

A sepia-toned photograph of a tropical landscape. In the foreground, the dark silhouette of a palm tree trunk is on the left, and its fronds are spread across the upper half of the frame. In the middle ground, a building with a thatched roof is visible, partially obscured by other vegetation. The background shows a hazy, mountainous or hilly terrain under a light sky. The overall tone is warm and historical.

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ÅRBOG FOR JYSK ARKÆOLOGISK SELSKAB
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BAHRAINS OLDTIDSHOVEDSTAD

Af P. V. GLOB

Som en krone over Bahrains palmedækkede nordkyst hæver ruinerne af et 400-årigt portugisisk fort sine højtrejste okkergule mure over en udstrakt grushøjs svagt hvælvede kuppel. Det omliggende land er ganske fladt, ligger kun et par meter over havets højeste vande. At banken er dannet ved menneskers århundredlange bosættelse på stedet viser talrige potteskår på højens overflade og i dens stejle sider mod kysten, hvor brændingen ved højvande blotter dens indre. Helt ude i havstokken ses, lejret i sand, kvaderhuggede fundamenter af en bygning, hvis ene ende er bortskyllet af havet, men hvis anden ende strækker sig ind under bankens sorte kulturlag. Flere steder langs højens sider rager tilhuggede stenblokke frem, og i fortets mure ses lignende sten, som tydeligt har haft anden anvendelse, inden de blev anbragt der. Alt tydede derfor på, at en udgravning her ville give udbytte, men resultatet overtraf de dristigste forhåbninger.

Banken er en halv snes meter høj, c. 600 m i øst-vest parallelt med kysten og halvt så bred i nord-syd. Det meste af den nordvestlige ende optages af fortet, og ud for dette i strandkanten ligger det ovenfor omtalte fundament, hvoraf et 16 m langt og 8 m bredt stykke er blottet. Syd derfor findes en lille landsby, hvis palmebladshytter og få stenhuse dækker en mindre del af vestenden. Langt den største del af banken ligger dog øde hen, velegnet til udgravning. Desværre blev der kun lejlighed til at foretage en prøvegravning på dette sted i »Dansk Arkæologisk Bahrain-Ekspedition«s allersidste fase.

Til udgravningsplads valgtes det højeste terrain, der ligger op mod fortets østlige voldgrav. Banken er her 10,19 m, og den tilstødende voldgravs bund 0,45 m over højvandsmærket. Når portugiserne under deres kortvarige herredømme over Bahrain valgte netop dette sted til deres fort, var det, fordi det var det eneste på nordkysten, hvor der kunne graves en betydelig voldgrav. Da det opførtes, var der en anelig by på stedet. Talrige skår af kinesisk og persisk porcelain ligger her spredt

