

Danish Archaeological Investigations in Qatar 1956-1974

Edited by Flemming Højlund



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Contents

1. Introduction	7
2. A Stone Age settlement at Ras Abu Amrahn	11
3. A Stone Age settlement at Al-Da'asa	15
4. Burial mounds at Ras Abaruk	19
5. A pot burial at Ras al-Matbakh	27
6. Burial mounds at Umm al-Ma	31
7. Two burial mounds at Mezru'ah	49
8. A Hellenistic settlement at Ras Uwainat Ali	67
9. An Early Islamic fort and settlement at Murwab	83
10. Rock carvings in Qatar	91
11. Rock art at Jebel Jusasiyah	101
Bibliography	193

1. Introduction

By Flemming Højlund

Comprehensive archaeological exploration in the state of Qatar has its beginnings in March 1956 with a three-day survey carried out by the Directors of the Danish Archaeological Expedition to the Arabian Gulf, P.V. Glob and G. Bibby (fig. 1), who had been active in neighbouring Bahrain since 1953. During the following years, 1957, 1958, 1959, 1960, 1961/62, 1962/63, 1964, and 1973/74, more thorough investigations involving both surveys and excavations, were carried out by the expedition. The length of the campaigns varied from 70 to 85 days and between 2 and 7 archaeologists participated in each season.

The campaigns have been summarized by Kapel (1967 p. 11-13), and they were also briefly reported in *Kuml*, the yearbook of Jutland Archaeological Society housed at Aarhus Museum (later *Moesgaard Museum*) (cf. Glob 1956, 1958, 1959, 1960; Bibby 1965, 1966). Popular accounts of the results of the expeditions appeared in 1968 (Glob 1968 p. 112-127) and in 1969 (Bibby 1969 p. 86ff).

A few of the investigations received lengthy reports in *Kuml*, e.g. the excavation in 1959 of a “blade arrowhead” settlement at *Al-Wusail* (Nielsen 1961. Kapel 1967 p. 31, his B-Group) and rich surface finds in 1960, of bifacial flint tools on the coast south of *Dukhan* (Madsen 1961. Kapel 1967 p. 37, his D-Group).

After having participated in four campaigns in Qatar (1960-1964) Holger Kapel published a classification of the Stone Age sites found there in four groups, A, B, C and D (Kapel 1965), and this was further elaborated in his *Atlas of the Stone-Age Cultures of Qatar*, which appeared in 1967 as the first monographic report of the Danish Archaeological Expedition to the Arabian Gulf (cf. Tixier 1980 p. 197).

A number of important investigations from the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s have, however, only been briefly mentioned in the literature. They will be described in more detail below, based on the original reports which have been edited and brought up to date (fig. 2). They encompass:

Two Stone Age settlements, one at *Ras Abu Amrahn* at the northern tip of Qatar (p. 11), and one south of *Dukhan*, later named *Al-Da'asa* (p. 15).

Ten burial mounds on the *Ras Abaruk* peninsula (p. 19).

A large earthenware pot containing a skeleton found at *Ras al-Matbakh* (p. 27).

Thirteen burial mounds at *Umm al-Ma*, one a warrior's grave with an iron sword and a bundle of iron arrow heads (p. 31).

Two burial mounds at *Mezru'ah*, one with two skeletons, an iron sword and a bundle of iron arrow-



Fig. 1. P.V. Glob and Geoffrey Bibby 1959.

