

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





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

## **Excavations and Human Bone remains**

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# Contents

Prelude.....	v
Acknowledgments .....	vi
Abstract .....	vii
المخلص .....	viii
<b>Mowaihat, Ajman: The excavations.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Walid Yasin Al Tikriti	
Introduction .....	1
The two Mowaihat tombs at Ajman .....	2
Excavations.....	2
The circular tomb .....	3
Skeletal remains and the infant burial.....	6
The rectangular tomb (Tomb B) .....	11
The finds .....	15
Stone vessels (Group S).....	19
Miscellaneous objects (Group M) .....	19
Seals .....	19
Beads.....	26
Metal objects .....	29
Shells.....	31
Conclusion .....	31
<b>Mowaihat, Ajman: The human remains.....</b>	<b>39</b>
Kathleen McSweeney	
Background to the research .....	39
Tomb B Mowaihat .....	39
Material and methods (Phase 1).....	39
Results of the osteological analysis .....	40
Condition and completeness of the remains.....	41
Minimum number of individuals (MNI).....	44
Combined results .....	45
Age at death.....	46
Combined results .....	46
Assessment of sex .....	47
Combined results .....	48
Estimation of stature.....	48
Combined results .....	49
Health and disease .....	49

Dental health .....	49
Combined results .....	52
Joint disease.....	53
Combined results .....	54
Trauma .....	54
Combined results .....	56
Anaemia and dental hypoplasia .....	56
Combined Results .....	58
Summary of the collated data from the Mowaihat Tomb B remains .....	58
Condition of the remains.....	58
Demography .....	58
Health and disease.....	58
The Mowaihat Tomb B remains in the wider context.....	59
Mortality profiles.....	59
Changes related to anaemia.....	59
Dental health .....	60
Summary .....	60
Jar burial.....	60
<b>APPENDIX 1 .....</b>	<b>62</b>
List of objects from Mowaihat, Ajman: Tombs A and B (1986/1987) .....	62
Tomb A, Group P (pottery) .....	62
Tomb B (pottery).....	62
Stone vessels – Group S (chlorite?) .....	63
Tomb A .....	63
Tomb B.....	63
Miscellanea – Group M .....	63
Tomb A .....	63
Tomb B.....	63
<b>APPENDIX 2 .....</b>	<b>65</b>
List of objects from Mowaihat, Ajman, Tomb B (1990) (NB: copied from Haerinck 1991) .....	65
<b>APPENDIX 3 .....</b>	<b>66</b>
Key for Figure 68 – Ajman Rectangular Tomb B .....	66
<b>References .....</b>	<b>67</b>

