

NOTES AND QUERIES

A tetradrachm of Abi'el found near Mileiha :

In April 1996, a coin found on the surface in the Mileiha area by Dr. Saif Mohammed al Ghais, of the Faculty of Science of the Emirates University, was submitted to the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey Project for identification.

Through comparison of the coin with examples of local pre-Islamic coinage published by D.T. Potts, (1991, 1994), it was possible to identify the coin as being a copper/bronze tetradrachm from the S2 (Eagle) Class of the monarch Abi'el.

Weight: 15.0 grams; Diameter : 2.4 cm.

The general description of the Class in Potts (1994) is applicable:

"Characteristics: obv: head of Heracles r. wearing the pelt of Nemean lion; rev. seated figure l. with right arm raised, supporting an eagle, left arm curled around staff; Aramaic legend to the r. of staff, beneath the sea, and along the left margin of the coin face."(1).

Despite close parallels with the Mileiha S2 tetradrachms 181, 182 & 183 illustrated by Potts, the coin shows slight but distinct differences, including the distance between the lower side of the extended right arm and the legs of the seated figure.

As far as is known, the Al Ghais coin is the first copper/bronze example of the Abi'el S2 class to have been published, the only other coins of the class, all also from Mileiha, and published by Potts, four tetradrachms, two drachms and three obols, all being of silver.

The etymology, origins and dating of the Abi'el S2 coins are still the subject of disagreement between scholars. Potts (1994) suggests however that they are "some of the if not the oldest issues of Abi'el."

He goes on to suggest a chronology for the early coinage of south eastern Arabia which would place the S2 class, described as the 'proto-typical Abi'el issue,' in the earlier 2nd century BC, and further states that "it is

now virtually certain that Abi'el must have reigned at Mileiha." (2)

The identity of Abi'el remains unclear. None of the S2 class coinage yet examined has been of a condition sufficient to permit scholars to agree on the patronymic of the monarch, or even to agree as to whether the monarch was male or female.

Debased derivatives of the early Abi'el coinage continued to be used into the 3rd Century AD at the coastal site of Ad Door in Umm al Qaiwain, while from the context of a debased coin mould found at Mileiha it is evident that the debased coins were certainly being minted in the 1st Century BC and/or the 1st Century AD, (Boucharlat & Drieux in Potts [1991]).

The Al Ghais tetradrachm was an isolated surface find, with no evidence of other archaeological material nearby. As this note suggests, however, it is of some importance, underlining the fact that all such stray finds should be reported for identification.

I am grateful to Dr. Saif al Ghais for drawing attention to the coin, and also acknowledge, with thanks, the help of Professor Dan Potts of the University of Sydney, who kindly commented on the first draft of this note.

References:

1: Potts, D.T. (1994). *Supplement to the Pre-Islamic coinage of Eastern Arabia*, CNIP Publications 16. Copenhagen. P.43.

2: Potts, D.T. (1994), *op. cit.* p. 82

Bibliography:

Potts, D.T. (1991) *The pre-Islamic Coinage of Eastern Arabia*, Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, CNIP Publications 14, Copenhagen, 119p.

Potts, D.T. (1994) *Supplement to The pre-Islamic coinage of Eastern Arabia*, CNIP Publications 16. 88p.

Peter Hellyer

Oligocene fossils from near Al Ain

While the Late Cretaceous fossils to be found at Jebel Huwayyah (Fossil Valley), in Oman's Wilayat of Buraimi, adjacent to Al Ain, have been widely recorded (1), little, if anything, appears to have been published on other fossils, possibly of Tertiary Oligocene date, to be found nearby.

Following the road from Buraimi towards Mahdah, and after passing Jebel Oha and shortly before reaching Jebel Huwayyah, a low hog-backed hill runs away from the left hand (western) side of the road. The sediments containing the fossils are to be found on the western side of this hill, and represent fossilised sandy shallow seabed deposits. The sediments, which lie on the surface of the hills and are angled at around 45 degrees, may be easily removed as slabs. Within them, numerous large fossil *Oyster* are visible.

A sample of the fossilised sediments was shown to Dr. T.D. Adams, former Group Vice Chairman and a trained paleontologist, (now President of the Azerbaijan International Operating Company), in October 1995. Besides the easily visible oysters, of up to 8 cm. length and 6

cm. in breadth, he also identified smaller fossils which he provisionally identified as being *Protozoa: Foraminifera: Nummalites: gezhensis*, of types first recorded in sediments to be found around the Giza pyramids in Egypt and of Oligocene date.

Further information on the presence of fossils within possible Oligocene outcrops within the UAE and adjacent areas of Oman would be welcome.

Reference

1. Smith, A.B. and Morris, N.J., n.d. (1992?). *Late Cretaceous faunas and palaeoenvironments of the United Arab Emirates and adjacent areas*, Interim Report to the Abu Dhabi Company for Onshore Oil Operations, ADCO.

and

Lehmann, C. (1992). *Fossil sea-urchin tests found in the UAE and adjacent areas*, in *Tribulus: 2.1*: 3-5, iii-vi.

Peter Hellyer