



Remains of palatial compound

By Bonnie James
Deputy News Editor

The well-preserved remains of a palatial compound are among the new findings from the ongoing archaeological excavations in the abandoned town of Al Zubarah, situated on the northwest coast of Qatar, *Gulf Times* has learnt.

Al Zubarah, which bustled with activity 200 years ago, is considered perhaps the best preserved example of a mid-18th to the end of 19th century pearl fishing and trading town.

"Though Al Zubarah is quite recent in terms of archaeology, it is a crucial location for the history of Qatar because it was the nation's largest town with at least 6,000 inhabitants at its heyday," Qatar Islamic Archaeology and Heritage (QIAH) project's deputy fieldwork director Dr Tobias Richter said.

QIAH is an initiative of Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) chairperson HE Sheikh Ma-yassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani and vice-chairperson Sheikh Hassan bin Mohamed al-Thani as part of a major programme to investigate and protect Al Zubarah's rich archaeological heritage.

As asked by QMA, teams from the University of Copenhagen are currently undertaking the third season of archaeological

fieldwork at Zubarah and the surrounding hinterland with another four years of field research planned.

"Al Zubarah was for sometime one of the most important trading centres in the entire Gulf," pointed out Dr Richter, an assistant professor at University of Copenhagen's Department of Cross-Cultural and Regional Studies.

The palatial compound, which the expert listed among the new findings, is the largest fortified compound, measuring 100 by 100m, in Zubarah.

The compound, with towers at each corner is sub-divided into a number of courtyards.

"We are excavating one of these courtyard areas to find out what the building was used for. It is clearly an important facility, very likely used by the ruling family of the town," Dr Richter stated.

It should have been a really impressive structure, a palace at one point and it has some nice features inside.

"We found these hamams (baths), footprints on the floor of one of the rooms, matting impressions, and fallen roof beams that are still preserved. They are small findings but significant in terms of understanding the site," he said.

Three major areas are being currently excavated in Al Zubarah, all of them continued from



Dr Tobias Richter

last year, the second season (Autumn 2009-Spring 2010) of excavation.

The centre of the town is being excavated. There are a number of courtyard houses or standard family homes very typical for the region.

"Then we are excavating an area what we think is a souq or market area, which is turning out some rather interesting results for the future," Dr Richter said.

Findings suggest that the souq was in the same location for at least two or three phases of the occupation.

"The first thing we did in the first season (Winter and Spring 2009), was to do a topographic survey of the entire town, followed by mapping and detailing all the neighbourhoods, roads, squares mosques and palaces in the settlement and then we



A view of Al Zubarah excavation site.

PICTURE: Jayaram

began excavations in a few locations targeting key areas of interest," he recalled.

This was in addition to the areas previously excavated by QMA. "There is still much to learn about the site as a whole. We now think that the site has at least six phases of occupation, the first major phase is 1760s to roundabout 1811 when the town was attacked and burned.

Subsequently Zubarah was

inhabited very sporadically then resettled in the middle of the 19th century for another 50 or 60 years.

"So the phases of occupation are quite short and in particular in the earlier phase, this is a very lucky situation for archaeologists, because not only was the town founded as a sort of a planned settlement, but it also was not changed much."

The total area is 60 hectares

for the major settlement, and the later settlement is 13 hectares (during the mid 19th century, when it was resettled after the attack in 1811).

"Al Zubarah is not a site that existed without its surrounding landscape. All of northern Qatar is full of historic sites and settlements," Dr Richter maintained.

There are small forts, small villages, coastal villages, rural settlements, wells throughout

the entire region and they all operated at one point in conjunction with Zubarah as it required food and water to support its pearl fishing and trading fleets.

The trading vessels went out into the Indian Ocean all the way to Bombay (now Mumbai) and to other places on the African coast.

"We are exploring these hinterland sites as well, but with non-intrusive methods," the expert said.

Fit case for World Heritage Site: expert

There are clear grounds to say that Qatar's historic abandoned town of Al Zubarah and its immediate hinterland is worthy of being declared a Unesco World Heritage Site, an archaeology expert has stated. Qatar Islamic Archaeology and Heritage (QIAH) project's deputy fieldwork director Dr Tobias Richter and his colleagues from University of Copenhagen have been working on the nomination file for few weeks now.

"It is not just the outstanding value of the site or its significance for world history, it also includes a whole lot of other issues relating to the management of the property and development in the surrounding areas that need to be addressed," he explained. Expressing the hope that the case of Al Zubarah is a strong one, Dr Richter said the University of Copenhagen team is working with Qatar Museums Authority and the relevant authorities to make sure the concepts in terms of management of the property will be implemented over the next weeks and months.

"The nominated property will include Al Zubarah excavation site, the Zubarah Fort, Qal'at Murayr (situated 1.65km east of Al Zubarah and the source of fresh water for the historic town) and a buffer zone," he said. As of now there is very little urban development in the area.

"It is virtually uninhabited so we don't identify development as a major threat at this point, at least not within the nominated property itself," Dr Richter observed.

