

An archaeological and architectural evaluation of a fort in the Wadi Safad, Emirate of Fujairah

by Gareth Longden and Salvatore Garfi

In December of 1998 archaeologists from Trinity College, Carmarthen, University of Wales conducted research within the Wadi Safad, Emirate of Fujairah. Interest focused upon a fort (*husn*) located approximately nine kilometres inland from the village of al-Qurayya (*plate 1*). The site was first examined by King in 1994 (King and Maren-Griesebach 1999 - in *Tribulus* 9:2, 10-18); an initial survey of the site was conducted by Garfi (1995) under the sponsorship of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, ADIAS. The *husn* originally stood on the end of a spur of rock projecting into the wadi, the construction of a road along the wadi in 1994/5, however, has truncated the spur leaving the *husn* isolated on a rocky outcrop (*fig. 1*). The outcrop upon which the *husn* stands is surrounded by the remains of abandoned settlements.

The *husn* itself has two distinct areas: a defended enclosure with towers and internal rooms; and a second extra-mural area located on a platform to the south of the main defended area, containing the insubstantial remains of at least seven buildings may be discerned on the platform.

The *husn*

The overall dimensions of the *husn* are approximately 32m north to south, by 20m east to west (*fig. 2*). The *husn* is largely constructed with random rubble and a mud mortar, although in places dry-stone techniques were also utilised. The main defensive elements of the *husn* are two, now ruinous, towers situated on rocky

outcrops, one at the northern end of the site and another in the south-west corner. The northern tower is round in form and the south-west tower is sub-rectangular in form.

The curtain wall links these two structures and follows the topography of the platform upon which the *husn* was built. The curtain wall curves out broadly from the northern tower to the south-east before turning west and linking up with the south-west tower, the wall then runs directly north-east to return to the north tower. The curtain wall appears to be continuous and the presence of any entrance way into the enclosure cannot be reliably identified, and indeed the likelihood of such a feature should be questioned. The curtain walls of the *husn* are in many places approximately 2m high internally, and 3m high externally, the wall varies from approximately 0.75m to 2m in thickness. The interior of the *husn*, on its eastern and southern walls, are fringed with what appear to be the remains of 6 casemate rooms or chambers. A further sunken gabled room can be identified in the north-west corner of the interior of the *husn*. The north-west area of the interior also contains the remains of a *juss*-lined sunken water cistern and a small ancillary structure, probably a sheltered hearth or storage area. Immediately to the south of the *husn* the hill top has been revetted to enhance a triangular shaped level area. This platform extends to the south for approximately 40m and is approximately 25m wide at its northern end. On this revetted area are the remains of at least seven structures and a small, dry-stone



Plate 1: Husn Safad, looking south. Picture by G.R.D. King

construction, a 'watch station'. Below the level of the husn, on the sides of the spur are the remains of at least two other "watch stations" (fig. 1).

Discussion

The examination of the structure has revealed a previously unsuspected complexity to the construction of the *husn*. It is clear that the building went through two distinct phases of rebuilding. The most significant alteration occurred in the second phase when the entire south end of the complex was redesigned. The addition of the southern tower and the suite of rooms along the interior of the south wall clearly illustrate the desire to improve the residential and defensive facilities of the structure and may represent a change in function towards a more permanent occupation. The third phase of activity at the site saw a series of minor alterations to the layout of the rooms that seems to indicate a more transitory period of squatter occupation. The relationships between the *husn* and the platform to its south and the surrounding settlements are difficult to assess. No such difficulty exists in regard to the three watch stations that lie to the north, north-west and south of the main *husn* complex. These small observation points are positioned so as to allow for unrestricted access down the steep slopes of the *husn* hill into the wadi bed and form part of an integrated defensive system. The seven structures on the platform to the south consist of low lines of stones, that often utilise natural outcrops, these lines of stones form enclosures, 2m by 3m that are open along one axis. It is likely that these small buildings were designed to be seasonally occupied 'arish covered dwellings, which were intended to complementary to the main *husn* occupation.

Alternatively, these buildings may simply be utilising the level area on top of the hill and would therefore have no relationship with the *husn*, ultimately only excavation will resolve this issue. From the results of the preliminary ceramic analysis of the site as a whole it is clear that most of the pottery is locally produced Julfar red unglazed ware, incised white ware and post-Julfar horizon wares and a small number of imported Persian turquoise glaze sherds (Ziolkowski *pers. comm.*). It is likely, therefore, that the earliest activity on the site dates from the 16th and 17th centuries and continued into the modern period.

