

= Qal 'at al @-@ Bahrain =

The Qal 'at al @-@ Bahrain (in Arabic : ????? ?????) , also known as the Bahrain Fort or Fort of Bahrain and previously as the Portugal Fort (Qal 'at al Portugal) is an archaeological site located in Bahrain , on the Arabian Peninsula . Archaeological excavations carried out since 1954 have unearthed antiquities from an artificial mound of 12 m (39 ft) height containing seven stratified layers , created by various occupants from 2300 BC up to the 18th century , including Kassites , Portuguese and Persians . It was once the capital of the Dilmun civilization and was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005 .

= = History and explorations = =

The archaeological findings , which are unearthed in the fort , reveal much about the history of the country . The area is thought to have been occupied for about 5000 years and contains a valuable insight into the Copper and Bronze Ages of Bahrain . The first Bahrain Fort was built around three thousand years ago , on the northeastern peak of Bahrain Island . The present fort dates from the sixth century AD . The capital of the Dilmun civilization , Dilmun was , according to the Epic of Gilgamesh , the " land of immortality " , the ancestral place of Sumerians and a meeting point of gods .

The site has been termed as Bahrain 's " most important site in antiquity " . The first excavation at the site was carried out by a Danish expedition led by Geoffrey Bibby between 1954 and 1972 , and later by a French expedition from 1977 . Since 1987 Bahrain archaeologists have been involved with this work . The archaeological findings have revealed seven civilizations of urban structures beginning with Dilmun empire , the most important ancient civilization of the region . The Danish expedition revealed that it was a notable Hellenistic site .

= = Geography = =

The fort and the tell Qal 'at al @-@ Bahrain is built on , are located on the Bahrain island , on the northern seashore . On a clear day it is also seen from Saar . It stands like a " sentinel " near Manama , the capital of Bahrain ; it is 6 km (4 mi) away from Manama on the fertile north coast . The tel is the largest in the Gulf region and was built close to the port and by reclamation of seashore land .

= = Description = =

Qal`at al @-@ Bahrain is a typical tell ? an artificial mound created by many successive layers of human occupation . The strata spreads over a 180 @,@ 000 sq ft (16 @,@ 723 m2) area , which encompasses the tell . This testifies to a continuous human presence from about 2300 BC to the 16th century AD . About 25 % of the site has been excavated revealing structures of different types : residential , public , commercial , religious and military . They testify to the importance of the site as a trading port over the centuries . On the top of the 12 @-@ metre @-@ high (39 ft) mound , there is the impressive Qal`at al @-@ Burtughal (Portuguese fort) , which gave the whole site its name , qal`a , meaning " fort " . As the site was the capital of the Dilmun civilisation , it contains the richest remains of this civilization , which was hitherto only known from written Sumerian references .

The site contains many areas and walls , including Saar necropolis , Al @-@ Hajjar necropolis , Kassite Palace , Madimat Hermand necropolis , Madimat Isa necropolis , Al @-@ Maqsha Necropolis , Palace of Uperi , Shakhura necropolis , and the Northern city wall . The ruins of the Copper Age consists of two sections of the fortification wall surrounding streets and houses , and a colossal building on the edge of the moat of the Portuguese fort in the centre . Barbar pottery has been unearthed around the walls of the central building , dating back to the same age as the Barbar Temples , although some of the other pottery and range of unearthed artefacts indicated that they predated the temples , dating back to 3000 BC or later . Relics of copper and ivory provide an

insight into ancient trade links . Many vessels have been unearthed on the site , and Danish excavations of the Palace of Uperi area revealed " snake bowls " , sarcophagi , seals and a mirror , among other things .

= = Layout = =

The excavations of the tel has revealed a small settlement , the only one of that period in eastern Arabia , on its northern side . It has been inferred that the village was settled by people who developed agriculture near the oasis , planted palm trees , tended cattle , sheep and goats and also ventured into fishing in the Arabian Sea . The small houses they built were made of rough stone with clay or mortar as binding material . The plastered floors in the houses were said to have been spacious . Excavations also hinted that the village had streets which separated the housing complexes .

The fortifications seen in the excavated tel area were found around the township and were erected in cardinal directions . The fort walls are seen now only in the northern , western and southern slopes of the tel , and the eastern side is yet to be excavated . The fortifications covered an area of 15 ha (37 acres) , and the walls were built with varying thickness by using stone masonry , and had gates which allowed transport and passing through , such as of donkey caravans . The fortifications were frequently raised , as noted from the gates erected at four levels ; the latest gate had two polished stone (made of fine grained material) pivots which fixed a double leafed gate . The western wall was seen well @-@ preserved for a length of 9 m (30 ft) . The streets were laid in north ? south direction and were 12 m (39 ft) wide .

There was a palace in the centre of the tel at a commanding location consisting of several warehouses which were inferred as indicative of economic activity during the Dilmun period . Proceeding from here towards the north , along the street leads , to a large gate that probably was the entry to the palace grounds . The modest houses built in the same size and type of construction were laid along a network of roads .

The place prospered till 1800 BC after when it was deserted . Eventually the town became covered with drift sand from the sea .

= = Antiquaries = =

Metal artifacts found in the tel were limited to copper pieces , fishing tools and a socketed spearhead ; a workshop of 525 m (1 @,@ 722 ft) size was also identified where copper casting two piece moulds and wax moulds were found . Small and large crucibles used for melting of metal were recovered in substantial quantities indicative of large scale manufacture by professional artisans . The copper ware was then traded in surrounding countries such as Oman and Mesopotamia . Dilmun stamp seals were also recovered from the excavations .

Pots and vessels were also recovered . Pots were used for cooking , while the large vessels for food import from Oman and Mesopotamia . Artifacts found there indicates the location . These include a cuneiform inscription and hematite , both of which link to Mesopotamia ; steatite bowls to Oman ; and carnelian beads , a stone weight and a few potsherds to the Indus Civilization .