A recent survey has shown that about 300 visitors come to see the fort on each Friday, and the total number of visitors over a weekend is nearly 500. "But few of them know about the archaeological sites. At the moment that is a good thing because we have not got facilities to present the site adequately and make it a nice location," the expert said.

Quite a lot of expensive conservation work has to be done before the site is developed and made accessible to visitors. There are guards at the excavation areas to prevent visitors from creating disturbances.

"It is difficult to make non-specialists understand, sometimes we clean an area and leave it so that it weathers overnight, or we leave pottery exposed, but we have people walk in and take the pieces and disturb the scene," Dr Richter added.

Unesco's ecological science adviser in the Arab region, Dr Benno Boer, had told *Gulf Times* in April 2010 that the archaeological site of Al-Zubarah town and its cultural landscape is an ideal World Heritage Site candidate from Qatar.

Efforts on to preserve historic site

By Bonnie James
Deputy News Editor

Brand new methods of conservation are being developed for the historic archaeological site of Al Zubarah, to counter the extreme climatic and environmental conditions.

"It is like reinventing the wheel in a sense, to try and figure out what is best for the site," Qatar Islamic Archaeology and Heritage (QIAH) project's deputy fieldwork director Dr Tobias Richter said.

Salinity in the air, high temperatures and very strong winds are among the threats to preserve the archaeology and the architecture at the site without changing its authenticity too much. The construction materials used in the mid-18th to the end of 19th century pearl fishing and trading town varies at different places.

"Most is limestone that comes from the area, lot of it is very porous rock, which is sort of a conglomerate of sand and little shells and that material is one of our problems because it disintegrates very easily, it gets attacked by the salt and it just disappears, it makes the whole architecture go away," Dr Richter said.

Basically the walls are built of core of rock with lime mortar and then a gypsum plaster coating on the outside which keeps the structure together.

Gypsum plaster is also quite fragile. When it is exposed to the air after excavations it becomes porous and breaks off and once the plaster is fallen off the whole wall begins to go.

The strong winds, particularly in January, blows out the mortar from between the stones and then the walls just collapse.

The reconstruction seen at Al Zubarah, was done by the Supreme Council for Culture, Arts and Heritage, in 1980s and then in the early 2000 to 2003 before the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA) was formed.

The 1980s excavation featured conservation of three areas and that work was the first to actually try and present the site a little bit to the public.

"These areas require further ongoing maintenance and consolidation work now and we are basically re-launching the process of maintaining and preserving them," said the expert, who is heading an excavation team from University of Copenhagen.

Preservation and conservation is an ongoing process. Craftsmen and workmen ought to be



A sketch of the historic Al Zubarah site.

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trained in the traditional building techniques and conservation and they should maintain the site on a daily basis, he suggested.

QMA, which has entrusted University of Copenhagen with the excavations, is installing a new fence line around the site.

"The big building coming up in the vicinity of the Zubarah Fort is going to be the new research sta-

tion with a small visitors' facility," Dr Richter.

Vehicle traffic on the site is one of the problems. The fencing and deployment of guards is expected to control this. Preventing people from camping on the Zubarah beach is another measure.

There is also a plan to put up shelters over the excavated areas, as part of the three-pronged ap-

proach of research, conservation and presentation.

The problem with the Zubarah site is that it is not very visually striking. Once the areas are fully excavated there will be a lot more to see.

"We are looking at different phases of how the management of the site will take place," Dr Richter added.

Commercialbank takes part in CNA-Q career fair

Commercialbank (Cb) once again participated in the College of North Atlantic - Qatar (CNA-Q) 2011 Education and Career Expo held recently, an official said.

The bank's aim in participating in this annual event, is to meet graduating students face-to-face and offer them an opportunity to develop their skills in a professional working environment, by providing them sponsorship and employment opportunities, the official said.

Staff from Cb's Career Development and Qatarisation Unit was present at the event on a daily basis to meet, offer guidance and answer queries from those wishing to pursue a career in banking.

"The bank actively pursues opportunities to equip and develop Qatari youth, with the necessary experience and expertise to become the future catalysts of Qatar's economic growth, diversification and development," the official said.

Cb deputy CEO Abdulla al-Raisi said: "As one of the leading banks in Qatar, Commercialbank places education high on its list of priorities and has extended staunch support to the educational sector. Our participation

in this event has provided an exceptional opportunity for Qataris to find a job in their area of interests and selected candidates will enjoy the benefits and career opportunities that arise from working with one of the country's leading employers."

Cb's specially developed training and development programme for Qataris provides selected graduates an opportunity for a permanent career with the Bank. The bank has an important strategic partnership with the London Metropolitan Business School and offers training and courses for fresh recruits followed by a two-year programme for middle management and a one-year executive leadership programme.

"These courses are designed to individually develop high-flying Qataris for senior leadership roles within the bank. Fresh graduates, who are selected for the programme, benefit immensely from this comprehensively designed development programme," the official said. Furthermore, Cb also offers summer training programmes for secondary school and university students, in line with its efforts to support and train Qataris who wish to pursue a banking career.



In this montage, Commercialbank employees guide prospective employees and students at CNA-Q 2011 Education and Career Expo.