

Archaeology Review

Further work on Balghelam

A second season of work on Late Islamic sites on the island of Balghelam, east of Abu Dhabi, was undertaken by a team from the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, ADIAS, in January and February 1997, yielding further useful information about patterns of life in the Late Islamic period.

The first season, undertaken with the support of Presidential Court Chamberlain Sheikh Surour bin Mohammed Al Nahyan, took place in early 1996, with results appearing in an earlier issue of *Tribulus* (1).

The work involved the completion of a detailed survey and mapping of archaeological sites on the island, during which a number of previously unidentified sites were located. Test excavations were also undertaken on a midden of Late Islamic date, which produced substantial quantities of fish and of turtle bones, providing evidence of the diet of the island's former inhabitants.

A controlled pick-up of pottery from selected sites was also carried out, with a provisional assessment suggesting that the bulk of the material dates to the Late Islamic period, from the Sixteenth Century onwards.

The season also permitted ADIAS to refine a number of its field methodologies, developed during the course of work on islands in the far west of Abu Dhabi.

Merawah focus for ADIAS main season

The main spring season of the ADIAS, focussed in March on the island of Merawah, around 100 kilometres due west of Abu Dhabi, with facilities being provided by the Office of Chief of Staff Lieut. General Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Merawah was first visited during the first ADIAS season in 1992, when an important site from the Late Stone Age was identified on a headland at the south-western end of the island. Lithics typical of the Arabian Bifacial Tradition obtained from the site were subsequently published in an earlier issue of *Tribulus* (2), while a further examination of the site took place in 1994.

The 1997 season, led by ADIAS Director Dr. Geoffrey King, involved detailed mapping and drawing of the Late Stone Age complex, yielding evidence of structures that suggest that it may be the first major site of its type so far identified on Abu Dhabi's islands. Preliminary studies were also undertaken of some cairns near the site.

Elsewhere on the island, further investigation was undertaken of Late Islamic occupation on and above relict shorelines, making use of methodologies refined during work on Balghelam, while, with the assistance of Professor Graham Evans, who carried out the first investigations of Abu Dhabi's *sabkhas* (salt flats) in 1961-1962, work began on studying the physical evidence of relict shorelines and of possible changes in sea level in the last few thousand years.

South eastern Arabia's largest Iron Age fort

A second season of study of the Iron Age fortress identified at Fujairah's village of Awhala in early 1996 by a team from Australia's University of Sydney has shown it to be the largest such fortified structure of its period

anywhere in south eastern Arabia.

Work under the supervision of Professor Dan Potts, showed the fortress to cover an area of over 100 metres by 50 metres, with walls up to 2.4 metres thick.

"No other fortified Iron Age building of the same size has been found anywhere in the UAE and northern Oman", according to Potts, who described the site as being "of great significance for the understanding of the Iron Age period in south eastern Arabia."

The work by the Australian team, lasting from early December 1996 to mid-February 1997, also involved the excavation of a collective tomb in just outside the village of Sharm, near Dibba. The tomb, around 17 metres long and partially subterranean in construction, has been dated to the later centuries of the Wadi Suq period, around 1,400 BC, with use continuing into the Iron Age.

From the several hundred potsherds and softstone vessel fragments recovered from the tomb, it will be possible for the first time to draw a detailed picture of the types of pottery and other vessels used in the UAE's East Coast during the Wadi Suq period.

The excavations prompted a welcome endorsement from Fujairah Ruler and Supreme Council member Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sharqi of the importance of archaeological research.

"By learning more about our past, we are better equipped to face the challenges of the present and the future," he was quoted by the daily *Emirates News* as telling the Australian team.

"Our ancestors learned to survive and to thrive in conditions that are much harsher than those we face today," the Ruler said. "Archaeological research into our past can help us to understand how our forebears tackled the challenges of the past. That, in turn, equips us better for today and tomorrow, and such studies are a vital part of our development process." (3)

Abu Dhabi Archaeology at Paris Fair

On the instructions of Minister of Information and Culture Sheikh Abdulla bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the UAE pavilion at the 1997 Foire International de Paris included a display devoted to the archaeology of Abu Dhabi.

Cases covering the Late Stone Age, the pre-Islamic Christian monastic site on Sir Bani Yas and evidence of Late Islamic settlement on the Emirate's offshore islands were contributed by ADIAS, while cases featuring material from Third Millennium BC settlements at Umm an Nar and Al Ain and the Iron Age, again from Al Ain, were provided by the Department of Antiquities and Tourism in Abu Dhabi's Eastern Region.

References:

- 1: Garfi, S. (1996). Excavations on Balghelam island - a preliminary report. *Tribulus* Vol. 6.2. P. 5-10
- 2: Anon. (1993). Neolithic Flints from Merawah. *Tribulus* Vol. 3:1, P. 20
- 3: quoted in *Emirates News*, 16 February 1997

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