KSAM Renews Archaeological Research in Kuwait

Contributed by Zora Miklíková1 and Peter Barta2

The Kuwaiti-Slovak Archaeological Mission (KSAM) is a joint project of the National Council of Culture, Arts and Letters, State of Kuwait, and the Institute of Archaeology, Slovak Academy of Sciences. KSAM was established in 2004 and originated from an idea put forward by Shehab A. H. Shehab, Director of the Department of Museums and Antiquities, National Council for Culture, in Kuwait. The main project, developed and directed by Lucia Benedíková and Peter Barta, is an interdisciplinary research endeavor focused on the endangered Dilmun site of Al-Khidr which is located on the northwestern shore of Failaka Island. The site dates from the late 3rd to early 2nd millennium BC. Excavations at Al-Khidr in 2004, 2006, and 2007 have exposed part of the settlement along with evidence of pottery, copper, and stone industries, Dilmun seals, and palaeoenvironmental remains. In contrast to Dilmun ruins from the southwestern part of the island, Al-Khidr has domestic structures with smaller rooms and seems to represent a village-like settlement.

Research, undertaken by Mária Hajnalová and Zora Miklíková, is a key component of the ongoing research at Al-Khidr. Investigations include the most current scientific recovery methods; up to 80% of all sediments are dry sieved and more than 25% subjected to flotation. The Al-Khidr excavations have produced the largest prehistoric archaeofaunal assemblage recovered to date in Kuwait. Archaeozoological studies aim to shed light on food production, animal husbandry practices, site seasonality, and information about the local and regional palaeoenvironment. Zora Miklíková is overseeing the study of the mammal and bird bones. The fish remains are being analyzed in cooperation with two other scholars working in the Gulf region, Dr. Mark Beech, from the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (fish bones), and Dr. Mohsen Al-Husaini, from the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research (fish otoliths). Preliminary analysis has identified at least three mammalian species (cattle, sheep, and goat) and twelve species of fish representing ten different families (Carcharhinidae, Pristidae, Ariidae, Serranidae, Carangidae, Haemulidae, Lethrinidae, Sparidae, Scaridae, and Sphyraenidae). A preliminary study of otoliths from sea catfish suggests that fishing at Al-Khidr took place mostly during the spring, between April and June.

In addition to ongoing research, a comparative collection of 26 local fish species has been established at the laboratory this year and new publications have been added to the environmental section of the newly founded library at the excavation house on Failaka Island. Scientists with the KSAM have also been collaborating with local specialists since 2006 to map the island’s current flora and fauna. Additional information about KSAM and the project at Al-Khidr is available online at http://www.kuwaitarchaeology.org.

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Stay tuned for more details!

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Dear Colleagues,

It has been more than a year since we hosted the 10th ICAZ International Conference in México City. Over this past year we have been working diligently to compile the presentations from the Plenary Session for publication as promised to those who attended the conference. As you may remember the Plenary Session focused on the current state of archaeozoological research in Latin America. To date, we have collected nine out of the 11 manuscripts that will appear in the book and we have secured the funds to print and mail it. We hope to have this publication ready to be shipped to all ICAZ 2006 conference participants in early 2008, hopefully by February. We are grateful to have received assistance on this project from our friend and colleague, Guillermo Mengoni Goiálafts (Argentina), as well as editorial assistance from Felisa Aguilar-Arellano (México).

Several other symposia from the conference are currently in the process of being published. Eight papers from the session titled “Herding Practices and Techniques: Models and Methodological Tools for Archaeozoological Analysis” have been reviewed and accepted for publication in the journal Anthropozoologica (volume 42, issue 2), which is forthcoming in December 2007 (Jean-Denis Vigne, pers. comm.). In addition, one paper from the session titled

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Zlatozar Boev (National Museum of Natural History, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria) has examined the avian material from several archaeological and paleontological sites in Bulgaria and abroad in Vietnam. These studies include the avian fauna from Pistiros, an Iron Age site near Vetren, Bulgaria (materials collected by Dr. Susan Stallibrass, English Heritage Archaeological Science, Liverpool) and from Dieu and Maxa I, two Upper Paleolithic caves located along an upper stream of the Ma River near Ba Thucu village in Thanh Hoa Province (300 km southwest of Hanoi) in northern Vietnam (materials collected by Dr. Vasil Popov, Institute of Zoology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). Materials from the cave sites date between 120,000 and 8,000 BC, but the most remains date ca. 50,000–60,000 BP. The most recent findings belong to the Hoabin Culture (17,000–6,000 BP).

