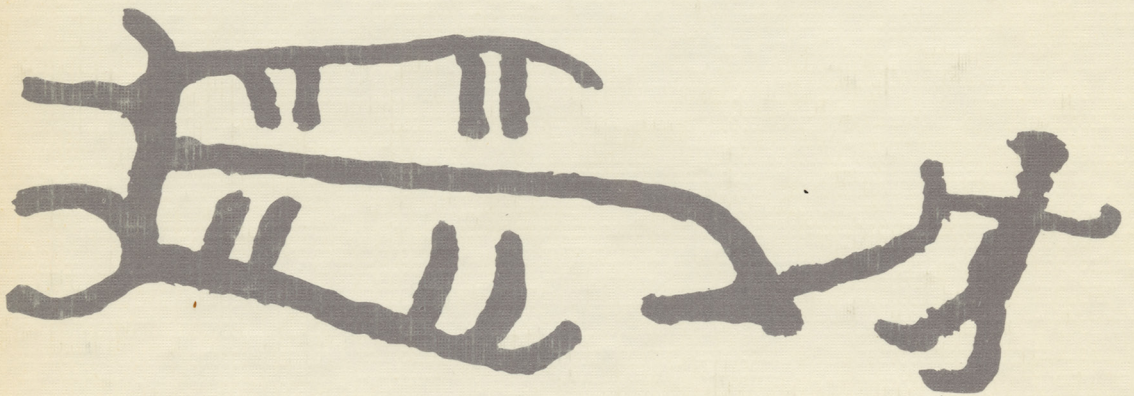


KUML

1968



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ÅRBOG FOR JYSK ARKÆOLOGISK SELSKAB

1967

With Summaries in English
Mit deutschen Zusammenfassungen

UNIVERSITETSFORLAGET I ÅRHUS

1968

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Fig. 1. Relief på den sydlige dørsten i det runde gravanlæg øst for Hili i Buraimi.
Relief on the south door-stone of the round tomb-structure east of Hili in Buraimi.

ARKÆOLOGISKE UNDERSØGELSER PÅ OMAN HALVØEN

En foreløbig rapport.

AF KAREN FRIFELT

Sletten strakte sig med spredte træer savanna-agtigt ud mod bjergene. Sandet føg for vinden og lejrede sig i smådynger op mod de tornede småbuske rundt om lejren, hvor den danske arkæologiske expedition havde opslået sine telte i den nordlige del af Buraimi oasen i sheikedømmet Abu Dhabi på Oman halvøen.

Mens et hold på 6 mand arbejdede i Saudi Arabien, var det en beskeden styrke, der startede sæsonen i Buraimi midt i januar 1968: arkitekt Eivind

Lorenzen og jeg, mens Henning Nielsen stødte til i begyndelsen af februar, hvorefter arbejdet fortsattes til midten af april. Som tidligere år dækkedes udgifterne gennem rundhåndet støtte fra olieselskaberne i Abu Dhabi: Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company, og Abu Dhabi Marine Areas, der tillige tog sig af expeditionens små og store problemer fra forsendelse af gods til fremskaffelse af materiale til køkken-palmehytten, og hvis stedlige chef, Donald Deane, expeditionen er stor tak skyldig for gæstfrihed og megen hjælp.

Små og store høje kuplede sig mod horisonten. På flere af de lavere fandtes rester af hustomter, og adskillige af de større har sikkert båret vagttårne som dem, der endnu ses ruiner af i en kreds om landsbyen Hili lige i nærheden. Mellem dem lå en gammel islamisk gravplads, flere grave endnu markeret af en sten ved hovedenden, en anden ved fodenden. Som svage forhøjninger i jordsmonnet kunne vi følge lange mure, som sikkert engang har heget gårdspladser eller haver. Overalt stødte man på potteskår, ikke i mængder, men nok til at bestemme hovedparten som islamiske, delvis samme typer som kendt fra Bahrain, rækkende tilbage til 13–14. årh. og med enkelte stykker af Ming og Celadon imellem.

Da den første støvstorm var gnedet af øjnene, den indiske kok P. C. Ummar installeret med gryder og krydderier, chaufføren Muhammad Akram fra Pakistan ankommet med expeditionens lejede landrover og sin egen harmonika, begyndte arbejdsdagen.

Den første større opgave var den næsten kilometerlange, lave tell, der strakte sig fra nord til syd mellem byerne Hili og Qatara, som Hans Højhed Sheik Zaid tidligere havde gjort expeditionen opmærksom på. Lerkarskårene lå tæt på dens ryg og sider, isprængt fragmenter fra små steatitkar med indridset ornamentik, og omrids af huse med lermure stak ligeledes frem på overfladen.

Samtidig med en opmåling af tell'en lagde vi et snit tværs igennem den 2–300 meter fra sydenden på et sted, hvor lermurene trådte skarpt frem i overfladen, d. v. s. vi afsatte i første omgang en 2 m bred øst-vest grøft nogenlunde fra midtryggen og 35 m ud mod østranden, hvor et vejspor gik langs med den i kanten af træplantningen. Et par hundrede meter længere mod øst fulgte den bredt afsatte nye vej, der var planlagt ind til Hili, og hvis skrabe »vejkasse«, efter kortet 290 m. o. h., vi tog som udgangspunkt for vore koter. Syd for byhøjen var man i fuld gang med endnu en motorvej, og umiddelbart på den anden side den lå Qatara. Mod nord skød nogle sandklitter og et par høje, hvoraf en endnu bar ruinerne af et tårn, sig ind mellem tell'en og Hili, mens mod vest sanddynernes rødgyldne bølger trængte sig tæt ind mod den gamle boplads: ørkenen på vej ind over oasen, dog endnu med spredte trægrupper. Intet under at Buraimi værner om sine træer, så det er forbudt af afkviste dem til foder og brændsel, endsige fælde dem. »For så«, advarede Ummar, »kommer sognefogden fra Qatara«. I dalene mellem sandklitterne i nærheden af tell'en lå ofte skårsamlinger, islamiske eller uglaserede skår af samme type som tell'ens.