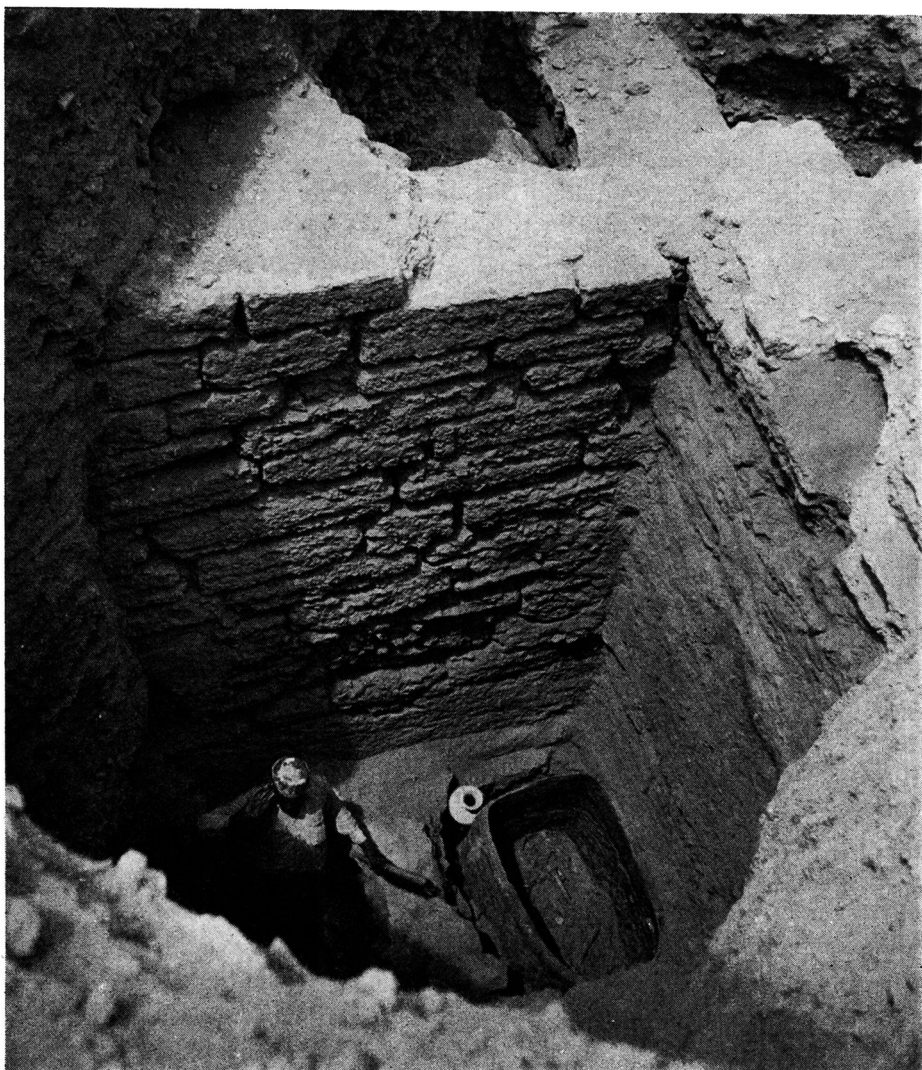


Fig. 1. Hjørne af bygning i ruinhøj ved Ras al Qala'a.
Corner of building in the tell at Ras al Qala'a.

mellem tusinder af glaceret islamisk keramik. Umiddelbart øst for byhøjen findes rester af en anseelig moske, hvorfra fint udhuggede stenblokke med dekorative arabiske indskrifter ligger strøet omkring. Vidnesbyrd om endnu tidligere bosættelse er skår af stenkar, flere reparerede med kobbertråd.

Det var oprindelig meningen at føre en skakt ned til byhøjens bund, men den måtte standses i c. 7 meters dybde, da gulvlagene i en monumentalbygning standsede videre gravninger. Et hjørne af denne blev af-

dækket, og her stod murene endnu i omtrent 5 meters højde (fig. 1). Disse mure, der var sat af svære, kvaderhuggede sten, var 1,10 m brede og bestod i den ene side af 14, i den anden af 17 skifter. Stenene var i fundamentet over 2 m lange. Væggene har oprindeligt været beklasket med et svært lag af gips. Gulvlaget var ligeledes gips, men udbedret flere gange, således at det andet gulvlag lå c. 0,45 m og det tredje c. 0,82 m over det oprindelige gulv. På billedet (fig. 1) står en af vore hjælpere på det nederste gulvlag, støtter sig til det andet lag, medens det sidste gulv ses til højre for ham.

De to øverste gulvlag er imidlertid på dette sted blevet gennemhugget for at give plads til badekarformede kister, der tidligere har været genstand for plyndring. Således var et dække, der har bestået af brædder og gipsplaster, gennembrudt og nedstyrtet i kisterne, hvor også skeletterne var noget forstyrret. Kisterne, der var 0,9 og 1 m lange og 0,6 m brede i indvendigt mål, var c. 0,65 og 0,63 m dybe. Materialet er dårligt brændt ler, tætnet på yder- og indersiden med bitumen (jordbeg). Desværre blev den ene kiste, der var orienteret i nord-syd og med et skelet liggende stærkt sammenbøjet med hovedet i den lige afskårne sydende, en nat ødelagt ved stenkast. Det har været en fuldvoksen person, der har været jordet her. Som eneste gravgods optoges en amulet af onyx, gennemboret fra side til side og af en type, der kendes fra Mesopotamien¹). Den anden kiste var orienteret i øst-vest. Heri lå et skelet af en fuldvoksen person i stærkt sammenbøjet stilling med hovedet i vestenden, fødderne i den afrundede østende og med hænderne foran ansigtet, der var vendt mod nord. I kisten fandtes intet gravgods, men uden for den, ved sydvesthjørnet, stod en lille lervase af rødt gods med hvidgulligt overtræk (se fig. 1). Kister af lignende type anvendtes i Mesopotamien allerede fra det 3. årtusinde, men brugtes der langt fremover i tiden²). Kisterne giver derfor ingen datering af bygningens sekundære anvendelse som gravplads. Lerkarret er af samme type som i fund fra Harappa i Indien og af lignende materiale³) og kan måske henføres til 2. årtusinde, hvor onyx-amuletter af omtalte type også var i brug.

