

Two Late Umm an-Nar Tombs at Mowaihat-Ajman,
United Arab Emirates





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Excavations and Human Bone remains

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ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

13-14 Market Square

Bicester

Oxfordshire OX26 6AD

United Kingdom

www.archaeopress.com

ISBN 978-1-80583-135-8

ISBN 978-1-80583-136-5 (e-Pdf)

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Prelude

This monograph comprises information resulting from rescue excavations at two collective tombs (A and B), belonging to the last quarter of the 3rd millennium BC, at Mowaihat, Emirate of Ajman, U.A.E. The excavations in the mid 1980s at Tomb A, a disturbed above-ground circular grave, and the diversity of the materials discovered in Tomb B, a rectangular and subterranean pit-grave, have confirmed that the sphere of the Umm an-Nar Culture is much wider than was originally thought. Whilst Tomb A was fully excavated, Tomb B was only partially uncovered (Al Tikriti 1989). Excavations at the latter were completed by the late Ernie Haerinck (1991). The aim of this report is therefore to summarise the two preliminary published reports and, more importantly, to introduce an osteological study of the human bone remains from Tomb B. Since the discovery of the Umm an-Nar culture by the Danish Archaeological Expedition in the late 1950s, subterranean tombs of the period are still rare. Tomb N at Hili and Tomb B in Ajman are the only ones known so far. However, despite belonging to the same period, and showing similarities in burial customs, the bone study of the Ajman remains demonstrate some differences between the dead of Tombs B and N.

Acknowledgments

The excavations of the two Late Umm an-Nar tombs were made possible through the generous support and interest of His Highness Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Ajman. His visit to the site during the course of the work, along with our discussions on the remains, provided invaluable inspiration to the excavator (W.Y.).

Gratitude is also due to Ajman Municipality and its then-director, Dr. Mukhtar Makki Hanafi, for their assistance in providing both labour and accommodation.

Special appreciation goes to H.E. Saif bin Ali Al Darmaki, former Secretary of the Department of Antiquities and Tourism, for entrusting us with the excavation mission. From the same department—now known as the Historic Environment Department—the excavator extends thanks to Mohamed Amer Al Neyadi, former director of H.E.D., for his support of the bone study programme.

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues—Jabir Salih Al Merri, current director of H.E.D., Aysha Masoud Al Ghaithi, Ali Al Meqbali, and Abdullah Al Kaabi—for providing copies of the registration cards originally prepared by the excavator. My thanks also go to C.U. John for preparing the site plans and inking the excavator's pencil drawings, in addition to Derek Kenet for reviewing the draft report and encouraging its publication.

Finally, heartfelt thanks are due to Kathleen McSweeney and her team for their careful study of the bones, for submitting their report promptly, and for relieving the excavator of a considerable burden. Kathleen McSweeney was expertly assisted by three of her, then, PhD students at the University of Edinburgh: Phillip McMath, Anna Evatt and Annamaria Diana.

Abstract

This monograph presents excavations and human bone remains from the Late Umm an-Nar Period in the United Arab Emirates. The excavations took place at two tombs that were accidentally discovered at Mowaihat, Emirate of Ajman in 1986, i.e. a circular tomb (Tomb A) and a rectangular tomb (Tomb B). The excavation results were previously presented in a report published by the excavator (Al Tikriti 1989). The above-ground Tomb A was fully excavated, while the subterranean Tomb B was partially excavated. The late Ernie Haerinck completed the excavation at Tomb B in 1990 and his findings were also published (1991). In this publication, both reports will be summarised and a study of human bone remains from Tomb B will follow.