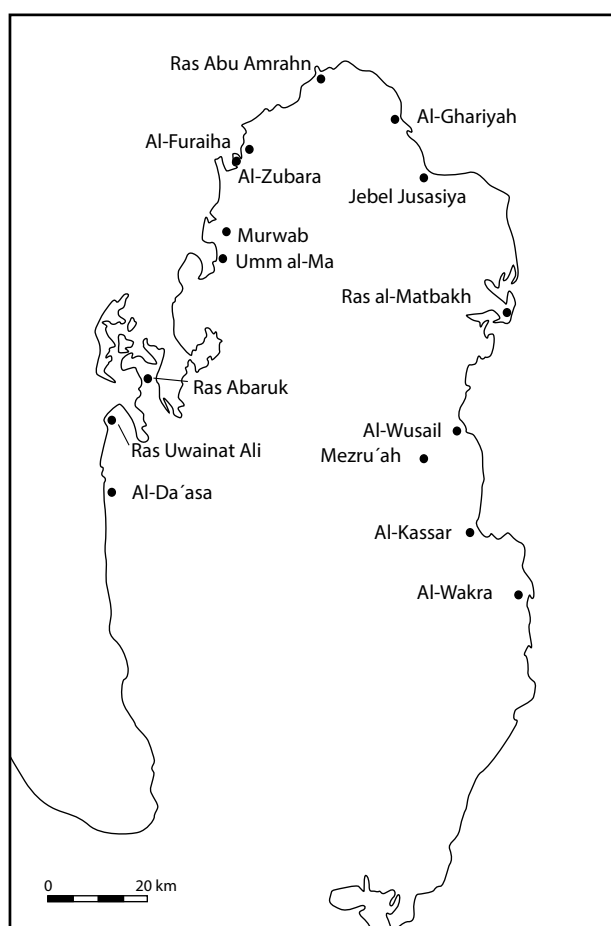


Fig. 2. Map of Qatar with sites mentioned.

heads (p. 49), and one with a rich, plundered grave in the centre together with a camel burial and a camel/horse burial (p. 61).

A Hellenistic settlement at *Ras Uwainat Ali* (p. 67).

An Early Islamic fort and settlement at *Murwab* (p. 83).

All of Qatar was surveyed during the 1950s and 1960s and many examples of rock art were found, especially in the peninsula's eastern and northern coastal areas. Based on a report by Holger Kapel (1973) and observations recorded in the archive of Moesgaard Museum a list of rock art localities is given, some of which, e.g. *Al-Kassar*, no longer exists, together with some photographic documentation (p. 91).

The largest and most varied rock art site in Qatar, the one at *Jebel Jusasiya* was visited and photographed several times, and drawings and casts were made of some of the most important engravings. Holger Kapel noted that the site suffered from quarrying, and he therefore proposed that the Qatar Government protect the site, and he recommended that a thorough recording of the site was carried out. In 1973/74 his son, Hans Kapel, spent two months in Qatar where he recorded in drawings/sketches

and photos a total of almost 900 rock carvings at the site. His report was published with a selection of his drawings and a few photographs in *Arrayan. Qatar National Museum Journal* (Kapel 1983). It is presented here in revised form with the full set of drawings and with a selection of the best photos taken when the light was optimal, at the end of the day or in the morning (p. 101).

The majority of sites discovered by the Danish expeditions in Qatar, around 120 sites, belong to the Stone Age (Kapel 1967 p. 14). Most of them date to c. 8000 to 4000 BC, a period when Qatar was blessed with a moist climate favourable to subsistence strategies based on hunting wild animals or tending domesticated animals, sheep, goat and cattle. The scarcity of sites from the following 3rd-2nd millennia is related to a decrease in precipitation and the resulting desertification of the Arabian Peninsula. It is not till the camel is domesticated around 1000 BC that the potential of the desert is realised. This re-conquest of the land and the resulting re-engagement in regional culture and politics is reflected in the later sites discovered by the Danish mission, dating to the 1st millennium BC and the 1st millennium AD, the burials of warriors with their weapons and camels, a Hellenistic coastal settlement with relations to central Arabia and the Early Islamic settlement of *Murwab* (cf. Magee 2014).

In 1959 an anthropologist from Aarhus Museum, Klaus Ferdinand, lived with Bedouins of the *Al Naim* and *Al Murra* tribes and collected ethnographica and information about their ways of life, which he later published in *Bedouins of Qatar* (1993). Together with Ferdinand was photographer and film-maker Jette Bang, who made the short film *Bedouins* (1962). In 2004-2005 all the photos taken during the Danish expeditions to Qatar (more than 2000), including those taken by Ferdinand and Bang were digitized and presented to the QMA (fig. 3).

