

ABSTRACTS

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The port of Sumhuran: new data on its history

Several reports have been published since the University of Pisa began its excavation of the site of Sumhuran (in the area of Khor Rori in the Omani Dhofar) in 1996 under the auspices of the Italian Mission to Oman. From a perusal of just some of these papers one gains a sense of how far our knowledge of this settlement has increased and how the reconstruction of its history has been revised over the years.

The work of IMTO soon showed that the port had a much longer and more complex history than was previously thought. As we now know, Sumhuran was founded at the end of the 3rd century BC and definitively abandoned sometime during the 5th century AD. These dates in themselves suggest a completely different historical scenario from the one previously proposed by the American mission in the 1950s.

The creation of the settlement coincided with the crucial, “formative” phase in the development of sea trade across the Indian Ocean, occurring before the arrival of the Romans in Egypt, and long before the foundation of Kana. Its slow decline followed the eclipse of the kingdom of Hadramawt, which was finally subdued by Himyar after many wars at the end of the 3rd century AD.

If I were asked today to choose two adjectives to describe the port of Sumhuran, I would say that it was at one and the same time a completely isolated settlement and a remarkably cosmopolitan one. Situated at a great distance from other urban centers, Sumhuran was inevitably characterized by a certain degree of ‘regionalism’, as reflected in the locally produced pottery and other objects found at the site. The work produced by local artists and artisans exhibit elements that were unique to Sumhuran; for example, beautiful incense burners have come to light whose form and iconography are quite distinct from those produced by the Hadrami artisans.

The cosmopolitan dimension of Sumhuran is testified to by the extraordinary variety of imported pottery that has been found on the site. During its history the port appears to have forged ties with nearly the entire known world.

Sumhuran’s closest trading ties from the very beginning of her history were undoubtedly with India. The discovery of Indian pottery dating to the last centuries of the millennium is one of the most interesting pieces of data to emerge from recent excavations.

It appears that during the course of its history two different sea routes connected Sumhuran with India. In the centuries before the Christian era ships followed a path that went from Berenike to Sumhuran and then crossed the open sea to southern India. Later it seems that this route was supplanted in favour of trade links with northern India along the route described in the Periplus.

With the arrival of the Romans in Egypt, commerce by sea underwent radical changes. Not only did the number of ships traversing the seas increase, but the number of routes across the Indian Ocean multiplied, with the expected development, of course, of preferential routes. Sumhuran and its inhabitants played a central role in this new expansion of trade during the Roman period, establishing ties with northern India and multiplying their contacts with the Mediterranean through Kana.

ABSTRACTS

MARCIN BIAŁOWARCZUK
Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw

Stone industry from Bahra 1

This paper presents a preliminary analysis of the Bahra 1 stone industries, excluding flints. The material includes artifacts discovered during excavations in 2009-2012. Two industries can be distinguished on the basis of the leading raw material and method of exploitation: 'chipped quartz' and 'ground and pecked stone'. Their characteristics clearly indicate a logistic strategy of local raw material exploitation, which seems to be the result of a lack of good quality flint. The considerable disproportion between flint, quartz and stone assemblages, as well as an evident preference for tool types seems to be linked with the settlement's manufacturing specialization and the demand for particular tool types. Regardless of the type of raw material and the quantitative disproportions, the stone assemblage from Bahra 1 comprises complex and well developed tools for specialized manufacturing purposes.

ROBERT CARTER
UCL Qatar

Neolithic and Ubaid Interactions in the Persian Gulf

The nature of interactions between the Neolithic communities of eastern Arabia and those of Ubaid Mesopotamia have been debated since the 1970s. Explanatory models have included terrestrial migration cycles, Mesopotamian resource-gathering expeditions, and maritime trade relations. Recent excavations in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have introduced significant quantities of new data, and our broader understanding of the coastal Arabian Neolithic has also been enhanced in recent years. This new information allows us to anatomize the relationship in more detail and identify three main zones of interaction along the Arabian littoral. Neolithic social dynamics and Neolithic trade are reconsidered with regard to the distribution of Ubaid pottery, as well as the role of the Kuwait region as an early regional entrepot.

RICHARD CUTTLER
University of Birmingham

Wādī Debay 'ān: A landscape approach

The discovery of a lithic scatter and ^CUbaid pottery at Wādī Debay 'ān, northwest Qatar, in 2009 provided the opportunity for a comprehensive study of a prehistoric landscape. Four years of survey and excavation have been augmented by environmental proxies, geomorphology and extensive radiocarbon dating to refine local sea level curves. Features resulting from marine deposition, now up to 2km inland, were not only a focus for Neolithic coastal activity, but were also accretionary, so have prevented the deflation of archaeological deposits. This paper examines the methodologies that have led to the identification of previously unmarked burials, midden deposits and structures, and considers the taphonomic pathways responsible for the survival of such deposits.