The discovery resulted from the digging of a c. 60 cm-wide trench to lay out a water pipe by the Ajman Municipality. In coordination between the department of Antiquities in Al Ain and the Ajman Municipality, based on direct instructions from H.H. Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, a Member of the Supreme Council of the United Arab Emirates, Ruler of Ajman, Al Tikriti visited the site and proposed a rescue excavation. The excavations, which lasted two seasons (two months each), revealed the above-ground Tomb A, circular with an exterior diameter of 8.25 m, and the rectangular subterranean Tomb B (3.9 m x 2.10 m), both of which are from the Late Umm an-Nar Period. The outer face of the circular tomb was originally built with carefully cut curved ashlar stones, while the other tomb was entirely built of rough stone. Contrary to Tomb A, which was found void of materials, apart from a few fragments of pottery and stone vessels, Tomb B was found intact and yielded various materials and large collections of human remains. Despite discovering a few semi-complete skeletons, based on the large number of unarticulated bones the excavators interpreted the tomb as an ossuary pit that received the dead originally buried in the circular tomb. In addition to the semi-complete skeletons, which were in good articulation, the osteological study carried out in 2013 by McSweeney on the bone collection uncovered during the first phase of excavations makes it evident that there were more articulated bones than originally thought. In this report, based on the above-mentioned study, it has been suggested that Tomb B may have been a secondary burial when first constructed, but contained primary burials as well. Despite the poor preservation of the skeletal remains, it seems that more males were buried than females. For six of the cases, three males and three females, statures averaged 177.33 cm for males and 159.67 cm for females. The remains showed that the children were rare in comparison to adults. Of the 12 juvenile skulls, two individuals were aged two to four years, one was aged about six years, five individuals were in late childhood, one was adolescent, and all that could be said for three of the individuals was that they were juvenile.

In comparison with Tomb N, a similar Late Umm an-Nar subterranean tomb at Hili, containing c. 600 individuals, the human remains from Ajman's rectangular tomb (160-180 individuals) indicate that the two collections belong to two different communities with different lifestyles, e.g. the latter appears to have consumed fewer dates than the former. Additionally, the impact of disease on the bones was much less pronounced with the Ajman human remains than those of Hili, therefore it is logical to suggest that the Mowaihat site, only c. 500 m from the ancient shoreline, relied on fishing, while Hili's inhabitants, c. 130 km away, practised terrestrial hunting and farming.

الملخص

في العام 1986 اكتشف موقع أثري بواسطة جرافة كانت تقوم بحفر خندق لمد أنبوب للماء بمنطقة المويهات في إمارة عجمان على امتداد الشارع الفاصل بين مدینتي عجمان والشارقة . وبتنسيق مع بلدية عجمان وإدارة الآثار والسياحة في مدينة العين ، تم بناءً على توجيه صاحب السمو الشيخ حميد بن راشد النعيمي عضو المجلس الأعلى للاتحاد حاكم إمارة عجمان ، اجراء الكشف الميداني على مكان الاكتشاف ، سرعان ما تأثرت حفائر أثرية نتيجة لما تم خضور عن ذلك الكشف من مواد أثرية وصخور منحوتة بدقة عالية كانت جزءً من مبني أثري . ومن خلال ذلك الكشف وموسمين من التنقيب قام بهما التكريتي في ذلك العام وبداية العام الذي تلاه تبين أن هذا الموقع الأثري قد اشتغل على مدفن دائري (مدفن A) مبني فوق سطح الأرض بقطر قدره 8.25 متر ، يجاوره مدفن آخر مستطيل الشكل (مدفن B) بطول اربعه أمتار وعرض مترين مبني بجوف الأرض . هذا وقد تشرف المنقب بزيارة سمو الحاكم للموقع أثناء عملية التنقيب ، وأبدى تعليماته بخصوص احتمال وجود موقع أثري آخر بمنطقة رميم الكائنة على بعد أربعة كيلومترات شرق المويهات نظراً لوجود الكثير من أشجار الغاف تدل على ارتفاع منسوب المياه الجوفية

وبسبب الضرر الكبير الذي أصاب المدفن الدائري عبر العصور فإن المواد الأثرية التي تم اكتشافها داخل هذا المدفن وخارجها كانت قليلة جداً ، لكنها كانت كافية لإيجاد مقارنات لها في مدافن أخرى تعود إلى الألف الثالث قبل الميلاد في كل من موقعى جزيرة أم النار ومنطقة هيلي بمدينة العين . وبالرغم من ذلك فإن بقايا الجدران الداخلية تشير إلى أنه كان يشتمل على عدة حجرات استعملت لدفن الموتى على غرار مدافن ذلك الزمن (أم النار) التي ترجع إلى العصر البرونزي .