Det blev snart klart, at tell'en kom til i nogen grad at skuffe vore forventninger foruden at berede os en hel del kvaler. Den var ikke særligt høj,

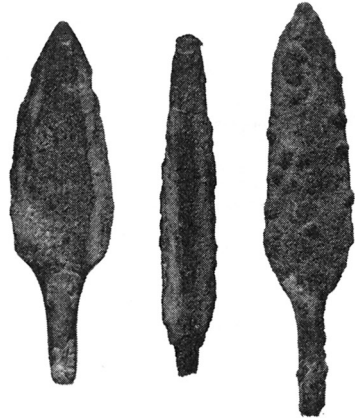


Fig. 2 a, b, c. Bronze pilespidser fra tell syd for Hili.
Bronze arrowheads from tell south of Hili.

3–4 meter over det omliggende land, men da allerede toplaget var før-islamisk, havde vi håbet, den ville give et godt snit gennem Buraimis forhistorie, når vi havde fjernet det øverste flyvesandslag. Desværre så det ud til, at dette lag fortsatte hele vejen igennem både på den ene og den anden led. Kun i de øverste $\frac{3}{4}$ m eller så stødte vi på askegruber, skår, rester af lergulve og -mure. Grøftens sider viste snart tilbøjelighed til at skride ind, i let blæst arbejdede vi i en støvsky, og efter flere dages regn skred siderne endnu mere. Både kulierne og vi var ved at være trætte af disse endeløse mængder sand. Ca. 2 m nede, i sterile sandlag, standsede vi arbejdet, og da et par små prøvegravninger andre steder på byhøjen gav samme resultat: et tyndt kulturlag øverst og derefter sand, sluttede vi af med en fladeudgravning af »søjlehuset«.

Et par meter syd for vestenden af profilgrøften, på tell'ens midtryk, stak 6 baser af ler til antagelig tagbærende piller op af sandet, mens murene tegnede sig mere usikre. Under afrensningen viste det sig, at de i tidens løb takket være vind og vand og sol havde lagt sig hen over højens top og et godt stykke ned ad siderne som en klumpet lerkappe. Kun småstumper af murene, eller rettere af fundamentene, kunne udskilles. De så ud til at være bygget af rektangulære lersten. Baserne havde en firkantet kerne med sider på $\frac{1}{2}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ m og var derefter forøget med en lerbeklaskning, der gjorde dem cirkelformede. De stod i to parallelle rækker med ca. 3 meters afstand mellem rækkerne og ligeledes mellem de to vestligste par, men kun med $1\frac{1}{2}$ m til det østligste par. Husets størrelse kan ikke med sikkerhed fastslås, men det har været på mindst 9×6 m. Der var adskillige askegruber inden for murene, antagelig sekundære, og et ler- og stenbygget ildsted i forbindelse med stumper af et slidt lergulv. Umiddelbart over gulvet og i nærheden af dette ildsted fandtes en lerklump med et utydeligt, næsten ødelagt seglaftryk, en lerbulla. I samme niveau fandtes i bunden af en askegrube et par meter fra ildstedet en bladformet pilespid af bronze med bred midtribbe, skrå skuldre og grebtunge (som fig. 2a). Det nordvestlige hjørne af huset, hvorfra disse fund stammer, var den bedst bevarede del. Iøvrigt fandtes kun små ubestemmelige bronzeklumper og potteskår.



Fig. 3. To seglsten og en hængeamulet af steatit fra telle syd for Hili.
Two stamp-seals and a pendant amulet, of steatite, from tell south of Hili.

Hele tell'ens overflade blev samtidig med udgravningsarbejdet og opmålingen omhyggeligt afsøgt og gav foruden skårmateriale adskillige gode fund: en række pilespidser af bronze, de fleste af samme form som den i huset fundne, men også et par firesidede (som fig. 2 b), dertil to knapsegl af steatit, det ene dog afbrækket på midten, en lille hængeamulet med et skriftlignende ornament indridset, ligeledes af steatit (fig. 3) og endelig fragmenter af små dyrefigurer af terracotta.

Skulderskåle af rødt lergods med smal flad eller afrundet og let ud- eller indbøjet rand, flad bund (fig. 4 a) er meget almindelige ligesom skåle med rød eller sort begitning, også med skulder, afrundet rand og flad bund. Både disse og de mange steatitskår med indridset stregornamentik svarer til *Dibba kulturen* [1], på østkysten af Oman halvøen. De fleste steatitkar er små med flad bund eller ringbund, let indbøjet rand og undertiden en åben randtud. Grangrenornament under randen er meget almindeligt, nogle ganske få stykker har koncentriske cirkler. Flade låg forekommer. Mange grove lerkarskår, svættede og af grusmagret gods, stammer sikkert fra kogekar. I fåtal, men ikke ualmindelige er skår af gulbrunt eller rødt gods med sort eller rødbrun stregbemaling. Krydsskravering eller zig-zag rækker udvendig under randen er karakteristisk, spiraler forekommer på meget fint rødt gods.

Sammenligner man keramikken og dyrefigurerne med fund fra Bahrain, vil man være tilbøjelig til at sætte tidspunktet til midten af 1. årtusind f. K., snarere lidt senere. Men bemærkelsesværdig er den fuldkomne mangel på glaseret keramik, og vanskelige at indpasse her er de to seglsten. Den ene viser en gazelle, et ikke ukendt motiv i Buraimi, vistnok stående på et alter. Efter stilen hører den snarere hjemme i 2. eller 3. årtusind f. K. end i 1.

Den beskadigede seglsten viser en midjeslank person, der i udstrakt højrearm holder en langskaftet øxe med udsvajet æg foran ansigtet. Paralleller til de bladformede pilespidser med bred midtribbe, der er i størst antal, kendes fra Persien fra Tepe Guran [2], hvor de er fundet i en grav, der er C¹⁴ dateret til 13. årh. f. K. En sammenligning mellem lerkarrene er vanskelig, så længe Buraimi materialet består af så forholdsvis få og små fragmenter, men også Guran karrene har malet geometrisk ornamentik, bl. a. krydsskravering.

Det kunne således se ud til, at der alligevel trods det tilsyneladende tynde kulturlag er tale om flere bosættelser med århundreders mellemrum. Det må en nøjere gennemgang af fundene og måske også af tell'en udrede.