Conclusions

The architectural and archaeological analysis of the *husn* in the Wadi Safad have revealed a previously unsuspected complexity to the structure. It seems that the *husn* in its final form bore close typological similarities to the nearby, and roughly contemporary site at al-Qurayya (see Note appended to this paper). Furthermore, Kennet's (1995) analysis in Ras al-Khaimah suggests that this type of complex can be found throughout the north-eastern part of the United Arab Emirates. The initial synthesis of the ceramic evidence would suggest that this type of building should be attributed to the 16th or 17th century. The form of the buildings with their provision for both storage and occupation suggests that they were intended for extended, perhaps even permanent occupation, unlike the redoubts of the coastal towers that were used as part of an integrated system of watchtowers and places of safety. Further research is required to bring greater clarity to the historical position of these buildings and also to examine in detail the way that they may have functioned in the wider social landscape, these issues are discussed elsewhere (Longden & Garfi *in prep.*).

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sharqi, Ruler of Fujairah, for giving approval for the work to be conducted. We are also grateful to Mr Ahmed Khalifa Al Shamsi, Director of the Department of Antiquities and Heritage of the Government of Fujairah, for the generous support offered by his Department. Mr Salah Ali Hassan, of the Department of Antiquities and Heritage, with whom we liaised throughout our stay in the Emirate. We would also like to thank Mr Peter Hellyer, Executive Director of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey, ADIAS, who undertook discussions on our behalf with the Fujairah authorities prior to commencement of the work, and for his continued assistance throughout this project. We would also like to acknowledge the provision of grants by the Emirates Natural History Group and by the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey towards the cost of our work. Michele Ziolkowski of the University of Sydney provided invaluable advice on the ceramics from the site. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the generous assistance provided by the Department of Archaeology, Trinity College, Carmarthen.

References

- Kennet, D. (1995). The Towers of Ras al-Khaimah. British Archaeological Reports International Series 601, Tempus Reparatum.
- Garfi, S. (1995) Archaeological investigations in the Wadi Safad, 1995. *Tribulus* 5.2, 23.
- King, G. & Maren-Griesebach, H. (1999) A preliminary survey of the archaeology of the Wadi Safad, Fujairah, United Arab Emirates, 13-15 April, 1994. *Tribulus* 9.2.

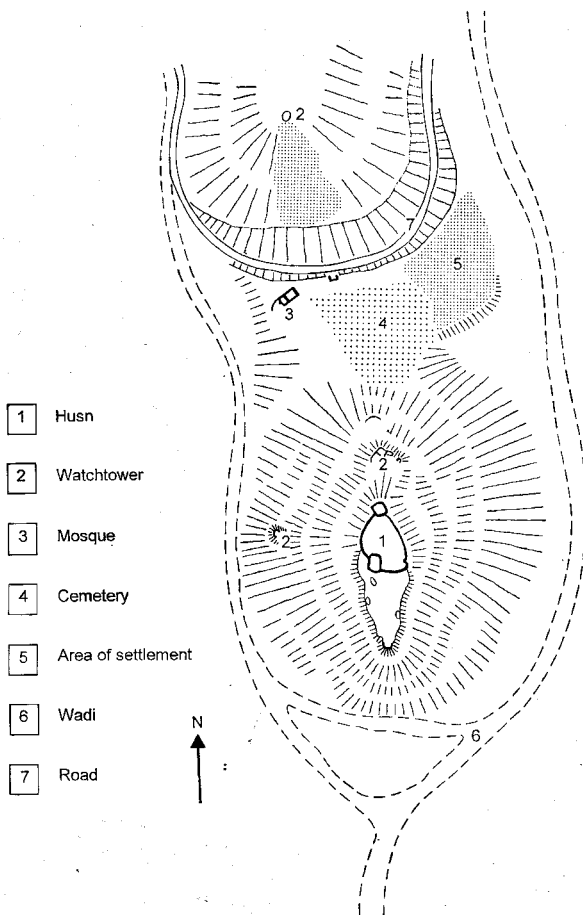


Fig. 1 Sketch plan of survey area

Longden, G. & Garfi, S. (*in prep.*) The evolution of a defended residence: Insights from recent archaeological and architectural fieldwork in the Wadi Safad, Emirate of Fujairah, United Arab Emirates.