على عكس المدفن الدائري فإن المدفن المستطيل قد حافظ على شكله الأصلي ومحتوياته بسبب بنائه تحت سطح الأرض ، وما كان من الممكن اكتشافه بسهولة لولا خندق التجريف الذي شق المدافن بعرض قدمين . لقد تم تنقيب الطبقات العليا من بقايا العظام البشرية المتراكمة على بعضها البعض - دون أن يكون بينها فواصيل - وما رافقها من مواد أثرية مثل أواني الفخار والحجر والخزز وغيرها ، في المرحلة الأولى من التنقيب (1986/1987) ، وتم نشرها باللغتين العربية والإنكليزية (وليد التكريتي 1989) . وفي المرحلة الثانية من التنقيب التي أجرتها بعثة الآثار البلجيكية في عام 1990 ، والتي اشتملت على تنقيب الطبقات السفلية من العظام ، فقد ثُرّرت هي الأخرى من قبل البعثة المذكورة (أيرني هايرننك 1991) . وبالرغم من أن بعض الهياكل وجدت بحالة شبه كاملة فإن معظم تلك العظام كانت غير مترابطة مع بعضها البعض وقد فسرت بأن الموتى كانوا قد قبروا أصلاً في المدفن الدائري المجاور ثم نقلت رفاتهم فيما بعد إلى المدفن المستطيل من أجل إعادة استخدام المدفن مرة أخرى . على أي حال ، فإن الدراسة الحديثة للعظام المكتشفة في المرحلة الأولى من التنقيب والتي ضمّنت نتائجها في هذه النشرة ، قد أكدت على وجود عظام مترابطة أكثر مما كان متوقعاً ، مما يدل بأن هذا المدفن قد استقبل موتي جدد لم يتم دمروا بالمدفن الدائري ، فضلاً عن آخرين ربما نقلت بقايا رفاتهم من المدفن الدائري . ومهما يكن من أمر ، فإن هذه الدراسة التي قامت بها كاثلين ماكسوبيني في عام 2013 خلصت إلى أن عدد الذكور قد فاق عدد الإناث ، وبالرغم من أن حالة العظام لم تسمح بتحديد الجنس إلا في حالات قليلة ، وبينت كذلك استناداً إلى بقايا ستة موتى بالعين ، ثلاثة من الذكور وثلاثة من الإناث ، أن طول القامة لهؤلاء هو 177.33 سم للذكور و 159.67 سم للإناث ، هذا ولم يكتشف من الأطفال إلا القليل حيث أن معظم الموتى كانوا من البالغين .

بالمقارنة بين مجموعة عظام مدافن المويهات الذي يرجع إلى الفترة الأخيرة من حقبة أم النار (الربع الأخير من الألف الثالث قبل الميلاد) مع مجموعة أخرى أكبر منها بكثير ، اكتشفت في مدافن مشابه في منطقة هيلي بمدينة العين يطلق عليه هيلي N ويعود إلى نفس الحقبة الزمنية - من حيث كونه مبني تحت سطح الأرض بشكل بيضوي ويجاوره مدفن دائري فوق سطح الأرض أيضاً - فإن التنقيب في كلا المدافن ، وكذلك دراسة عظام الموتى التي شملت بقايا رفات ما يقدر بين 180-160 فرداً من مدافن المويهات ، وحوالي 600 فرداً من المدفن الثاني (هيلي) ، وهذا حالتان نادرتان لا ثالث لهما حتى اعداد هذه النشرة ، فهما يمثلان مجتمعين مختلفين من الناحية المعيشية . لقد بينت دراسة أفكار الموتى وبقايا الأسنان من كلا المدافن أن مجتمع المويهات كان أقل استهلاكاً للتمور مما هو الحال في مجتمع هيلي ، بينما بينت العظام الأخرى أن بنية مجتمع المويهات كان أكثر صلابة ، وما ترکته الامراض من آثار على عظامهم كان أقل مما هو في حالة هيلي . ومن المنطقي القول بأن اقتصاد الموقع الأول والذي كان لا يبعد سوى 500 مترًا عن ساحل البحر ، قبل أن تنسحب مياه البحر وتصبح على بعد سبعة كيلومترات ، بعد مرور أكثر من أربعة آلاف عام ، كان يعتمد في الأساس على الصيد البحري ، بينما كانت الزراعة والصيد البري الأساس في حالة الموقع الثاني الذي يبعد 130 كيلومتراً عن نفس الساحل .