# List of Figures and Tables

## Mowaihat, Ajman: The excavations

Figure 1: Map of 3rd-millennium sites in the UAE showing approximate locations of the Umm an-Nar settlements and tombs	3
Figure 2: Map of Ajman showing locations of the city and the site (source: Ajman Municipality 1986)	4
Figure 3: Google image showing modern Ajman and the site location (Google Earth)	4
Figure 4: Ajman Museum established within the fort (May 1991)	5
Figure 5: The circular grave (Tomb A) reinstalled in the courtyard of the museum	5
Figure 6: The in-situ circular Ajman Tomb A at Mowaihat with municipality labourers	6
Figure 7: The circular tomb showing the trench with the excavator	7
Figure 8: Plan and section of the circular tomb (Tomb A)	7
Figure 9: Part of the ring wall and the fallen stones (Tomb A)	8
Figure 10: The blocking stone and the carved lintel, indicating the approximate location of the entrance	9
Figure 11: The semi-final stage of excavations with the digger-machine trench cutting through and draftsman, C.U. John	9
Figure 12: General view of the circular tomb (A) after excavations and the rectangular tomb (B) under excavations. Helpers (from left): Marcus Nano, Wendy al-Rubaie, Hamdan al-Rubaie	9
Figure 13: Rim and body sherds of fine Umm an-Nar black-on-red ware collected from the fill	10
Figure 14: Incomplete rectangular soft stone vessel adorned with dotted circles and a portion of grooved bowl	10
Figure 15: Fragment of a hemispherical soft stone bowl and a grooved fragment of a beaker rescued from the fill	10
Figure 16: Fragments of soft stone vessels belong to hemispherical bowls, boxes, grooved beaker, and an unidentified fragment	11
Figure 17: Two rings made of copper (left) and silver-alloy (right) from Tomb A	11
Figure 18: The burial jar in relation to the ring wall of Tomb A	12
Figure 19: Burial jar with a flat stone on top	13
Figure 20: The burial jar after restoration	13
Figure 21: Incomplete infant skeleton	13
Figure 22: The infant grave contained two cups of Wadi Suq Period (with traces of paint still visible on one of them)	14
Figure 23: Shapes of the burial jar and the two Wadi Suq cups	14
Figure 24: Plan of the rectangular tomb (B) with the top bone layer	15
Figure 25: Northern chamber with unarticulated skeletal remains	16
Figure 26: Northern chamber: bones and pottery	16
Figure 27: Northern chamber: incomplete articulated skeleton with necklace	17
Figure 28: Northern chamber: Partially articulated skeleton overlying remains of more skeletal remains	17
Figure 29: Southern chamber with semi-complete skeletons	17
Figure 30: General view of both sections of Tomb B, showing a small portion of the lowest layer (4) excavated in 1987. Bones of this layer were cleared in 1990	18
Figure 31: Pottery vessel of black-on-red ware adorned with horizontal lines and chevron motif	20
Figure 32: Pottery vessel of black-on-red ware adorned with horizontal lines and chevron motif (decorations cover the upper part of the object)	20
Figure 33: Typical shapes of the black-on-red Umm an-Nar pottery	20
Figure 34: Fine black-on-red vessels from the lower levels of Tomb B (after Haerinck 1991)	20
Figure 35: Pottery vessel of black-on-red ware with high shoulder decorated with wavy line between horizontal lines. Rest of the body with chevron motif; decorations cover c. 60% of the object	21
Figure 36: Pottery vessel adorned with chevron motif and traces of wavy line; decorations cover c. 60% of the object	21
Figure 37: High-shouldered pottery vessel of black-on-red ware	21
Figure 38: Pottery vessel of fine ware; faded design	21
Figure 39: Pottery vessels from the upper levels of Tomb B	22
Figure 40: Pottery vessels from the upper levels, Tomb B, Late Umm an-Nar Period	22
Figure 41: Medium size, small and miniature pottery vessels from Tomb B (Late Umm an-Nar Period)	23
Figure 42: Imported vessel (see Figure 41, C)	23
Figure 43: Pottery vessels from the lower layers (Tomb B) (after Haerinck 1991)	24
Figure 44: Plain pottery vessels from Tomb B, some of which may originally have been painted	24
Figure 45: This handmade vessel may have been an imitation of fine red ware (Tomb B)	25
Figure 46: Two mended fragments of fine grey ware (Tomb B)	25
Figure 47: Drawing of the former grey ware fragments and a lower portion of another grey vessel (Tomb B)	25
Figure 48: Soft stone vessels (chlorite) from Tombs A and B; mostly fragmented	26
Figure 49: Compartmented soft stone vessel decorated with double dotted circles (Tomb B)	27
Figure 50: Decorated soft stone beaker from Tomb B (after Haerinck 1991)	27
Figure 51: Drawings of Figure 50 beaker and two other soft stone vessels. The double-dotted circle motif was standard in the Mid and Late Umm an-Nar Periods (after Haerinck 1991)	27
Figure 52: Short and thick cylinder seal made of steatite (Tomb B)	28

Figure 53: Stamp seal with perforated grip (Tomb B) .....	28
Figure 54: Bitumen and carnelian beads .....	29
Figure 55: Red carnelian beads in various shapes.....	29
Figure 56: Beads of various shapes strung to form four necklaces .....	30
Figure 57: Bi-conical, barrel- and cylinder-shaped beads, mostly made of carnelian.....	30
Figure 58: Collection of various beads strung in three necklaces .....	30
Figure 59: Etched bead, rounded shape .....	30
Figure 60: Barrel-shaped etched bead .....	30
Figure 61: Silver/lead alloy beads mostly in bi-conical shapes .....	30
Figure 62: Silver/lead alloy beads mostly bi-conical with one cylindrical and two date-shaped. The bead on the right is c. 2.5 cm long.....	31
Figure 63: Elongated tubular beads made of heated steatite .....	31
Figure 64: Metal awls. 7.20 cm - 10 cm in length.....	31
Figure 65: Rings made of copper, bone, and shell.....	31
Figure 66: Bronze/copper finger rings and awls (after Haerinck 1991) .....	32
Figure 67: Bronze/copper objects (short dagger blade, spatula, scraper) (after Haerinck 1991) .....	32
Figure 68: Two seals (A and B) and various beads from Tomb B (1987 excavations).....	33
Figure 69: Various beads and feeder shells from Tomb B (after Haerinck 1991) .....	34
Figure 70: Feeder shell.....	35