Michael A. Etnier (University of Washington, USA) notes that the Kuril Islands Biocomplexity Project, directed by Ben Fitzhugh (University of Washington), completed its second of three summer field seasons in August 2007. An intensive three-week field season focused on excavations at a few key sites. Although the faunal samples are still being held in Russia pending the clearance of exportation paperwork, we anticipate the transfer to be complete by the end of this year. Preliminary study of the materials indicates the assemblage consists primarily of marine birds and fish. In contrast to the 2006 field season, we recovered relatively few marine mammal bones this past summer.

Diane Gifford-Gonzalez (University of California, Santa Cruz, USA) recently completed a four-week visit to Argentina as a Fulbright Senior Specialist. She gave a 10-day intensive doctoral seminar at the Universidad del Centro de la Provincia de Buenos Aires, Olavarria. Thirty-four students from four Argentine universities and Chile attended the seminar, titled “Tópicos en Zooarqueología.” Gifford-Gonzalez also offered overview comments during a three-day workshop on zooarchaeology and taphonomy. Twenty-four professional archaeologists from Argentina and Brazil attended the workshop. She also gave three public talks in Buenos Aires, Olavarria, and Córdoba. During her visit, her research and views on Argentine archaeology received widespread media attention; she was interviewed by two newspapers, one radio station, and one web-based news outlet.

Akira Matsui (Nara National Cultural Properties Research Institute, Japan) is working with Korean archaeologists to analyze thousands of faunal remains and about 1,300 bone tools recovered during the recent excavations of the Kimhae Phaecon shell midden, a site located near the mouth of the Nakutongawan River near Pusan, Korea. The midden, which consists of mostly oysters and common clams, is more than 8 m thick and dates between 1 BC and AD 2. In addition, Matsui is serving on the advisory board of the Shigashimyo shell midden site in Saga City, Kyushu, Japan. The Shigashimyo shell midden dates ca. 7000 BP (calibrated). Cocles, oysters, and cherry clams are present. About 500 woven baskets have been uncovered along with many other fibers, ropes, wooden vessels, and planks. Fauna (mostly sika deer and wild boar) and flora remains are well preserved. Completing the site report will take several years. Matsui is also in the process of editing an identification manual for animal remains (from fish to human) in English. The manual will be used as the textbook for an upcoming training class held at the Asian UNESCO office.

Kathleen Ryan and William Fitts (Museum Applied Science Center for Archaeology, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, USA), Karega Munene and Mulu Muia (United States International University in Nairobi), Richard P. Evershed (University of Bristol, UK), and Ruth Shahack-Gross (Weizmann Institute, Israel) were awarded a three-year National Science Foundation grant for their collaborative project titled, “The Arrival and Expansion of Pastoralist Economies on the Laikipia Plateau, Kenya.” The project aims to better understand the interactions between pastoralists and hunter-gatherers and to examine when a dependence on milk originated.

Kathleen Ryan

For additional details go to http://www.alexandriaarchive.org/bonecommons

BoneCommons—One Benefit of Being an ICAZ Member

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Letter from the President

humanistic attitude held in a complex world—an attitude that has driven ICAZ for a very long time.

All these positive thoughts, however, should not stop us from reflecting upon the professional problems that are faced by many ICAZ members, often on a daily basis. These include the need to strengthen lato sensu the external connections of our field and organization (both across disciplines and in terms of public exposure) and enhancing, or rather optimizing, personal access to ICAZ International Conferences by carefully planned international venues. Neither of these two challenges is new; however they have changed, in fact increased, along with the growth of the organization in an ever-changing academic, political, and, ultimately, financial environment. Meeting these challenges will require conscious and concerted efforts in the future.

As for strengthening external, interdisciplinary connections, ICAZ grew out of the need for studying animal bones from archaeological sites and already its founders have begun to “proselytize” the importance of our work. It continues to be a nagging question, however, how much our research has been recognized and embraced by the broader archaeological community and related historical disciplines, not to speak of funding organizations. Two generations of archaeozoologists have successfully operated their own organization. I feel that capitalizing on the internal coherence of ICAZ, we must assert the importance of our work at every level in the academic life of our respective countries. The need for this type of exposure is shown even from within ICAZ. In México City, one of our well-read and highly-respected colleagues expressed pleasant amazement at how much more “archaeological” the 10th ICAZ International Conference had become since her last participation more than a decade ago. This should not be a surprise, but a widely known development in our field. By definition many of us will be employed by archaeologists, compete before archaeological, historical, or anthropological panels for increasingly scarce jobs and funding. Last, but not least, it is intellectually very rewarding and great fun brainstorming...