

The 2012/2013 Season. MUWAILEH & TELL ABRAQ

Between December 2012 and January 2013, the Bryn Mawr College Archaeological Project in Sharjah carried out excavations at three sites under the terms of an Agreement with the Department of Antiquities, Government of Sharjah. Excavations at Muweilah focused on clarifying the extent of a series of ancient wells which date to about 1000 BC, or 3000 years ago. These wells appear to represent a very sophisticated form of water acquisition on what would have been the interface between the coast and the desert in antiquity. By digging shallow wells the inhabitants of ancient Muweilah were able to access the fresh water that lay above the denser salty water near the coast. They utilized this system of wells for as long as 100 years until they were no longer viable, perhaps as a result of salt-water intrusion. Other water systems must have then been employed until the settlement was finally attacked and destroyed shortly after 800 BC.

Excavations and survey were also conducted at the site of Hamriya. This large and expansive site contains remains that stretch from the Neolithic (c. 6000 BC) until the end of the Iron Age (c. 300 BC). Intensive ground survey and excavation in a shell midden area confirmed the presence of Neolithic period remains in the form of an imported pottery sherd from Iraq dating to the Ubaid culture. Those that occupied Hamriya in the past intensively exploited the rich coastal environment and in particular the many shellfish that were common along the water's edge and in lagoons. It is likely that occupation of this site was seasonal, perhaps during the winter.

Most of our work this year focused on the mound at Tell Abraaq. This large and imposing mound contains one of the most important stratigraphic sequences from the United Arab Emirates, stretching over 3000 years. Our excavations this year focused on clarifying the nature of occupation between c. 1500 and 1000 BC. Many floors upon which areesh (palm frond) structures were built were excavated and these contained a wealth of archaeological finds. Included in these deposits were locally produced ceramics of the Late Bronze Age. Imported ceramics from Iraq and Pakistan were also found, indicating that the people living at Tell Abraaq during these centuries engaged in long-distance maritime trade with their neighbors. These remains represent the first time such trade has been documented for the second half of the second millennium BC. The finds from these floors also included lumps of bitumen which might have been used for covering boats to make them water-tight. Evidence for bronze working was also discovered. Our excavations indicate that during this occupation of Tell Abraaq a series of massive ditches were cut around the settlement so as to provide some defensive measure. By 1000 BC, these ditches were filled in and an enormous fortification wall constructed. This wall built, from mud brick and stone, was at its maximum extent nearly 4 meters wide and several meters high. Future excavations will focus on clarifying the extent of the wall, but for the moment it remains one of the largest fortification walls yet discovered in the United Arab Emirates. Towards the end of the excavation a further surprise was discovered at the base of the mound. Under floor levels dating to 1500 BC, a well was found that contained pottery of the Umm an-Nar (2500-2000 BC) and Wadi Suq (2000-1600 BC)

periods. Excavations did not reveal the full depth of the well which will be the focus of future excavations.

The excavation of these three sites, made possible by the generous support of the Department of Antiquities, has revealed new and exciting evidence on the manner in which the ancient inhabitants of Sharjah adapted to the desert coastal environment and interacted with their environment. Continued excavations at all three sites will augment our knowledge of these processes and further our understanding of ancient Sharjah.