Med sikkerhed kunne imidlertid fastslås, at keramikken ikke svarede til den, der var fundet i det runde gravanlæg et par km øst for Hili, udgravet de to foregående sæsoner i Buraimi [3], eller til Umm an-Nar bopladsens.

Hili graven er med sin 12 m diameter og sine store stenblokke, der har stået i mindst to skifter, et storstilet anlæg. På en af de mindre blokke havde udgraverne fundet et relief af en oryx. Desværre lå de fleste større blokke med den glatte, d. v. s. den eventuelle billedflade nedefter, og der var ingen midler til at løfte de kolossalt tunge og uhåndterlige stenplader. Nu 3 år efter var så meget af en jordsøjle drysset væk under en sten, at tre nye dyr dukkede op. Takket være hjælp fra Trucial Oman Scouts i Fort Jahili, der mødte op med to trucks med drejespil, fik vi rejst stenen på højkant, og to besynderlige langbenede dyr med stærkt svungen hale og en gazelle imellem sig lod sig fotografere (fig. 5 b). Skønt dyrene mest af alt ligner aber, er de dog nok af kunstneren tænkt afbildet som løver. To modstillede løver med et dyr imellem sig er et ikke ualmindeligt motiv på mesopotamiske seglsten. Reliefferne fremtræder skarpt og klart på den gråbrune, lidt flagende sandsten. Blokken er den nederste del af nord-dørstenen, der i dørhullet er knækket over. Den øverste og største del af blokken, foroven trappeformigt afsluttet, havde lagt sig så godt til rette, at den i første omgang ikke lod sig rokke.



Fig. 4 a, b. Skulderkar af rødt gods fra tell syd for Hili og tudkar af gulbrunt gods fra tilsvarende tell øst for Hili.

Shouldered bowl of red ware from tell south of Hili, and a spouted bowl of biscuit-coloured ware from the similar tell east of Hili.

Vi vendte så opmærksomheden mod syddøren, hvor øverste halvdel var spaltet i to og lettere at tumle. Tilmed kunne vi med hånden føle svage forhøjninger på den nedadvendte side og endda i det skrå eftermiddagslys skimte figurer, der så ud som menneskeskikkelser. Spændingen var stor, da Trucial Oman Scouts, påny tilkaldt, igen kørte bilerne i stilling og tog fat med kæder og spil. Operationen blev heldigt gennemført uden at beskadige relieffet mere, end sket var. Det forestiller to mennesker hånd i hånd mellem og under to oryxer med de lange, let buede horn pegende bagud (fig. 1). De er meget skematiske, uden ansigtstræk, men den enes frie arm ender i en stor hånd med de enkelte fingre udmejslet. Om det samme gælder den anden person, kan ikke afgøres på grund af brudet i stenen.

Nederste halvdel af syddøren lå skråt op mod fundamentsstenene, således at det var muligt at se ind under den. Fladen var meget beskadiget, og der var tilsyneladende intet tilbage af de relieffer, den vel oprindeligt har haft. Da den kun kunne vendes med fare for at beskadige menneskeparret, fik den foreløbig lov at ligge. Til gengæld blev omsider den øverste del af norddøren trukket op på højkant og forsigtigt lagt ned med billedsiden opad (fig. 5). Der var to reliefgrupper på denne sten: en bryllupsscene (fig. 5 c) og en gruppe, som vi uden småligt hensyn til kronologi kaldte Flugten til Ægypten (fig. 5 d). Forrest gik et ridedyr, efter alt at dømme et æsel, med en person ridende sidelæns, den ene hånd på dyrets hals, den anden med et solidt tag i halen. Personens køn fremgår ikke, men håropsætning eller hovedbeklædning står som en glorie om hovedet. Bag dyret følger en anden person, hvis bøjede arme løfter, hvad der ser ud som to stokke. Muligt er det sværd og bue.

Hvor vi før på gravstenene fra Umm an-Nar har fundet enkelte dyr: en kamel, en tyr, en slange, står vi her over for en mere fortællende billedverden, der rykker os tidens mennesker nærmere ind på livet. Men hvilken tid? Relief-fernes stil tidsfæster dem ikke, men man må regne med, at de hører til gravene, der efter keramikken har forbindelse med Kulli kulturen i Beluchistan og i så fald daterer billedstenene til 3. årtusind. På et tidspunkt, da vi herhjemme byggede dysser og jættestuer, mens Ægypten var i gang med pyramiderne, har også Oman halvøen haft sine storstensgrave. Bag så imponerende et gravmæle som det runde anlæg i Buraimi venter man at finde et ordnet og velhavende samfund. Hvor havde det levet sin hverdag?

Nær gravanlægget for foden af Jebel Auha kæden lå adskillige lave høje med skår og skærver på toppen, nogle med en enkelt stenblok stikkende frem i overfladen, flere af dem sikkert rester af tilsvarende grave. Ja, 3–4 km mod nord næsten begravet i de sandklitter, der vestfra stryger ind over sletten, fandt vi sikre rester af et plyndret anlæg.

Et par steder førte ganske lave »volde«, næppe synlige over jordsmonnet, fra bjergene ud over sletten, gamle underjordiske vandledninger, falaj'er. Her og der bryder en brønd overfladen, og i dens stensatte sider genkendte vi af og til de små kvadratiske fundamentsten fra gravanlæggene. Men ingen tell trak blikket til sig.

En banke mellem gravområdet og Hili lokkede os til nogle dages gravning, da skår på overfladen svarede til tell'ens syd for Hili, og vi tæt op ad

den fandt en meget smuk og komplet skulderskål med randtud stående med bunden akkurat synlig i sandet (fig. 4 b). Igen var det kun et tyndt overfladelag, hvorefter vi kom ned i til en afveksling ikke sand, men sterilt grus.

