



## Bahra 1. Ubaid Culture Settlement in North Kuwait

The site of Bahra 1 is a large settlement dating from late 6th millennium BC. By that time, a buoyant new culture had sprang to life in Southern Mesopotamia, now known as the Ubaid culture. As attested by the wide distribution of its characteristic material, including pottery vessels and small objects, the Ubaid culture quickly spread reaching Anatolia and Levant on the one hand, and the coasts of Oman on the other. Several dozens of Ubaid-related sites have been identified along the coast of the Arabian Gulf, including the site of H3 on the coast of Kuwait Bay, just a few kilometers away from Bahra 1.

However, the Bahra 1 site is unique among the other Gulf sites for several reasons. The size of the site, which measured at least c. 180m by 50m, its stratigraphy, pointing to long-term occupation with a few phases of rebuilding, and the character of the site's architectural remains all make it clear that it was a permanent settlement which had strong links with Mesopotamia, being, at the same time, well rooted in the local environment.

**The KUWAITI-POLISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL MISSION** was formed in 2007, as a cooperation between the National Council of Culture Arts and Letters of the State of Kuwait and the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw. It started work in Northern Kuwait in the fall of the same year, beginning with excavations of tumuli graves (2007-08), then expanding into several sub-projects, including the excavation of desert wells (2008-11) and a survey of burials and other structures in the Al-Subiyah region (2009-12), the excavation of the Bahra 1 settlement (since 2009). Further projects were initiated on Failaka Island: excavations of a part of the Qusur site (2011-13), a survey (2012) and excavations at Kharab el-Desh, combined with an underwater survey (since 2013).

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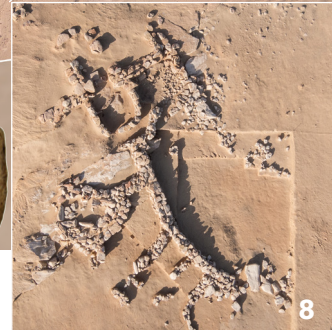
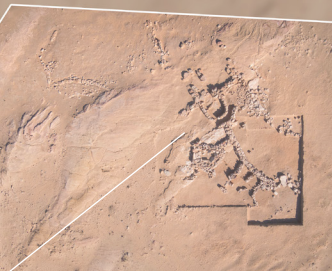
Al-Subiyah

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# Workshops, Imports and Exports

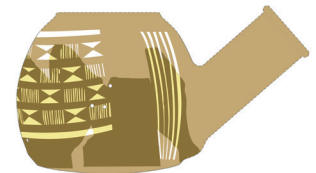


Elements of the material culture discovered at the site, especially a distinct type of decorated pottery (1) and various small objects (2) point to direct contacts with centers of the Ubaid culture in Mesopotamia. At the same time, the assemblage of finds includes elements typical of the so-called Arabian Neolithic: Coarse Red Ware pottery (3) and lithic tools (4) of local provenience.

The most striking feature of the settlement, as established during the seven years of excavations conducted there hitherto, is the purpose it seems to have served: it was a vast, specialized shell bead production center. Of the over a dozen architectural units discovered at the site, most included workshops manufacturing a single type of tubular bead from the shells of the marine snail *Conomurex persicus* (5). Detailed analyses allowed for the reconstruction of the whole production method and identifying tools used in this process (6), and – fascinatingly – showed that none of the ready products stayed in the settlement, where only failed specimens have been discovered. The beads must have been exported.

The architectural remains at Bahra 1 consist mainly of the stone wall bases, the superstructures of which must have been made of perishable materials. The walls belong to, mostly rectilinear, houses and courtyards, many of them paved with stones (7), and accommodating installations in the form of stone hearths and bins. An area dotted with installations that are filled with ashes was located on the western outskirts of the settlement. A structure of a unique character – an oval enclosure (8) – was located in the highest point of the settlement and must have had a special function, as both its shape and the assemblage of finds set it apart from the rest of the village.

The inhabitants of the settlement, which was located at least one kilometer inland from the then coastline, had a mixed sustenance strategy. They relied for food on marine resources, harvesting sea mollusks and snails, but at the same time hunted small game (for instance, hare and gazelle) and herded sheep and/or goats. Who the people were – settlers from Mesopotamia? or locals embracing Ubaid goods and connecting to the “global” exchange networks? – is still difficult to say. Yet, they must have belonged to a well organized society that was able to manage and maintain a specialized exchange of luxurious goods.



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