Hvor meget ældre end lerkisterne bygningen er, kan endnu ikke afgøres. I det hjørne, der fremgravedes, var kulturlagene helt omrodede, og rester af flere kister end de ovenfor omtalte blev fundet. Der er grund til at fremhæve, at murens teknik, de svære kvaderhuggede bygningssten af lokal kalksten og beklædningen med gipsplaster, er den samme, som vi kender fra de vældige gravkamre ved Ali⁴). Der er derfor al god grund til at tro, at de stormænd, der hviler i Bahraíns anseligste bronzealderhøje også har opført denne bygning. Det må således anses for sandsynligt, at den store byhøj, som dækker et areal på op mod 200.000 m² ved det portugisiske fort, Ras al Qala'a, skjuler Bahraíns Oldtidshovedstad, af hvis bygninger hjørnet af den afdækkede monumentalbygning viser

et glimt. Her må stedet være, hvor søhandelsmænd, Alik Dilmun, udvekslede deres klædedragter, stoffer og sølv fra Ur og andre mesopotamiske byer, mod kobber og kobbersager fra Makkan, måske vore dages Omankyst, og mod elfenben, sjældne stene og vellugtende urter fra Meluhha, Induskulturens område i Indusdalen.

Fremtidige undersøgelser ved Ras al Qala'a vil uden tvivl klare mange dunkle afsnit af Bahraíns og det mellemste Østens oldtidshistorie. De 10 meters skiftende kulturlag, hvori tusinder af levninger fra mange forskellige kulturgrupper og tidsafsnit er indlejret, vil give mulighed for opstilling af en selvstændig kronologi for Bahrain. De tre gulvlag i den påviste monumentalbygning vil ligeledes kunne give vigtige kronologiske holdepunkter, og under bygningen ligger endnu mindst et par meter kulturlag, der måske går meget længere tilbage i tiden end Bahraíns bronzalderhøje. På dette sted, hvor købmænd fra Mesopotamien og Indien mødtes for 4000 år siden, må der tillige være en mulighed for at finde nøglen til tydning af Induskulturens endnu ulæste skriftsprog. Her må fremtidige udgravninger koncentreres.

The Ancient Capital of Bahrain.

Above the palmclad northern coast of Bahrain the ruins of a 400-year old Portuguese fort raise their ochre walls like a crown over the gently rounded dome of a spreading gravel mound. The country around is quite flat and lies only about six feet above high-water-mark. That the mound has been formed by centuries of human settlement on the site is shown by the numerous potsherds upon the surface of the mound and in its steep edges on the side bordering the sea, where the breakers at high tide have cut into the sides. Further out, below high-water-mark, can be seen, embedded in sand, the ashlar foundations of a building, of which one end has been washed away by the sea, while the other end extends in under the black occupation earth of the mound. At many points along the edges of the mound project squared stone blocks, while in the walls of the fort can be seen similar stones, which clearly were used elsewhere before they were built in here. All indications therefore suggested that an excavation here would give results, but the truth exceeded our wildest hopes.

The mound is about ten meters high, and measures about 600 yards in an east-west direction parallel with the coast and about half that distance from north to south. The greater part of the northwestern end is occupied by the fort, and it is on the beach opposite the fort that the foundation mentioned above is located, a stretch of 16 meters in length and 8 meters in width lying exposed. South of this point lies a little village, whose palm-leaf huts and few stone houses cover a smaller portion of the western end. By far the greater part of the mound, however, is deserted and well suited for excavation. Unfortunately it was only possible to make a test sondage on this site during the final phase of the "Danish Archeological Bahrain-Expedition's" work.

The spot chosen for this excavation was the highest point of the ground,

which lies next to the eastern moat of the fort. The mound is at this point 10.19 meters high, and the bottom of the adjoining moat is here 0.45 meters above high-water-mark. The reason why the Portuguese, during their short mastery over Bahrain, chose just this point for their fort was because this was the only place on the north coast where it was possible to dig a substantial moat. At the time when the fort was built there lay a considerable city on the site. Numerous sherds of Chinese and Persian porcelain lie here among thousands of sherds of Islamic glazed ware. Directly to the east of the tell lie the ruins of a large mosque, and finely carved stone blocks with decorative Arabic inscriptions lie strewn over the desert around it. Sherds of stone vessels, many repaired with copper wire, bear witness to settlements of an even earlier date.