Efterhånden var vi så fortrolige med gravområdet, at vi mente at kunne skelne runde anlæg fra »andre høje«. Nord for relief-graven lå en uregelmæssig række sluttende længst væk med en større, smukt kuplet høj. Da vi gennem talrige spadestik mente at have sikret os, at de ikke var sanddyner, men indeholdt både skår og kulturjord, udvalgte vi en stor, flad høj – omkr. 40 m diameter – tæt ved det udgravede runde anlæg. Fra midten af højen førte vi en 2 m bred grøft 20 m mod vest, hvor vi anslog at have nået randen. Kuliernes begejstring over at være kommet ud til »de store sten« holdt sig nogle dage, til de havde konstateret, at grøften i hele sin længde under et få cm tyndt lag overfladesand bestod af hårdt ler. Også vi blev betænkelige og stak en tilsvarende grøft ud mod nord. Fænomenet gentog sig. Så afsatte vi et større felt i højens sydvestkvadrant og lod det mod vest gå endnu længere ud end grøften. Helt herude på fladt terræn afdækkedes tæt under overfladen et bælte med store utilhuggede sten og med så megen orden i rækkerne, at man får indtryk af, det er resterne af fundamentet til en mur. Foreløbig kunne det dog ikke afgøres, om muren forløb i en lige linje eller cirklede om højen. Over selve højsiden lå leret som en fast kappe. Og mens søndenvinden pustede hede og støv fra Rub al-Khali ørkenen ind over os, så det sved i huden, gav sprukne læber og tørstru hals, børstede og skrabede vi på den store lerflade, til mure af store rektangulære lersten så småt begyndte at tegne sig. Mens nord-syd grøften fik lov at ligge, gik vi hårdt til værks i den anden, og nær vestenden lykkedes det at komme ned mellem to metertykke nord-sydgående mure. I en dybde af mellem tre og fire meter havde vi gennembrudt flere gulvlignende lerlag, og hvor vi kom ned til fundamentet for en mur, tog en anden mur fat og fortsatte nedefter, men forskudt, så pladsen efterhånden snævrede ind til et ubehageligt hul. (fig. 6).

Arbejdet i grøften var ikke eftertragtet. Det gjorde godt at komme op på kanten og få en slurk af gedekindets kølige vand i skyggen af et træ, med blikket ud over oasen, hvor flokke af får og sorte geder kom trippende over sten og tuer, skyllede ind over højen uden respekt for vore snore og afmærkninger, mens tæt under bjergene en række kameler eller en lastbil i sin støvsky fulgte den gamle karavanevej mod Dubai.

Der var ingen småfund udover potteskår, men da vi bortset fra grøften ikke nåede ned til egentlige gulvlag, var det ikke så forbavsende. Fra fladeudgravningen fik vi gode mængder af delvis ret grove skår, hvoraf mange mindede stærkt om Umm an-Nar bopladsens keramik. Grøften havde kun få skår, fra de dybere lag kom bl. a. nogle malede fragmenter – sort stregmaling på fint rødt gods – der svarede til gravgods fra det runde anlæg. I det store felt stødte vi på adskillige bålgruber og på et lersat ildsted, ligesom vi i grøften skar igennem et par gruber med aske og trækul. Takket være Mobil Oil, der med stor imødekommenhed lod et par prøver fra en af gruberne, godt 1/2 m under overfladen, C¹⁴ bestemme for os på sit laboratorium i New York, vidste vi allerede et par måneder efter hjemkomsten, at det



Fig. 5 a.



Fig. 5 b.

Fig. 5 a, b, c, d. Øverste og nederste halvdel af norddøren fra gravanlægget ved Hili med reliefgrupper: foroven løver med gazelle og foroven bryllupscene og rytter med ledsager.

Upper and lower half of the north door-stone of the tomb-structure near Hili, with groups of reliefs: below, lions with a gazelle; above, intercourse scene and rider with escort.



Fig. 5 c.



Fig. 5 d.

ikke bare var beduinbål fra de foregående århundreder, vi omhyggeligt havde skrabet os igennem. Resultaterne lød på 3196 ± 156 og 3403 ± 161 [4], en ikke urimeligt stor uoverensstemmelse, der således tidsfæster højens øvre lag, som ikke så vidt vi kunne skønne havde forbindelse med de svære lerstensmure, til omkring 14. årh. f. K.

At komme til bunds i lagene, at få murene frem og at blive klar over, om de tilstødende højninger virkelig gemmer bopladser, der kan stå mål med deres gravmæler, det må blive den kommende sæsons opgaver.

De fleste af vore undersøgelser havde ligget nord for Buraimis centrum, Al-Ain, men læger og sygeplejersker fra det amerikanske hospital syd for byen havde i det nærliggende område øst for klipperne samlet skår og stenfragmenter beslægtede med det runde anlægs, så vi gennemsøgte en betydelig strækning her. Skårene lå strøet tæt, men var så godt som alle af islamisk oprindelse. Muligvis er de få ældre ting skyllet ud fra ødelagte høje.

Sæsonen gik mod slutningen. De kolde nætter var blevet lune, sletten, der efter regnen grønnedes og blomstrede, blev en grå, støvet flade, hvor skarnbasserne trillede med deres kugler af kamelgødning. Rundt om os voksede og trivedes det moderne Buraimi. Skolebussen kørte hver dag børnene ind til Al-Ain, hvor cementbygninger afløser palmehytter og lerhuse. Grave-maskiner og bulldozere larmede dag og nat, og store vejanlæg trak bånd mellem landsbyerne, mens rundkørsler sprang op som paddehatte på en nat. Forsøgslandbrug og træplantning søger at dæmme op for sandflugten, og undersøgelser af vandføring og vandmængde skal forebygge, at det livsvigtige vand, der har skabt Buraimi, uventet tager slut. På den næsten 200 km lange strækning ud til regeringsbyen Abu Dhabi ved kysten bygges vej og vandledninger, et gigantisk foretagende. Mest imponerende er måske den måde, hvorpå beduinen springer fra middelalderen lukt ind i det 20. århundrede. En gammel beduin kommer ind i flyveren, sætter kamelstokken fra sig og spænder sikkerhedsbæltet med samme selvfølgelighed, hvormed han senere sætter sig op på sin kamel eller ind i sin bil.

Hans Højhed Sheik Zaid leder gennem personlige forhandlinger de millionforetagender, han har sat i gang i sit ørkenrige, men tager sig stadig tid til på gammel vis at rejse fra by til by i oasen og holde majlis (modtagelse), hvor enhver kan komme til ham og fremføre, hvad han har på hjerte, mens sheiken lytter og ryger på sin lille beduinpipe. Måtte kamelstokken og den ro og værdighed, der er et særkende for dets små samfund, følge Abu Dhabi ind i olietiden.

