found, while Khor Yfrah itself is silted up, and was probably too shallow for anything but the very smallest of craft at the time Ad Door flourished. Was it perhaps

primarily a necropolis for local tribes, who journeyed to it for burials, and some coastal trade? The evidence of imported goods, from the Roman Empire and from Baluchistan and Sind, as well as the sophistication of the building techniques used in the tombs and temple, suggest the existence of at least a partially settled, trading community, which, if the evidence is to be believed, at least minted its own coinage, even if it was subject to the nearby Parthians on the other side of the Gulf.

Many questions about Ad Door remain to be answered, while hypotheses developed one year by one team come under review or are discarded the next year by another. With a large area yet to be explored, the answers to the riddle, as with so many in Emirates archaeology, may yet lie beneath the sand.

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Dugongs - a summary of their status in the UAE

by J. N. Bish Brown

Believed to be the origin of the legend of the mermaid, the dugong is one of the world's most endangered species of marine mammal. This paper reviews its status in the UAE and Arabian Gulf.

Almost five thousand years ago, the villagers who lived on the island of Umm an Nar, just over the Muqta Bridge from Abu Dhabi City, probably harpooned dugongs for food. Many dugong bones and tusks were found inside the village and tombs dating from 2,700 BC. The site was believed to have been inhabited for about three hundred years.

Dugongs, *Dugong dugon* (Muller, 1776) are large marine mammals measuring up to 3 metres long and weighing 170 kilos, rarely seen, but nevertheless present in small numbers over a large area of the Arabian Gulf. The males show 2 or 3 inches of tusk, but the females do not. They inhabit the warm, shallow, coastal waters and inshore Khors of the United Arab Emirates, from Sadiyat and west to Sila and the Qatar coast. Their diet consists almost exclusively of sea grasses, which grow in the fine sandy bottom sediments. They do not thrive when the water temperature falls below 18 degrees centigrade.

Other populations are known from north-west of Qatar, Bahrain and the Arabian Gulf coast of Saudi Arabia. The Meteorology and Environmental Protection Administration (MEPA) of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, recently carried out surveys of the dugong population in the Arabian Gulf. It was estimated that there are more than 7,000 in the area, including the United Arab Emirates, out of a world population of around 30,000

يعتبر حيوان الأطوم، الذي يعتقد بأنه أصل أسطورة حورية الماء، من أكثر أنواع الثدييات البحرية تعرضاً للخطر. ويعرض هذا البحث أحواله في دولة الامارات العربية المتحدة والخليج العربي.

animals. During the survey in 1986, one herd of more than 600 was sighted and photographed between Bahrain and Qatar.

The massive oil spillage in the northern Gulf, which started towards the end of January 1991, could have disastrous effects on the dugongs. Very early on it was reported that more than thirty had been washed up dead on the coast of Saudi Arabia. They have to surface at regular intervals to breathe and will probably swallow oil at the same time. In addition, when the oil forms globules and drops to the seabed their food plants are likely to be damaged. Dredging in the shallow waters also destroys the seagrass beds.

During fishing operations a number of dugongs are caught in the nets and are drowned. Most are caught in the months from December to March, and there are probably a few in other months. This could mean that some of them migrate from the area at the end of March. Although the fishermen insist that they do not deliberately set out to catch them, many do end up in the fish suq. Following daily visits to the Abu Dhabi fish suq in the late 1970's, it was estimated that the annual catch delivered was between 50 and 70. More recently fewer have been seen in the suq, but it is difficult to judge whether this is because fewer are caught or because they are sold elsewhere. If fewer are caught, it could mean that numbers are decreasing.