## **Mowaihat, Ajman: The human remains**

Figure 71: Skull from N3 showing cranial fragments held together by the soil endocast .....	40
Figure 72: Fragmented long bones N3-4.....	41
Table 1: Numbers of examined bones and fragments of bones from Phase 1 by Section and Layer .....	42
Figure 73: Group of articulated thoracic vertebrae and ribs.....	43
Figure 74: Group of articulated lower arm, wrist, and hand bones from N3-4. (The bone on lower right of picture is an un-associated foot bone, i.e. a first metatarsal) .....	43
Figure 75: Poor condition of the remains from the Phase 2 excavations (photo: Blau 1999) .....	43
Table 2: MNI from Phase 1 and Phase 2 skeletal examinations (Blau only summarised MNI for some bones) .....	44
Figure 76: Tomb B showing the trench removed by the digger (photo: Al Tikriti) .....	44
Table 3: Age at death.....	47
Figure 77: Age at death from the Phase 1 and Phase 2 remains .....	47
Table 4: Summary of sexed crania (Phases 1 and 2) .....	48
Figure 78: A sample of sorted loose teeth, N3-4.....	49
Figure 79: Edentulous mandible from N3.....	50
Figure 80: Maxilla from N3 (male) showing full dentition (some teeth are missing post mortem, but all had been present at death).....	50
Figure 81: Mandible from N3-4 .....	50
Figure 82: Dental abscess at lower left canine (N3) .....	51
Figure 83: Mandible from N3-4 showing marked attrition of anterior teeth.....	51
Figure 84: Edentulous mandible from the Phase 2 excavations (photo: Blau 1999) .....	52
Table 5: Spinal degeneration (Phase 1) .....	53
Figure 85: Skull of a two- to four-year-old child with oval traumatic lesion (N2) .....	55
Figure 86: Skull with lesion and radiating fractures on the parietal bone (N1).....	55
Figure 87: Lesion on the parietal bone of a skull with radiating fractures (N3) .....	55
Figure 88: Orbit with healed cribra orbitalia (N3) .....	56
Figure 89: Canine from N3 showing several hypoplastic lines .....	56
Figure 90: Dental hypoplasia from Phase 2 excavations (photo: Blau 1999).....	57
Figure 91: Human remains from the jar burial.....	61



## 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

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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 مدينتي 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 تلت حفائر أثرية نتيجة لما تمخض عنه ذلك الكشف من مواد أثرية وصخور منحوتة بدقة عالية كانت جزءاً من مبنى أثري . ومن خلال ذلك الكشف وموسمين من التنقيب قام بهما التكريتي في ذلك العام وبداية العام الذي تلاه تبين أن هذا الموقع الأثري قد اشتمل على مدفن دائري (مدفن A) مبني فوق سطح الأرض بقطر قدره 8.25 متر ، يجاوره مدفن آخر مستطيل الشكل (مدفن B) بطول أربعة أمتار وعرض مترين مبني بجوف الأرض . هذا وقد تشرف المنقب بزيارة سمو الحاكم للموقع أثناء عملية التنقيب، وأبدى تعليماته بخصوص احتمال وجود مواقع أثرية أخرى بمنطقة رميرم 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 وخارجه كانت قليلة جداً ، لكنها كانت كافية لإيجاد مقارنات لها في مدافن أخرى تعود إلى الألف الثالث قبل الميلاد في كل من موقعي 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 المدفنين بعرض قدمين . لقد تم تنقيب الطبقات العليا من بقايا العظام البشرية المتراكمة على بعضها البعض - دون أن يكون بينها فواصل - وما رافقها من مواد أثرية مثل أواني الفخار والحجر والخرز وغيرها ، في المرحلة الأولى من التنقيب (87/1986) ، وتم نشرها باللغتين العربية والانكليزية (وليد التكريتي 1989) . وفي المرحلة الثانية من التنقيب التي أجرتها بعثة الآثار البلجيكية في عام 1990 ، والتي اشتملت على تنقيب الطبقات السفلى من العظام ، فقد نُشرت هي الأخرى من قبل البعثة المذكورة (أيرني هايرنك 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 ضمنت نتائجها في هذه النشرة ، قد أكدت على وجود عظام مترابطة أكثر مما كان متوقعاً ، مما يدل بأن هذا المدفن قد استقبل موتى جدد لم يمروا بالمدفن الدائري ، فضلاً عن آخرين ربما نقلت بقايا رفاتهم من المدفن الدائري . ومهما يكن من أمر ، فإن هذه الدراسة التي قامت بها كاتلين ماكسويني في عام 2013 خلصت إلى أن عدد الذكور قد فاق عدد الإناث ، بالرغم من أن حالة العظام لم تسمح بتحديد الجنس إلا في حالات قليلة ، وبينت كذلك استناداً إلى بقايا ستة موتى بالغين ، ثلاثة من الذكور وثلاث 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 مدفن 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 مدفن 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 المدفنين ، وكذلك دراسة عظام الموتى التي شملت بقايا رفات ما يقدر بين 160-180 فرداً من مدفن المويهات ، وحوالي 600 فرداً من المدفن الثاني (هيلي) ، وهما حالتان نادرتان لا ثالث لهما حتى اعداد هذه النشرة ، فهما يمثلان مجتمعين مختلفين من الناحية المعيشية . لقد بينت دراسة أفكاك الموتى وبقايا الأسنان من كلا المدفنين 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 تركته 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 متراً عن ساحل البحر ، قبل أن تتسحب 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.