Recent work at al-Qurayya, Emirate of Fujairah

In December 1999 work by the Department of Archaeology, Trinity College, Carmarthen continued on the Late Islamic fortified structures of the Wadi Safad. The centre of research shifted to the defended fort at al-Qurayya, colloquially known as the fort of Mohammed bin Mohammed (de Cardi 1971). The work revealed a much larger although simpler structure than the contemporary fort higher up the wadi at Safad, where the College's research programme began in 1998. The fort at al-Qurayya is approximately 70m by 90m in size. The main feature is a massive defensive curtain wall that encompasses the entire hilltop. In many places this wall still stands to a height of over 2.5m. The construction of such a wall would have been a significant undertaking for a large population. The wall is pierced by at least two original entrances, one to the east and one to the south, a third entrance on the north is probably later. There are few internal features. The five rooms that are present are small, the average size being 3m by 2m. These are more likely to be store rooms than rooms intended for permanent occupation. There is within the defended enclosure a sunken *juss*-lined cistern, which if full might contain as much as 18,500 litres of water. The

eastern side of the hill has approximately 50 small terraces or platforms. The function of these platforms is unclear but it is interesting to note that c.20 small (3m by 2m) platforms were found around the fort at Safad. To the south of the hill on a lower-lying shoulder are the remains of a mosque.

The large open, very public space at al-Qurayya can be contrasted with the much more private and intimate space created at Safad. The fort at Safad evokes ideas associated with a prestigious private residence. The fort at al-Qurayya offers little evidence of this type of occupation. Instead one is left feeling that the interior of the fort was intended not for permanent occupation by any group but as a temporary place of safety, somewhere where a larger population could find protection. Further work is planned in December 2001.

Reference

De Cardi, B. "Archaeological survey in the Northern Trucial states", *East and West*, vol. 21, Nos. 3-3 1971, 225-289.

Gareth Longden

E-mail: G.Longden@trinity-cm.ac.uk

Salvatore Garfi

E-mail: Sal.Garfi@btinternet.com

**Department of Archaeology,
Trinity College, Carmarthen,
SA31 3EP, United Kingdom.**

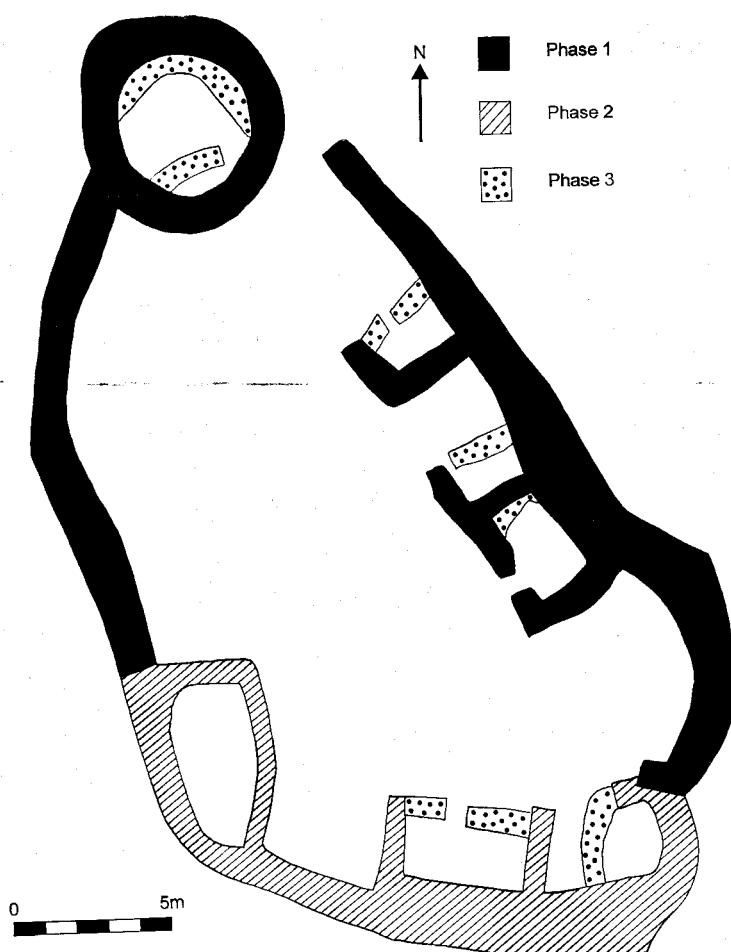


Figure 2: Schematic plan of Husn Safad, looking north