



Two new archaeological sites in the Hajar Mountains excavated by Omani-Polish team

The Omani-Polish Archaeological Mission is at an end of a fruitful excavation season. This year, the team has been working on two separate sites in the Qumayrah micro-region: one from the Bronze Age Umm an-Nar culture (c. 2500–2000 BCE) and the other from the Iron Age II (about 1100–600 BCE).

The excavations are a cooperation between the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman and the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw. It is a project financed by the National Science Centre of Poland, titled: “The development of settlement in the mountains of northern Oman in the Bronze and Iron Ages” (2018/30/M/HS3/00635). The project directors are Prof. Piotr Bieliński (PCMA UW) and Dr. Sultan al-Bakri (MoHT).

The investigated sites are located about 7 km apart, on both ends of the study area. One is code-named QA 20 and belongs to a cluster of sites near the modern village of Ayn Bani Saydah where the team has been working since 2016. It is a hilltop settlement which dates from the Iron Age II period.

– “As it is located at the top of a steep hill covered with stones, it was quite a challenge for the team. But previous surveys spotted tops of walls between the stone rubble, so it was clear that the site should be examined closer” – explains Prof. Bieliński.



1. Site QB 2, a room with stairs made of white stones (Photo J. Sliwa/PCMA UW)

Soon the effort of work on over 1400 m² proved to be worthwhile. After removing stones, the outlines of 33 rooms and courtyards appeared, which belong to about 13 houses standing by a few narrow streets. The rooms are connected by passages equipped with thresholds and door sockets, and in some cases, stairways. – “Many of the thresholds are made of exquisitely worked white stones, often called “sugar lumps” because of their color and fine surface. They must have been salvaged from a particularly impressive Bronze Age, Umm an-Nar period grave which has been completely dismantled. The stones are the only trace of the <white tomb’s> existence, although there are 10 tombs from this period, but made of other stones, just across the *wadi*” – says the archaeologist.



The other excavated site is code-named QB 2 and is located near the village of Bilt. Also in this area an Umm an-Nar period tomb faced with white stones is located (QB 1; not the object of this year's investigations). Although the QB 2 site has been surveyed before, this is the first time archaeological excavations have been conducted there. The site has an area of about 5 ha and is scattered with the ruins of various structures. Some of the are just several decades old but there are at least six clusters of ruins which have been dated to the Umm an-Nar period based on the pottery found on their surface.



2. Documenting the site of QB 2.
(Photo A. Szymczak/PCMA UW)

The largest of them was chosen for closer investigation and excavations. Once the thick layer of stones which must have come from the structures' ruined wall. It is a cluster of no less than three houses each consisting of two or three rooms. They are tightly spaced at the edge of a slope which was strengthened with a series of retaining walls. There were very few objects left inside the excavated rooms apart from pottery sherds, so it seems that their inhabitants left very little behind when abandoning the structures (or the objects were taken away at some later point). The recovered potsherds will be analyzed in the coming months and some samples will be radiocarbon-dated to establish a more precise dating within the Umm an-Nar period. This will allow to compare the QB 2 site with a settlement from the same period previously excavated by the team near Ayn Bani Saydah (site QA 3, [where a game board was found last year](#)). The new information will also help to place remote mountain valleys, such as the Qumayrah micro-region, on the map of Umm an-Nar settlement and economic activities.

Read more on the [Omani-Polish project in the Qumayrah micro-region](#).

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 20 projects are ongoing in Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Cyprus, Lebanon, Kuwait, Oman, Georgia and Armenia. The PCMA UW also runs Research Centres in Egypt, Sudan, Cyprus and Georgia.

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