When the *Bedouins of Qatar* became known in Qatar it caused a lot of excitement, not least among the descendants of the Bedouins with whom Ferdinand had lived in 1959. In 1998 Ferdinand was invited to Qatar to give a talk to the *Qatar Natural History Group* arranged by Claire Gillespie and supported by Maersk Oil Qatar. He brought with him a photo exhibition, *Bedouins in Qatar 1959*, that was put up in the Qatar National Museum, courtesy of the Director General of Antiquities and Museums Mr Mohammed Jassim Al-Kholaifi.

In 2009 a selection of 119 of Jette Bang's and Klaus Ferdinand's photos with text in English and Arabic was published by Moesgaard Museum and the *Qatar Museum Authority*. Ferdinand passed away in 2005 and Hans Chr. Korsholm Nielsen who had assisted Ferdinand in preparing the *Bedouins of Qatar*, selected the photos and wrote the text (Nielsen 2009).

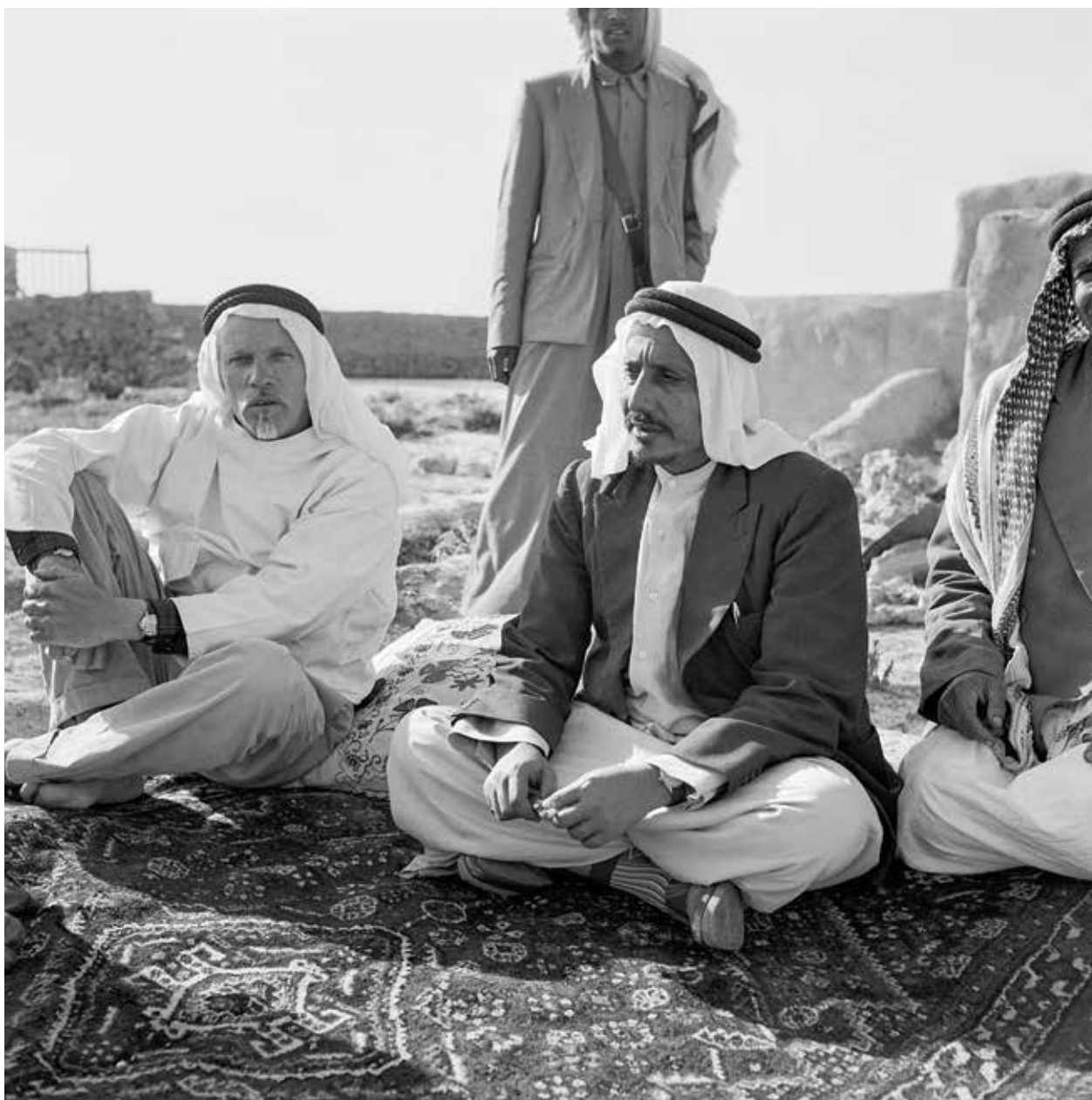


Fig. 3. P.V. Glob and Sheikh Jasim bin Mohammed bin Jasim Al Thani at Umm Salal Muhammad, February 1959 (cf. Ferdinand 1993 p. 352-354).

In connection with a celebration of the discovery of the Dilmun civilization that took place at the National Museum in Bahrain in April 2005 (Højlund 2005), officials from the Directorate of Museums & Antiquities of the National Council for Culture, Arts & Heritage in Qatar encouraged Moesgaard Museum to begin new archaeological investigations in Qatar. Consequently, a four-month campaign of three persons led by Bo Madsen was organised between January and May 2008. An excavation was carried out in the oasis of Bir Abaruk, and a detailed survey was made of the Ras Abaruk Peninsula and the area to the south, totalling almost 100 square km. 131 sites were registered,

among them more than ten sites with archaic artefacts of exceptional interest as their technology and morphology may be interpreted as a local Acheulean industry, dating to around 700,000 BC (Madsen 2008).

