



Discovery at KharaiB el-Desht, Failaka Island

In mid-March, the sixth season of archaeological excavations has begun at the site of KharaiB el-Desht on Failaka Island. There are strong indications that one of the excavated structures could be interpreted as a mosque.



The research at the site of KharaiB el-Desht has been conducted since 2013 by the Kuwaiti–Polish Archaeological Mission (KPAM) composed of a team of archaeologists of the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw led by Dr Agnieszka Pieńkowska in co-operation with Dr Sultan al-Duweish and Dr Hamid al-Mutairi. The works are carried out under the *Kuwait Failaka Archeological Research Project – comparative study of the settlement patterns on Failaka Island. Investigations of KharaiB el-Desht Settlement Complex*. Apart from the excavations conducted on land, the project also includes underwater research along the coast of the island, which located over a dozen stone fishing structures, known as fish traps.

KharaiB el-Desht lies on the north-western coast of Failaka Island. The excavations at the site conducted by the KPAM led to uncovering of a fishing settlement preliminary dated to the Late Islamic period (from the end of the 16th century to the end of the 19th century). The discoveries made by the Kuwaiti-Polish team include two houses and over a hundred small clay ovens. The presence of the ovens was related to the main activity of the settlement's inhabitants – fishing. The archaeologist also uncovered many other artefacts attesting to the fishermen's occupation, for instance various types of stone anchors, fishing hooks and fishing net weights.

However, there is yet another structure located within the settlement which may prove to be a truly remarkable discovery. To the north-east of the remains of fishermen's houses, the team is currently unearthing a monumental building. The outline of the structure approximates a square, with the length of its sides about 20 m each. The building consists of a large courtyard (almost 200 m² in area) which led to the main room. Inside the room, there were unearthed remains of four large pillars, used to support a roofing (unfortunately not preserved). Following a thorough cleaning, two niches were uncovered more or less at mid-length of the south-western wall. The wall closing the larger niche protrudes beyond the outline of the structure, creating a semi-circular projection. The smaller niche fits entirely within the width of the wall.



The analysis of the structure's layout shows a plan typical for mosques. The discovery of the niches oriented to the south-east – the largest of which is most likely the *mihrab* – strengthens the excavators' hypothesis.

When exactly and for how long was the mosque in use? Where is the main entrance to the courtyard located? These and other questions are still unanswered, but perhaps some of them will be solved by the end of this year's excavations.

Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw coordinates Polish archaeological research in the Eastern Mediterranean since 1959 (since 1990 under the present name). In recent years it broadened its scope of interest into the Arabian Peninsula and the Caucasus. Currently about 30 projects in Egypt, Sudan, Cyprus, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Armenia and Tunisia. The PCMA also runs a Research Centre in Cairo and the Polish Archaeological Unit in Khartoum.

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