ABSTRACTS

PHILIPP DRECHSLER

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Eberhard-Karls Universität Tübingen

Dosariyah — just another “Ubaid-related” site?

Since 2010, archaeological excavations at the Neolithic site of Dosariyah have revealed a wealth of material remains: thousands of potsherds and flint artifacts, jewelry and personal adornment, pieces of bitumen and bone tools. A strong dependence on marine resources has been proved by uncounted shellfish remains and fish bones. Hunting as well as herding of domesticated animals also contributed to the everyday diet. Despite the rich material assemblage, evidence for permanent installations and architecture is rather sparse at Dosariyah. This can be explained considering the absence of rocks in the vicinity of the site. But stratigraphic observations also suggest phases of reduced settlement activities or even repeated abandonment of the place.

While the flint artifact assemblage from Dosariyah is reminiscent of the wider technical complex of the Arabian Bifacial tradition and therefore proves the presence of a local Arabian population at the site, Ubaid pottery clearly indicates cultural contacts with southern Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, there is no compelling evidence for the actual presence of southern Mesopotamian people at the site.

The paper discusses the hypothesis that Arabian Neolithic groups heavily relying on marine resources played a much more active role in long-lasting cultural contacts with southern Mesopotamia than reflected in the present scientific discourse: I will suggest that not the seafaring merchants of Ur, but the Arabian fishermen traveled along the coast of the Gulf towards the north in search of pottery and other prestigious goods.

HEIKO KALLWEIT

University of Birmingham

Remarks on the Neolithic period on the Arabian Peninsula

A contribution on the Neolithic period in general, which is referring to my work along the Arabian Gulf coast and previous work conducted in the Yemen and Jordan respectively. This contribution will emphasize certain aspects, such as subsistence strategies, raw material and chronological aspects than expanding details.

ERIC OLIJDAM

Independent researcher, Netherlands

Tumulus-cemeteries in 3rd–2nd Millennium Dilmun

This presentation will provide an overview of funerary evidence from Dilmun dating to the 3rd and 2nd millennia BC, thereby focusing on the architecture, ritual and assemblage. The data will be presented in four chronological blocks: early 3rd, mid-3rd, late 3rd and early 2nd millennium. Special attention will be given to the late 3rd millennium when Bahrain became part of the Dilmun polity and

ABSTRACTS

to the early 2nd millennium when Bahrain had become the socio-political centre and Dilmun became an early state. The aim is to define chronological criteria for each block in order to help in dating Bronze Age tumuli excavated and surveyed by Kuwaiti–Polish Archaeological Mission at as-Sabiyah. Finally, some inferences will be made on the type of society that created these tumuli.

JOANNA KAZIMIERA RAĐKOWSKA
PCMA UW associate

The “Lotus Temple” of Berenike

Whereas the cultic nature of the building excavated by the Berenike Project in the southwestern harbor of Berenike was evident nearly from the start, its cultural and religious attribution has remained a mystery despite three successive seasons of investigations. The shrine can now be reconstructed fairly well in terms of its architectural appearance and the furnishings in the two recorded phases of use, yet the deity worshiped in this building is still elusive. It was a space divided into three aisles with a form of cella at back and the cult paraphernalia included an egg-shaped stone of black basalt, a small column acting as an altar for offerings, and two small altars for burning incense. The assemblage of finds from the first phase included a south Arabian bronze bull head and a bronze headless figurine in Arabian style (head of the priest's stick?), which has suggested the possibility of the shrine being used by the South Arabian minority in Berenike, whose presence in the city, also in an earlier age, has been confirmed by finds of pottery and the graffiti on the pottery. On the other hand, the assemblage also included other objects, such as a characteristic variant of frog lamps, large cowry shells, ostrich eggshells with magical markings in red paint, and pottery suggesting Egyptian or even Axumite origin rather than South Arabian. Installations recorded in the temple have included a pottery vase with remains of seasonal flowers, including lotus, wooden bowls with remnants of burned offerings, as well as animal bones attesting to numerous meat offerings being left in the shrine in small Aswan bowls. Analysis of the evidence has provided information on the cult activities taking place inside the shrine in the two phases, the types of incense that was burned during ceremonies, the kinds of flowers and plants that were brought to the temple in different seasons, the kinds of meat that were brought as offerings. Consequently, the ‘Lotus Temple’ appears as a highly eclectic shrine, which could be a factor of its location in a multi cultural harbor city, inhabited by many different ethnic groups.

ABSTRACTS

ANDRZEJ REICHE
National Museum in Warsaw

Small finds from Bahra 1 (seasons 2009–2012)

Four seasons of excavations at the Ubaid-related settlement Bahra 1, a site in the Sabbiya region of Kuwait, yielded numerous small finds, restricted however in terms of categories. Artifacts were made of clay, pottery, shell and stone. Most of them represented the category of personal adornments, repeating types known from Ubaid-period sites from Mesopotamia. It should be emphasized, however, that a considerable number of these items was locally made. There is also a group of finds, the function of which still escapes interpretation. Failed tubular beads made of trimmed sections of apex slices of *Strombus* (*Conomurex*) *persicus* shells constitutes an important set. The items represent different stages of beads manufacture, permitting a reconstruction of the production process and confirming the presence on the site of a workshop (or workshops) specialised in the manufacturing of tubular shell beads.