Glob and Kapel thought that they had found Palaeolithic sites in Qatar (Glob 1968 p. 114. Kapel 1965 p. 148). They were referred by Kapel to his A-Group, but the dating of at least some of these sites was later disputed by Tixier (1980 p. 197). The handful of apparently Palaeolithic sites found by Bo Madsen around Ras Abaruk was described in his report submitted to the QMA on May 22nd 2008 (Madsen 2008) and suggests that the discussion of whether man

lived in Qatar during the Palaeolithic is still open (cf. Scott-Jackson & Scott-Jackson 2016).

As there were no museum facilities in Qatar in the 1950s and 1960s, all finds were sent to the museum in Aarhus for conservation and study. When, in the early 1970s plans were made for the first permanent archaeological exhibition in Doha, most finds suitable for exhibition were sent to Doha and a general division of the remaining finds was made between the Qatar National Museum and Moesgaard Museum. The division was organised by Holger Kapel and G. Bibby (Bibby 1973b), and supervised by Mr Mahmoud I. El-Sharif, Director of the Information Department in Qatar and a British archaeologist appointed by Mr El-Sharif, namely Dr G. Lankester Harding, who had been Director of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan.

The present publication was prepared in 2016-2017, and the costs were met by the *Qatar Museum Author-*

ity through a generous donation to Moesgaard Museum. At the same time the Qatar archive at Moesgaard Museum was digitized and a copy delivered to the QMA. Furthermore, a database of the Qatar archaeological collection at Moesgaard Museum was made and delivered to the QMA.

Our warm thanks go to HE Shaikha Al Mayassa Al Thani, Chairperson of the QMA, Shaikha Dr Haya Al Thani, Director of Curatorial Affairs at the National Museum of Qatar (NMoQ), Mr Faisal Al Naimi, Director of Archaeology & Conservation, Dr Sultan Muhsen, Senior Archaeology Advisor, Dr Alice Enrica Bianchi, Manager of Archeology & Heritage Database, and Dr Maria Matta, Head of Collections & Information Development at NMoQ.