Efter afslutning af arbejdet i Buraimi blev der foretaget en recognoscering i sheikedømmet *Sharjah*, hvis regent, Hans Højhed Sheik Khalid bin Muhammad al-Qasimi, havde sendt os underretning om, at der var gjort arkæologiske fund i hans sheikedømme, sammen med en indbydelse til at tage fundene i øjesyn. Gennem de undersøgelser, der i disse år foretages hernede af vandingsmuligheder var Trucial States Water Resources Survey inde i landet ved Tawi Mulayha stødt på bygningsrester og potteskår. Hans Højhed havde selv under en jagtudflugt gjort et par fine fund i sandet: et par halvmåneformede guldørenringe og et lille alabasterkar med to rum og ører som skematiske dyrehoveder,

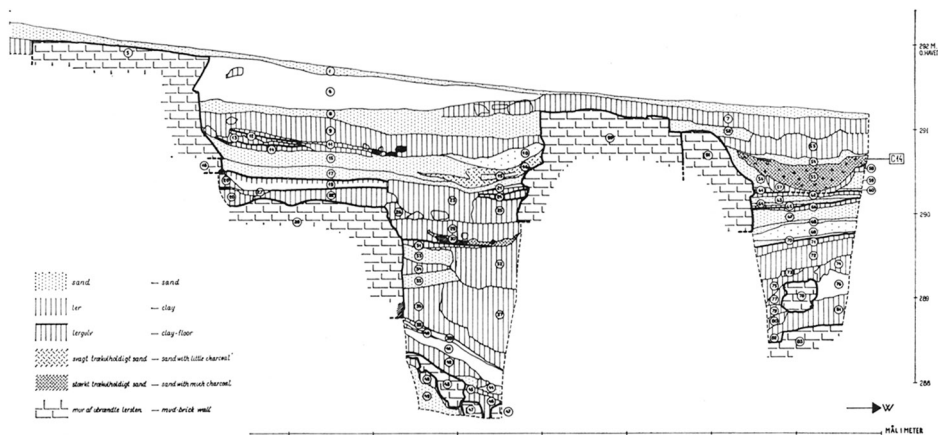


Fig. 6. Profil gennem tell nord for det runde gravanlæg.
Section through tell north of the round tomb-structure.

dertil en lille fladbundet skål (eller låg) af samme materiale. Ørenringene kan være islamiske, mens de to alabastre minder om fund fra Bahrain, fra den hellenistiske tid.

Under en recognosceringstur med Trucial States Water Survey godtgjordes det, at der på stedet ligger en gammel islamisk gravplads, og at der var mængder af islamiske skår, hvoraf en del synes at være fra tidlig islamisk tid. Men på lave høje i området fandtes også glaserede før-islamiske skår, der i tid kan passe sammen med alabasterkarrene. Foruden Hans Højhed havde også den arkæologiinteresserede Sheik Khalid bin Sultan og John Nisbet fra International Aeradio store skårsamlinger, der bekræftede dette indtryk.

Længere sydpå i Madan området lå grupper af gravhøje af størrelse og form omtrent som danske bronzealderhøje. Mod øst i Wadi Hatta, der løber ind i bjergene på grænsen til Muscat, fandtes helleristninger på store løse klippeblokke. En meget vandrig kilde sprudlede frem og gjorde stedet i det ellers golde bjergpas til en frodig plet med grønne planter og blomstrende nerior. De ubehjælpelige ristninger, oftest af ryttere, kan ikke tidsfæstes, men stedet ligger utvivlsomt på en af de gamle karavaneveje tværs over Oman halvøen. At disse områder var livlige hvad angår både handel og krige i islamisk tid, er velkendt. Og de gamle vandledninger vidner om betydeligt tættere beboelse før end i nutiden. Lidt mod nord i Tawi Fili var en sådan falaj gravet igennem, så man kunne se de uregelmæssige kalkstensfliser, den var opbygget af. Et par nogenlunde komplette lerkar fundet i den er islamiske og snarest fra 13.-14. årh. Men det er sikkert, at både Sharjah og Dubai har en længere og mere broget fortid, end de hidtil har drømt om.

Translation

Archaeological investigations in the Oman peninsula

A preliminary report

The plain extended, savannah-like with its scattered trees, out toward the mountains. The sand blew before the wind, and settled in miniature dunes against the small thorn bushes around the camp where the Danish Archaeological Expedition had pitched its tents at the northern edge of the Buraimi oasis in the sheikhdom of Abu Dhabi, in the Oman peninsula of Arabia.

While a team of six men were working at the same time in Saudi Arabia, it was a modest force which started work in Buraimi in the middle of January 1968: Eivind Lorenzen, an architect, and I, while Henning Nielsen joined us at the beginning of February. Work continued until the middle of April. As in previous years our expenses were covered by generous grants from the oil companies in Abu Dhabi: the Abu Dhabi Petroleum Company and Abu Dhabi Marine Areas. The latter in addition took care of all the large and small problems of the Expedition, from despatching our packing cases to acquiring the material for the cook's palm-leaf kitchen, while its representative in Abu Dhabi, Donald Deane, earned the gratitude of the Expedition for ever-present help and hospitality.

Mounds large and small raised their rounded tops against the horizon. On several of the lower ones were found the ruined traces of houses, while several of the larger had certainly borne watch-towers such as those whose ruins could still be seen ringing the nearby village of Hili. Between them lay an ancient Islamic cemetery, with several graves still marked by a stone at the head and another at the foot. Low ridges on the level ground showed the run of long walls, which had once undoubtedly fenced in farms or gardens. Everywhere lay potsherds, in no great numbers, but sufficient to allow the greater part to be identified as Islamic, many of the same types as we knew from Bahrain, stretching back to the 13th and 14th centuries, with a few fragments of Ming ware and celadon among them.

When we had rubbed the first dust-storm out of our eyes, and installed the Indian cook, P. C. Ummer, with his pans and spices, and the Pakistani chauffeur, Muhammad Akram, with the Expedition's hired land-rover and his own harmonica the work could begin.