STEVEN A. ROSEN
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

The Shrines at Ramat Saharonim: Desert Cult in Social Perspective

The summer solstice shrines at Ramat Saharonim, in the central Negev, reflect evolving levels of social organization and identity, most notably the rise of tribal societies in the context of the transition from hunting-gathering to herding-gathering. From a larger geographical perspective, where the development of agriculture in the fertile regions of the Near East was concomitant with increasing social complexity and the earliest monumental and cultic architecture, in the Near Eastern deserts the equivalent social revolution should be seen in the adoption of desert pastoralism and, in parallel, the appearance of centralized desert cult and associated architecture. The shrines at Ramat Saharonim, in their construction, alignments, and associations, offer a case study for understanding the implications of this pastoral revolution.

ŁUKASZ RUTKOWSKI
Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology
University of Warsaw

Investigations of an ancient tumulus-cemetery on the north coast of Kuwait Bay

Investigations of the Kuwaiti–Polish Archaeological Mission in 2007–2012 revealed an ancient tumulus cemetery that stretches along the north coast of Kuwait Bay (As-Sabiyah region). This presentation will provide an overview of the combined results of excavations and survey, showing various aspects of tumuli exploration, such as the distribution of burial mounds, classification of structures, grave goods and related problems of equivocal chronological evidence. Apart from tumuli, the presentation will show mysterious elongated stone structures that occasionally occur in the vicinity of burial mounds. In the end, the presentation will seek to address the question, which direction appears to be more consistent in exhibiting possible cultural affinities: the Gulf-region, the desert outskirts, or both of them.

ABSTRACTS

ANNA SMOGORZEWSKA

Institute of Archaeology, University of Warsaw

Local and imported Pottery from the Ubaid-related site Bahra 1

Two groups of pottery, Ubaid and Coarse Red Ware, can be distinguished at Bahra 1, a site in northern Kuwait. They are also distinct for other Ubaid-related sites in the Gulf area. Ubaid pottery prevails at Bahra 1 and Coarse Red Ware makes for approximately 35% of the collected pottery. The two differ in almost all aspects: repertoire of shapes, technology and chemical composition of clay. While the Coarse Red Ware was most probably locally manufactured, Ubaid pottery originated from southern Mesopotamia. The Coarse Red Ware, such as lugged pots or shallow bowls, served practical ends. On the other hand, much of the Ubaid pottery from Bahra 1 can be considered as luxury tableware for serving food and beverages. Of significance is the big number of bowls and plates, many of them rendered in Hajji Muhammad style. However, common and coarse ware vessels for storing or processing food products have also been found (such as coarse ware vats or jars). Based on pottery parallels from many sites in Mesopotamia, the pottery assemblage from Bahra 1 can be dated to the Ubaid 2 and Ubaid 2/3 phases. Compared to the other Ubaid-related sites in the Gulf, a large number of potsherds associated, both in shape and style, with the Ubaid 2 (or Hajji Muhammad) phase is notable at Bahra 1.

ROBERTA TOMBER

Department of Conservation & Scientific Research
The British Museum, London

Ceramic evidence for South Arabian trade and travellers on the Red Sea Coast of Egypt

This paper will look at the ceramic evidence for South Arabian contacts at the Red Sea ports of Myos Hormos (Quseir al-Qadim) and Berenike. The strongest evidence comes from the 'Organic Storage Jars' — transport vessels produced in the Hadramawt and probably Dhofar and imported to the Red Sea in large numbers. A second, related strand of evidence is South Arabian epigraphs and graffiti occurring on both South Arabian and Roman wares. In particular, graffiti may suggest the presence of Arabians at Berenike. First the evidence will be reviewed on a site-wide basis, and in the case of Berenike the distribution will be more closely examined within the site and in reference to the 'Lotus Temple'.

ABSTRACTS

IWONA ZYCH, STEVEN E. SIDEBOTHAM

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University of Delaware

The setting for South Arabian presence in Berenike – results of excavations

Setting the stage, that is to say, an overview of the excavations carried out by the Berenike Project (PCMA UW/University of Delaware) at the Red Sea harbor of Berenike in 2008–2013 and by the previous Berenike Project (University of Delaware/Leiden University (Netherlands)/UCLA) in 1994–2001, highlighting the evidence for extensive trade contacts and eclectic influences that had shaped the landscape of the town and its material culture in the relevant period. The presentation will give an idea of the place as it would have been perceived by traveling Arabian merchants.