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2. A Stone Age settlement at Ras Abu Amrahn

by Hans Jørgen Madsen

In November 1961 a flint site was found on the east face of Ras Abu Amrahn at the northernmost point of Qatar (see map on p. 8), on bare rock sloping directly down to the coast, only a few feet above present sea-level (Kapel 1967 p. 35). The collection consisted of 58 specimens: scrapers, awls, bifacially worked implements, cores as well as 145 chippings. According to Kapel, the patina of the flint is reminiscent of the A-culture of the Khor group, but the scrapers, in particular small, round specimens, argue for a place in the C-Group (fig. 1 = Kapel 1967 p. 35, pl. 41-42). Neither Kapel's "A-culture of the Khor group" nor his C-Group are, however, particularly well-defined and a precise dating of the collection is not possible (cf. Tixier 1980 p. 197).

Four rectangular stone structures were observed and excavated, receiving the letters A-D (fig. 2). The surface of the site was covered with stones (including natural, brown flint), which extended down to where the rock met the shore at a 3/4 m high face. Under the small stones of the surface was a blackish grey layer of sand, which was examined by means of two trenches, E and F.

This investigation is numbered OA72 in the archive of Moesgaard Museum (Field number Q.61.17). The excavation was carried out by Hans Jørgen Madsen who also wrote the report.

72.A. A stone structure measuring 50 × 50 cm was found oriented NE-SW. It was constructed from one small and four large stone slabs. The top 3-4 cm of the slabs were evident above ground, while the total depth was about 25 cm. It contained fish bones, seashells, and stones in a matrix of blackish grey sand. The bottom 10 cm was clearly marked by fire (fracturing).

72.B. A stone structure, 110 cm long, 90 cm wide and 65 cm deep, rectangular in plan, orientated E-W and somewhat rounded along the eastern edge (fig. 3). The structure could be discerned above ground and consisted of large, flat, vertical limestone blocks, with a local covering of plaster, which continued unbroken into the floor layer here and there. The upper-

most layer was comprised of reddish yellow sand with substantial pieces of charcoal; this sealed tightly-packed, fire-blackened, fist-sized stones, which were separated from the bottom by a 3-5 cm thick layer of blackish brown ash.

72.C. A stone structure 130 cm long, 115 cm wide and 65-70 cm deep, oval in plan and oriented E-W. The structure was originally constructed of seven large vertical slabs, one or two of which consisted of smaller stones held together by plaster (fig. 4). Uppermost at the east end was a small horizontal slab, filling a gap between two larger ones. At the west end were fragments of a slab, which had apparently slipped from the south-west corner. Plaster was found on the lateral blocks and also covered the stony floor, which was damaged at the east end, possibly during excavation. It contained above a layer of greyish yellow sand with stones; from a depth of 25 cm there was blackish grey sand, fire-fractured stones, and seashells.

72.D. A rectangular stone structure 115 cm long, 90 cm wide and 60 cm deep, oriented E-W and constructed from flat, vertical blocks which at several places were covered by a greyish, hard layer of plaster continuing unbroken from the wall across the stony floor (fig. 5). The structure stood up to 2-5 cm above the ground. The walls and floor bore distinct traces of fire (blackening and fracture). The uppermost layer was comprised of greyish yellow sand; at a depth of 20 cm was a layer of stones up to 35 × 25 × 8 cm in size, fire blackened and -fractured. These occurred, though more dispersed, down to the floor, which was covered by a 0.5 cm thick black-brown layer of ash.

72.E. An excavation trench measuring 5 m long, 35 cm wide and 5-20 cm deep, exposed a layer of blackish grey, fine sand containing stones, seashells, fish bones and worked flint (fig. 6). An extension from the centre measuring 70 × 40 cm provided the same picture.

72.F. As E but without bones or flint