The first major project was the low tell, almost a kilometre long, which extended from north to south between the villages of Hili and Qatara, and which His Highness Sheikh Zayyid had earlier brought to the attention of the Expedition. Potsherds lay thick upon its top and sides, interspersed with fragments of small steatite vessels with incised ornamentation, while the outlines of clay-walled houses could also be made out on the surface.

While the tell was being surveyed in, a section trench was laid out across it 2-300 metres from the southern end at a point where the clay walls were particularly sharply defined on the surface; in the first instance we set off an east-west trench, 2 metres wide, from the approximate centre of the ridge for 35 metres out towards the eastern edge, where a track ran along the edge of a growth of trees. A couple of hundred metres further to the east ran the course of the broad new road which was planned to run to Hili, and we took its clean-scraped "bed", according to the map 290 metres above sea-level, as the datum point for our levels. South of the tell work was in full progress on another motor road, and immediately beyond the road-works lay Qatara. To the north a few dunes and two mounds, of which one still bore the ruins of a tower, intervened between the tell and Hili, while to the west the yellow-red waves of the sand-dunes rolled close in upon the ancient settlement: the desert on the march across the oasis, though still sparing a few groups of trees. No wonder that Buraimi guards its trees, so that it is forbidden to break off boughs for fodder or fuel. "For if you do," warned Ummer, "the constable from Qatara will come." In the hollows between the

dunes near the tell there often lay potsherds, either Islamic or unglazed sherds of the same type as those on the tell.

It was soon obvious that the tell would to some degree disappoint our expectations, in addition to causing us a deal of trouble. It was not very high, 3–4 metres above the surrounding country, but since the surface layer was pre-Islamic we had hoped that it would give us a sizable section through Buraimi's prehistory, once we had removed the upper layer of drift-sand. Unfortunately it appeared that the drift-sand continued all the way both across and down. Only the upper three-quarter metre or so contained ash-pits, potsherds, and remains of clay walls and floors. The sides of the trench soon showed a tendency to slide inward; in the slightest wind we worked in a cloud of dust, and after several days' rain the sides collapsed even more. Both our workers and we were getting tired of "such quantities of sand". About 2 metres down, in sterile sand, we stopped work, and after two small test pits elsewhere on the tell gave the same result – a thin occupation level overlying sand – we finished off with an area-excavation of the "pillared house".

Two metres south of the western end of the section trench, on the summit ridge of the tell, 6 clay plinths, apparently for roof-bearing pillars, stuck out from the sand, while the surrounding walls could be made out less clearly. When the area was cleared it could be seen that these walls had, under the action of wind and rain and sun, collapsed to form an irregular cap of clay over the top of the mound and a good way down each side. Only small stretches of wall, or rather of foundations, could be distinguished. They appeared to have been built of rectangular sun-dried bricks. The plinths had a square core, with sides measuring a half to three-quarters of a metre, which had then been added to with clay daub to give them a circular form. They stood in two parallel rows about three metres apart; the two westernmost pairs were the same distance apart, while there was only a metre and a half to the easternmost pair. The size of the house could not be determined with certainty, but it had measured at least 9×6 metres. There were a number of ash-pits within the walls, probably secondary, and a hearth of clay and stones in association with fragments of worn clay flooring. Immediately above the floor and close to the hearth a lump of clay was found with an unclear, almost destroyed seal-impression, a clay bulla. At the same level, at the bottom of an ash-pit two metres from the hearth was found a leaf-shaped bronze arrowhead with a broad centre-rib, sloping shoulders and tang (as in Fig. 2 a). The northwest corner of the house, in which these finds were made, was the best preserved area. The only other objects recovered were small indeterminate scraps of bronze and potsherds.

During the excavation and survey of the tell the whole surface was carefully searched, resulting in several interesting finds in addition to the potsherd material: a number of bronze arrowheads, the majority of the same shape as that found in the house, but also two with a more massive midrib and very narrow edges (as in Fig. 2 b); and two stamp-seals of steatite, one of them broken away at the middle; a little pendant amulet with a script-like incised ornamentation, also of steatite (Fig. 3), and finally fragments of small animal figurines of terracotta.

Bowls of red ware with a conspicuous shoulder and a narrow flat or curved rim trending slightly inward or outward and a flat base (Fig. 4 a) are very common, as are bowls with a red or black wash, also with shoulder, curved rim and flat base. Both these vessels and the numerous steatite fragments with incised stroke ornamentation correspond to the Dibba culture on the east coast of the Oman peninsula [1]. The majority of the steatite vessels are small, with a flat or ring base, slightly inturned rim, and sometimes an open rim-spout. Herringbone ornamentation below the rim is very common, while a few fragments bear concentric circles. Flat lids occur. Many coarse potsherds, blackened and of gravel-tempered clay, doubtless belong to kitchen ware. A not infrequent minority of sherds are of fawn or red ware with lines of black or reddish-brown paint. Cross-hatching or rows of zigzags on the outside of the vessels below the rim is characteristic, while spirals occur on very fine red ware.

On comparing the pottery and animal figurines with the material from Bahrain one

would be inclined to date the site to the middle of the First Millennium B. C., or perhaps a little later. But the complete absence of glazed ware is noteworthy, while the two seals are difficult to ascribe to this date. One portrays a gazelle, a not unknown motif in Buraimi, apparently standing upon an altar; its style is more at home in the Second or Third Millennium than in the First. The broken seal shows a wasp-waisted individual holding in his extended right hand a long-shafted axe with a curved edge in front of his face. Parallels to the leaf-shaped arrowheads with a broad midrib, which form the most common type, are known from Tepe Guran in Persia [2], where they have been found in a grave dated by C¹⁴ to the 13th century B. C. Pottery comparison is difficult, so long as the Buraimi material consists of so comparatively few and small fragments, but the Guran pottery too bears painted geometric ornamentation, including cross-hatching.

It seems thus likely that, despite the apparently thin occupation layer, there may be evidence for several occupations at intervals of centuries. This can only be determined by a more thorough study of the material and perhaps of the tell.

One thing at least was certain. The pottery did not in any way resemble that found in the round tomb structure some two kilometres east of Hili, which was excavated during the two previous seasons in Buraimi [3], nor that found in the settlement on Umm an-Nar.