The original intention was to drive a shaft down to the bottom of the tell, but it proved necessary to halt the shaft at a depth of about 7 meters, where the floor levels of a monumental building prevented further excavation. A corner of this building was uncovered and here the walls still stood to a height of about 5 meters (Fig. 1). The walls were 1.10 meters thick and consisted of massive ashlar masonry, one of the walls having 14 courses and the other 17, the blocks at foundation level being over two meters long. The walls had originally been coated with a thick layer of plaster. The floor was similarly of gypsum plaster, but it had been relaid several times, the second floor level lying about 0.45 meters and the third about 0.82 meters above the original floor. In the illustration (Fig. 1) one of our assistants is standing on the lowest floor level and leaning against the second floor, while the third can be seen on his right.

The two upper floor levels had, however, been broken through at this point to accommodate bathtub-shaped coffins, which had been plundered at some earlier date. This was shown by the fact that a lid, which had consisted of boards and gypsum plaster, had been broken up and had fallen into the coffins, in which the skeletons were also somewhat disturbed. The coffins were 0.6 meters broad, and respectively 0.9 and 1 meter long and about 0.65 and 0.63 meters deep, all measurements being interior. They were formed of poorly baked clay, coated inside and out with bitumen. One of the two coffins, which lay north-south and contained a skeleton lying in a sharply contracted posture with its head to the unrounded south end, was unfortunately destroyed one night by persons bombarding it with stones. The skeleton in this coffin was of an adult. The only item of burial furnishing to be discovered was an amulet of onyx, pierced from side to side, of a type known from Mesopotamia¹). The other coffin was oriented east-west. In it lay the skeleton of a fully grown individual in a sharply contracted position with its head in the western end, its feet in the rounded eastern end, and its hands in front of the face, which was turned towards the north. No burial furnishings were found within the coffin, but just outside it, by the southwest corner, stood a little pottery vase of red ware with a yellowish white slip (cf. Fig. 1). Coffins of a similar type were in use in Mesopotamia as early as the third millennium, but were used over a long period²). The coffins therefore do not provide any date for the secondary use of the building as a place of burial. The pottery vessel is of the same type and similar material as found in Harappa in India³), and can perhaps be dated to the second millennium, when onyx amulets of the type described were also in use.

How much older the building is than the coffins, it is still impossible to

say. In the corner which was excavated the stratification was completely disturbed, and remains of several coffins were found in addition to the two described above. There is reason to emphasize that the building technique here used, the massive square-cut building stones of the local limestone and the coating with gypsum plaster, is the same as the technique seen in the colossal burial chambers at 'Ali¹). There is thus every reason to believe that the chieftains who rest in the finest of Bahrain's Bronze Age tumuli also erected this building. It must therefore be regarded as probable that the large tell, which covers an area of about 200.000 square yards, by the Portuguese fort, Ras al Qala'a, conceals the ancient capital of Bahrain, of whose buildings the monumental structure of which the corner has been uncovered provides a glimpse. Here it must have been that the seafaring merchants, the Alik Dilmun, exchanged their garments, their cloth and silver from Ur and the other cities of Mesopotamia for the copper and the copper objects from Makkan, perhaps the Oman coast of our own day, and for the ivory, precious stones and aromatic plants from Meluhha, the area of the Indus civilization in the valley of the Indus.

Future investigations at Ras al Qala'a will undoubtedly illuminate many dark points in the ancient history of Bahrain and the Middle East. The ten meters of successive occupation layers, in which thousands of relics from many varied culture groups and periods are embedded, will provide an opportunity of establishing an independent chronology for Bahrain. The three floor levels in the monumental building which have already been found will similarly give important chronological datum points, while beneath the building there still lie at least two meters of occupation debris, which will perhaps take the story back to a time before Bahrain's Bronze Age tumuli. At this site, moreover, where merchants from Mesopotamia and India used to meet 4000 years ago, there may well be a possibility of finding the key to the decipherment of the still unread script of the Indus civilization. It is here that future excavation must be concentrated.

P. V. Glob.

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NOTER

¹) Délégation en Perse, Mémoires, Tome VII, pl. XIII₇ (Paris 1905). ²) H. R. Hall and C. L. Wolley: *Ur Excavations* Vol. I, p. 179, 189 og 193 (1927); C. L. Wolley: *Ur Excavations* Vol. II, p. 162. ³) Madho Sarup Vats: *Excavations at Harappa* Pl. LX. 20. H. 487 a (1940). ⁴) Ernest Mackay: *Bahrain. British School of Archaeology in Egypt*, Vol. 47, p. 7 og 11. (London 1929).