



The Al-Subiyah Tumulus Project

The first task of the Kuwaiti-Polish Archaeological Mission was the exploration of stone burial mounds in the Mughaira region of Al-Subiyah. The results of the first season in 2007 were very promising due to the discovery of a richly equipped grave that added 600 objects, including pearls, to the collection of the National Museum in Kuwait. This was in part salvage work in face of the fast development in the area, threatening the archaeological heritage. The need for preserving and researching the archaeological sites in the region resulted in a separate survey project. In its course, 200 archaeological features were documented, and 40 of them excavated.

Apart from burials and other stone features, the Al-Subiyah region was also dotted with disused desert wells. Excavations of a large structure of this kind in the Muhaita area (5), started in 2008, prompted more work on documenting this type of structures in the neighboring region of Dubaij.

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 Kharaib el-Desh, combined with an under-water survey (since 2013).

POLISH CENTRE OF MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW coordinates Polish archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean since 1959 (since 1990 under the present name). In recent years it has broadened its scope of interest to include the Arabian Peninsula and the Caucasus. Currently it runs about 30 projects in Egypt, Sudan, Cyprus, Lebanon, Iraqi Kurdistan, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Armenia and Georgia. It also manages a Research Center in Cairo.

For more information on the PCMA UW go to: www.pcma.uw.edu.pl/en/ ; www.facebook.com/pcma.uw/



Text: A. Szymczak
Design: U. Wicenciak
Original concept: M. Momot
Photos: M. Karolak, M. Makowski, A. Reiche, Ł. Rutkowski, Ł. Wojnarowicz



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The investigations concentrated on a vast tumuli field stretching between the ridge of Jal al-Zor and the coastal plain along the north coast of Kuwait Bay. It comprised mainly circular burial mounds made of rough stones (1, 2, 3, 4). Over 120 such tumuli were registered and excavations were undertaken of almost 30 of them to examine the manner of their construction and establish their typology, analyze available grave goods and remains of the buried people.

Almost all of the burials excavated by the KPAM proved to have been pillaged by ancient robbers (as had been the case with those investigated by Kuwaiti and GCC teams), with very few artifacts and barely any skeletal remains left behind. With few artifacts at hand – especially lacking the best archaeological dating material: pottery, of which just one vessel was found throughout the project – it was difficult to firmly date the tumuli.

However, the objects omitted by the robbers in several graves – most of them minute personal ornaments, mostly stone and shell beads, and in a few cases also metal objects provided some indications. Especially informative were two graves with abundant jewelry (6, 7) and one with the well preserved bones of at least 16 individuals and a few stone and bone objects.

Based on careful analysis of the available data, most of the burials could be dated to the Bronze Age (3rd-2nd millennium BC). However, there is also evidence that some graves can be dated to the Ubaid period, coeval with the settlements of Bahra 1 and H3 located in the vicinity. The tumuli ground in the Al-Subiyah served a population, the identity of which is difficult to establish, perhaps nomadic tribes that controlled the route along the shores of the Kuwait Bay. However, some burial rites were also reconstructed based on the distribution of beads and bones in the excavated graves.

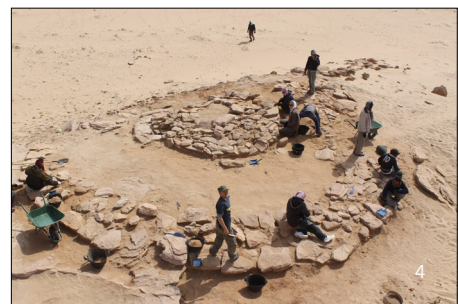
The burial ceremonies may have also necessitated the construction of some of the other stone structures registered during the surveys. There is a variety of such features of unidentified function – flat long platforms and square bin-like structures among others – that were not conceived as burials. In most cases they seem to be associated with the tumuli.



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