This tomb structure near Hili, with its 12 metre diameter and its immense stone slabs, originally standing in at least two courses, had been an impressive monument. The excavators had found on one of the smaller slabs a picture of an oryx in shallow relief. Unfortunately the majority of the larger slabs lay with the smooth outer surface, on which further reliefs might occur, downwards, and there had been no means at hand to lift the colossally heavy and unwieldy blocks. But now, three years later, enough of the soil supporting one of the stones had crumbled away so that three new animal figures had appeared. With the help of the Trucial Oman Scouts from Fort Jahili, who brought with them two trucks with winches, we succeeded in raising the stone on edge, and two remarkable, long-legged animals with long curved tails, holding a gazelle between them, could be photographed (Fig. 5 b). Although the animals in fact most resemble monkeys they were undoubtedly intended by the artist to represent lions. Two opposing lions with an animal between them form a motif not uncommon on Mesopotamian seals. The reliefs stand clear and sharp on the greyish-brown, somewhat layered sandstone. The block is the lower portion of the northern door-stone, which has been broken across at the porthole entrance. The upper, and larger, portion of the slab, with its stepped top, lay so firmly on its face that it was initially impossible to move it.

We accordingly turned our attention to the south door-stone, whose upper half had broken into two and was correspondingly easier to wrestle with. We could moreover feel by hand slight irregularities on the down-turned side and even, in the oblique light of the afternoons, make out figures which resembled human forms. Excitement was high when the Trucial Oman Scouts, once more summoned, drove their trucks into position and brought their winches and chains into play. The operation was carried out successfully, without further damage to the reliefs. They turned out to represent two human figures hand in hand between and below two oryx with their long, slightly curved horns pointing backward (Fig. 1). They are very schematically represented, and the human figures have no features, but the free arm of one of them ends in a large hand with the individual fingers represented. Whether the same is true of the other figure cannot be determined because of the break in the stone.

The lower half of the south door-stone lay leaning against the foundation blocks, so that it was possible to see its lower face. The surface was very damaged, and there appeared to be nothing left of the reliefs which it probably originally bore. As it could only be turned at the risk of damaging the upper relief it was left for the moment in peace. Instead, the upper part of the north door-stone was finally winched up on edge and carefully lowered with its ornamented side uppermost (Fig. 5). There were two relief-groups on this stone: a scene of sexual intercourse (Fig. 5 c) and a group which we entitled (with complete disregard for chronology) the "Flight into Egypt" (Fig. 5 d).

In front went a quadruped, by all the evidence a donkey, with a human figure riding sidesaddle, with one hand on the neck of the animal and the other holding the tail in a firm grip. The sex of the figure is not indicated, but the hair or headdress forms a halo around the head. Behind the animal follows another human figure, carrying in half-extended hands what appear to be two sticks, perhaps a sword and a bow.

While we had previously discovered, on the stones of the tomb structures of Umm an-Nar, representations of single animals, a camel, a bull, a snake, here we met a more communicative art, which brings us closer to the people of the period. But which period? The style of the reliefs does not date them, but we may assume that they are an integral part of the tomb, the pottery of which is connected with that of the Kulli culture in Baluchistan, thus dating the pictorial slabs to the Third Millennium. At a time when we in Denmark were building dolmens and passage graves, while Egypt was raising its pyramids, the Oman peninsula, too, had its megalithic graves. Behind so imposing a grave-monument as the round structure in Buraimi one would expect to find an organized and prosperous community. Where had it carried on its day-by-day life?

Close to the monumental tomb at the foot of the mountain chain of Jebel Auha lay a number of low mounds with potsherds and stone chippings on their tops, some with a single stone slab or so sticking up above the surface, most of them undoubtedly the remains of comparable tomb structures. Even 3–4 kms. to the north, almost buried in the sand dunes which stream in across the plain from the west, the undoubted ruins of a plundered tomb were found.

At a few points quite small ridges, scarcely visible above ground surface, ran out from the mountains over the plain, old subterranean aqueducts, *aflaj* (sing. *falaj*). Here and there a well connected to the *aflaj* broke the surface, and in its stone-set sides we could sometimes recognize the small square foundation stones from the tombs. But no tell caught the eye.

A ridge between the tomb area and Hili tempted us to a few days' excavation, as the sherds on its surface corresponded to those on the tell south of Hili, and as we had found close up to it a very fine and complete shouldered bowl with rim-spout standing bottom-uppermost with its base just visible in the sand (Fig. 4 b). But again there was only a thin surface layer, below which we reached, for a change, not sand but sterile gravel.

We had gradually become so familiarized with the tomb area that we felt capable of distinguishing "round structures" from "other mounds". Immediately north of the tomb with the reliefs lay an irregular row of these "other mounds" terminating at the more distant end in a larger and finely rounded mound. After innumerable turnings up of spadefuls of soil had convinced us that they were not sand-dunes, but contained both potsherds and settlement earth, we selected a large flattish mound, about 40 metres in diameter, close to the excavated tomb structure. From the centre of the mound we laid out a trench, 2 metres wide, for 20 metres toward the west, to where we estimated the edge of the mound to be. Our workers' delight at having moved out to the "big stones" lasted a few days, until they discovered that in all its length the trench, under a layer of surface sand only a few cms. thick, consisted of hard clay. We too had our doubts, and laid out a corresponding trench toward the north. The result was the same. We laid out a larger area in the southwestern quadrant of the mound, extending further to the west than the end of the west trench. Right out here, on the level plain, we uncovered close below the surface a belt of large unshaped stones, with so much order in their ranks as to give the impression of being the foundations of a wall. For the moment it could not be determined whether the wall pursued a straight course or circled around the mound. Up the sides of the mound itself stretched the solid cap of clay. And while the southern wind blew the heat and dust of the Rub' al-Khali desert in over us, smarting our skin, splitting our lips and roughening our throats with thirst, we brushed and scraped the large clay surface, until walls of large rectangular dried-clay bricks began to come reluctantly into view. While the north-south trench lay deserted, we went hard to work on the other, and close to its western end we were able to dig down between two

north-south-going walls, each over a metre thick. At a depth of between 3 and 4 metres we had passed through several clay layers resembling floors, and where we reached the foundation of one wall another wall would start and continue downward, but not immediately below the higher wall, so that the space available gradually narrowed to unpleasantly small proportions.

