importance in confirming the continuity of occupation on the islands of Abu Dhabi during a period that is still little understood.

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References

5. See King, Hellyer & Aspinall [1999].
7. Danish Juma al-Rumaithi, a local fisherman, has indicated that he used such hearths on the island of Balghelam in the 1950s and/or 1960s (Al Rumaithi, pers. comm. 1997). 
8. A small circular hearth with a piece of Late Islamic pottery used in its construction has been identified by ADIAS on Abu al-Abyadh (Hellyer et al., 2001.)
9. See ceramic analysis by Dr. R.A. Carter in King, Hellyer & Aspinall, [1999].

Peter Hellyer, ADIAS, P.O. Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, U.A.E. e-mail: Hellyer@emirates.net.ae

Mark Beech, Department of Archaeology, University of York, York, YO1 7EP, United Kingdom e-mail: mjb117@york.ac.uk

A newly recognised Iron Age site near Jabeeb, Al Ain, U.A.E.

by Brien Holmes

The presence of Iron Age settlement in the area between the city of Al Ain, in the Eastern Region of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, and Dhaid, in the Emirate of Sharjah, in areas that are now covered in sand and unsuitable for agriculture is well attested. Immediately north of Al Ain, the Iron Age village at Rumaithah has walls that were still standing to a height of two metres when excavated in the 1980s, although it was completely covered with sand. Further north, near the rocky outcrop of Qarn bin Saud (or Bida bint Saud), the presence of an Iron Age falaj (pl. aflaj) and village has been proven by recent excavations carried out by Dr. Walid Yasin al-Tikriti, Archaeological Adviser at the Department of Antiquities and Tourism in Abu Dhabi's Eastern Region. On the al-Madam plain, south of Dhaid, another Iron Age settlement concealed beneath the sand has been the focus of recent excavations carried out by the Autonomous University of Madrid, in association with the Sharjah Directorate of Archaeology, part of the Department of Culture and Information.

In the intervening areas, evidence of an Iron Age falaj was identified in the 1980s by Dr. al-Tikriti in the Jabeeb area, more than fifty kilometres north of Al Ain, although it has not yet been published.

With the exception of Rumaithah, the sites above mentioned all have falaj irrigation systems, now dried up, although they are a considerable distance from the Hajar Mountains, which provide the sources of water for the aflaj of the villages in the Al Ain/Buraimi area. All are now also largely covered, often to a depth of two metres or more, by mobile sand dunes. It has been presumed that, during the Iron Age, there were supplies of underground water close enough to the surface to be tapped by aflaj, these supplies perhaps being supplemented by greater rainfall than there is today.

With a declining water table, and perhaps a decline in rainfall, the aflaj would have dried up, agriculture would have become increasingly unproductive and the settlements abandoned. The sand dunes would then have moved in to cover much of the settlement area, although remains of them, including artefacts such as potsherds, remained visible in areas of inter-dunal plains.

During weekend forays from Al Ain over the last few years, I have been able to locate numerous archaeological sites in the inter-dunal plains to the north of Al Ain. Many of these have yielded pottery of Late Islamic date, and may represent simple, but frequently re-visited, camp-sites comparable to one identified in the late 1970s by the Emirates Natural History Group near Al Khatam, on the route from Al Ain to Abu Dhabi.

In late 1999, I ventured into the Jabeeb area, exiting the Al Ain - Dubai highway at the Jabeeb overpass, which provides access to recently-established farms on either side of the highway. The route to the west was taken, towards an area where the sand dunes are higher, and the track is more substantial, due to the presence of numerous camel-camps and a small five-kilometre training track for camel-racing.

I returned to an area where I had previously located an iron object which was initially assessed as being a piece of jewellery, but which, on further study, seemed to resemble a key. The 'key' itself had been found on an inter-dunal gravel plain, surrounded for the most part by sand dunes. To the north-west, however, a flat promontory about the size of two football fields rose several metres above the floor of the plain.

On the surface of the promontory was an extensive scatter of potsherds, so thick that in many places it was almost impossible to walk without treading on them.
Further study of the site is clearly necessary if these questions are to be resolved. However, there is extensive development currently taking place in the area, with dunes being levelled to prepare land for farming. The survival of the site is by no means guaranteed, and this preliminary ‘Note’ has, therefore, been prepared simply to place the existence of the site on record. Many more archaeological sites may lie within the eastern edge of the dunefield running north of Al Ain, although with the current pace of development, many may be destroyed before they are even recognised.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Peter Hellyer, Managing Editor of Tribulus and Executive Director of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, who first insisted that I should show pottery from the Jabez site to the appropriate specialists, and arranged for it to be seen by Dr. Robert Carter, and then also encouraged me to place the site on record, albeit in a non-academic format.

I am also grateful to Dr. Robert Carter for examining the pottery, and to Dr. Walid Yasin al-Tikriti for also looking at the pottery and for visiting the site with me, as well as for his insights into the nature of the Iron Age presence of Al Ain.

Brien Holmes,
PO Box 17258,
AL AIN, UAE

e-mail: bocknobby@hotmail.com

The damselfly Pseudagrion decorum breeding in the U.A.E.

Visiting amateur naturalist Graham Giles published an illustrated checklist of UAE dragonflies and damselflies in Tribulus 8.1 (Winter 1996). His work, and his predictions, facilitated the subsequent discovery in the UAE of two additional damselflies known to be resident in Oman. One of these, Pseudagrion decorum, a small electric blue species (first reported in Tribulus 9.2), was recently found to be abundant at the Wadi Shi dam near Khor Fakkan. This site provided the first records of P. decorum females in the UAE. These are dull yellow in colour. A number of pairs were observed mating, both flying in tandem and perching in ‘wheel’ formation.

In one dramatic instance a pair flying in tandem alighted on a tiny sprig of underwater plant projecting above the lake surface. The female began to descend along the stem until she had pulled the male almost entirely underwater. At that point he released her and flew free. She, however, continued to inch down the stem, tail first, “looping” like a leech, until she was out of sight some 6-8 inches or more below the surface, seeking just the ‘right’ place to lay her eggs. Moments passed while three males circled over the sprig for 30 seconds, 60 seconds, 90 seconds, perhaps more, before she suddenly came up to the surface like a diver in a free ascent, only to be snatched up immediately in tandem once more.

The ladies in question apparently know what they want. Another female, deposited on some near-horizontal branches only an inch or so below the surface, fidgeted almost constantly during more than five minutes underwater, investigating various spots with the tip of her abdomen. It wasn’t clear in the end if she had laid her eggs or not, but she, too, was off in tandem again within only a second of regaining the surface.

Despite its name, mating among P. decorum is a rather ungentlemanly affair. One pair mating in wheel formation on a twig was repeatedly molested by other males, which landed on both the mating male’s arched abdomen and the female’s wings.

Gary Feulner

A mating pair of P. decorum