Work in the trench was not popular. It was refreshing to come up to the surface, and take a mouthful of cool water from the goatskin in the shade of a tree, looking out over the oasis where flocks of sheep and black goats skipped lightly over stones and hillocks, and drove in over our mound with no respect for our marking posts and twine, while close in under the mountains a string of camels or a truck in its cloud of dust followed the old caravan trail to Dubai.

There were no "small finds" apart from potsherds, but this was scarcely odd because only in the trench did we reach any real floor level. The area excavation yielded fair quantities of sherds, mostly of fairly coarse character, many recalling strongly the pottery of the Umm an-Nar settlement. The trench gave only few sherds, but from the deeper levels these included some painted fragments – black linear designs on fine red ware – which corresponded to the burial pottery from the round tomb. In the larger area we met with several fire-pits and one clay-built hearth, while in the trench we cut through two pits, dug down from near the surface and filled with ashes and charcoal. We are grateful to Mobil Oil, who very kindly arranged for two samples from one of these pits, taken about 50 cms. below the surface, to be Carbon 14-tested for us at their laboratory in New York; no more than two months after our return home we knew, therefore, that it was not bedouin camp-fires from recent centuries that we had so carefully cut through. The results read 3196 ± 156 and 3403 ± 161 Before Present [4], a not unduly large discrepancy, which enables us to date the upper disturbances of the mound, which so far as we could see have no connection with the massive mud-brick walls, to about the 14th century B. C.

To reach the bottom of the occupation layers, to extricate the walls, and to determine whether the adjoining mounds really cover a settlement of a size and quality to match its burial monuments, must be the objects of coming seasons' work.

Most of our investigations had lain north of the centre of Buraimi, Al-Ain, but doctors and nurses from the American hospital south of that town had picked up potsherds and steatite fragments related to those of the round tomb in the area east of the cliffs near their hospital; we accordingly reconnoitred a considerable area here. Potsherds lay very thick, but they were practically all of Islamic origin. It is possible that the few earlier objects have been washed out of vanished mounds.

The season drew to a close. The cold nights had become milk-warm; the plain, which after the rain had blossomed and grown green, became a gray dusty expanse, where the scarab-beetles rolled their balls of camel-dung. Round about us the modern Buraimi grew up vigorously. The school-bus every day drove the children in to Al-Ain, where buildings of cement were replacing palm-huts and clay houses. Excavators and bulldozers roared by day and by night, and immense roadworks stretched their ribbons between the villages, while roundabouts shot up like toadstools in the course of a single night. Experimental farms and afforestation attempt to check the movement of the sand, and research on aquifers and water reserves will ensure that the vital water, which created Buraimi, does not suddenly fail. On the route, almost 200 kms. long, to the capital city of Abu Dhabi on the coast, roads and water-lines are being built, a gigantic undertaking. Most impressive, perhaps, is the way in which the bedouin jump straight from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century. An old bedawi will mount into the aircraft, lay his camel-stick aside and fasten his seat-belt with the same nonchalance as he later will mount his camel or his truck.

His Highness Sheikh Zayyid personally negotiates and leads the million-pound projects which he has initiated in his desert kingdom, but he still takes the time to travel in the traditional fashion from village to village in the oasis and to hold the *majlis* (assembly) where anyone may come to him and present his views and problems,

while the Sheikh listens and smokes his tiny bedouin pipe. May the camel-stick, and the undisturbed dignity which characterizes its little community, accompany Abu Dhabi on its way into the oil-period.

After the termination of our work in Buraimi a reconnaissance was carried out in *Sharjah*, where the ruler, His Highness Sheikh Khalid bin Muhammad al-Qasimi, had sent us a message, that archaeological discoveries had been made in his sheikhdom, with an invitation to come and see the discoveries. In the course of investigations of water resources which have been carried out during the latest years the Trucial States Water Resources Survey had encountered inland near Tawi Mulayha ruins of buildings and potsherds. His Highness had personally in the course of hunting made two valuable discoveries in the sand: a pair of crescent-shaped gold earrings and a little alabaster vessel with two compartments and lug-handles formed as schematic animal heads, together with a little flat-based bowl (or lid?) of the same material. The earrings may be Islamic, but the two objects of alabaster resemble objects from Bahrain, of Hellenistic date.

In the course of a reconnaissance with the Trucial States Water Survey it was confirmed that an old Islamic cemetery exists on the site, together with quantities of Islamic sherds, many of which seem to be of early Islamic date. But on low mounds in the neighbourhood there were also glazed pre-Islamic sherds which could agree very well in date with the alabaster vessels. In addition to His Highness, two archaeological enthusiasts, Sheikh Khalid bin Sultan and John Nisbet from International Aeradio, possessed large collections of potsherds which confirmed this conclusion.

Further to the south, in the area of Madan, lay groups of tumuli of a size and shape reminiscent of Danish Bronze-Age mounds. Towards the east in Wadi Hatta, which runs up into the mountains, on the border of Muscat, rock carvings were found on large free-lying blocks of stone. A munificent spring of water here broke forth, and had transformed the site, in the otherwise parched mountain pass, into a garden of green plants and flowering oleanders. The carvings, often of mounted men, cannot in themselves be dated, but the site undoubtedly lies on one of the old caravan roads across the Oman peninsula. That these regions were the scenes of lively activity in both trade and war during Islamic times is well-attested. And the ancient aqueducts bear witness of a considerably larger population in former times than now. A little north of Tawi Fili such a *falaj* had been cut through, exposing the irregular limestone slabs of which it had been built. A couple of fairly complete pottery vessels discovered in it are Islamic, probably of the 13th–14th century. But it is certain that both Sharjah and Dubai have a history longer and more eventful than they yet have dreamed.

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NOTER

1. Bibby, *Kuml* 1965, p. 151.
2. Thrane, *Acta Archaeologica* XXXIV, p. 130 & fig. 32.
3. Bibby, *Kuml* 1966, p. 94 & fig. 1,11–12.
4. Mobil Research and Development Corporation: SM 1113 & SM 1114.