

The necropolis of Al Qusais (Dubai, UAE): preliminary results of the 2020 excavation and reassessment of the data from the 1970s and 1990s excavations

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Summary

The site of Al Qusais had long been forgotten until recent interest from Dubai Municipality in reassessing the data uncovered in its 1970s and 1990s excavations. The first excavations uncovered two main areas of occupation, a Bronze and Iron Age necropolis and the so-called ‘Mound of Serpents’, where numerous copper snakes and snake-decorated ceramics were found, associated with what seems to be a columned hall, characteristic of the Iron Age II period. In the 1990s, new excavations were held in the necropolis area, where 101 burial pits were found. A rich assemblage of burial goods and human remains were uncovered in them, although they were never studied or published. After almost thirty years, new excavations were therefore held and the data reassessed. Although the excavation did not last long, more burial pits were identified, the previously uncovered material was studied and chronologically interpreted, human remains properly identified, and a geomorphological and environmental study was held to understand its prehistoric landscape. The results from this 2020 reassessment and excavation presented here will, it is hoped, help us to understand the ‘cultural’ shifts that occurred from the Bronze to the Iron Age period, still so poorly understood and so difficult to distinguish from one another.

Keywords: Al Qusais, burial pits, Late Bronze Age, Iron Age, necropolis

Introduction

The site of Al Qusais, located near the northern border of Dubai Emirate (25° 15′ 58″ N, 55° 25′ 11″ E), is today situated in the middle of a heavily urbanized area. In the 1970s, several communal and individual tombs were discovered here, along with a possible nearby settlement and an area designated as a cultic place for a snake deity (Taha 1981; 1983; 2009). However, despite this interesting archaeological evidence the area’s urbanization continued, destroying most of the areas in which remains were identified. In the 1990s, renewed interest in researching the ancient heritage of Dubai prompted the re-excavation of the site, where dozens of burial pits were found. However, the results were never published, and the site remained inaccessible to most researchers from the region.

In 2020, thanks to the interest of, and efforts made by, the members of the Architectural Heritage and Antiquities Department of Dubai, a new research project

was put in place in collaboration with the Sanisera Archaeology Institute. This new project aimed to reassess the data from the previous excavations, identify any remaining areas in Al Qusais that might be rescued among the modern buildings, identify the stratigraphy and geomorphology of the site, and identify more burial pits that could be excavated within the protected area of the cemetery. Initially, this project was supposed to last for eight months but unfortunately, it was cut short because of the Covid pandemic. Only three months of research were possible, although important preliminary data was still collected that we would like to share here.

The site (Fig. 1), previously identified as dating from the Wadi Suq to the Iron Age period (Taha 1983; 2009), has since the 1970s excavations proved to be essential for understanding the changes in burial practices between these periods, as well as in the corresponding burial goods. The site’s location and characteristics, namely the existence of a possible cultic place and its proximity to another Iron Age site, Muweilah, could also provide

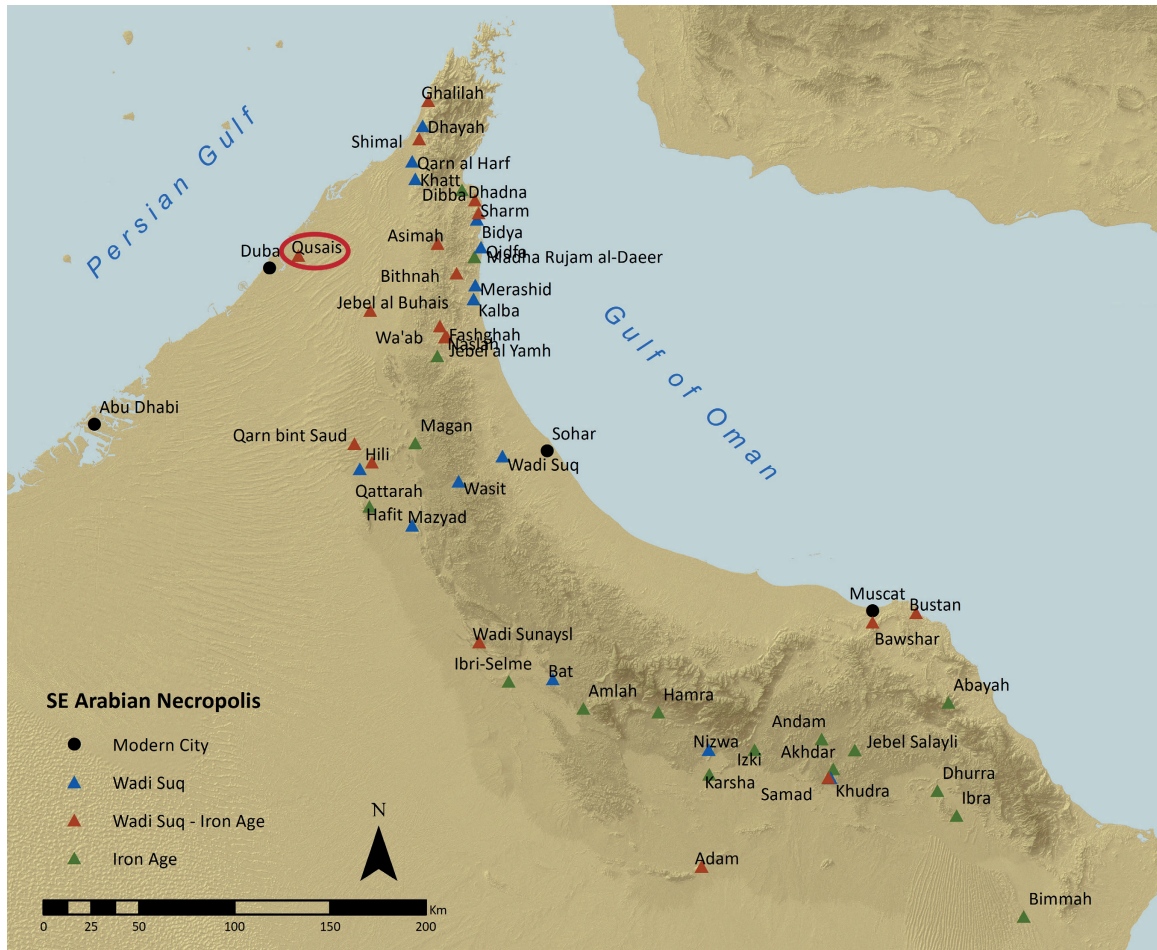


FIGURE 1. A map showing Wadi Suq to Iron Age necropolises. The location of Al Qusais is highlighted in red (© T. Valente).

further information on site distribution patterns and organization. This paper therefore aims to highlight the information gathered regarding structures, burial practices, and identified grave goods and to restart the discussion about the site's significance in the region's historical panorama.

The archaeological site of Al Qusais

The new 2020 project at Al Qusais began by identifying the areas previously pointed out by Munir Taha (2009). At the time of his excavations, the area was mostly deserted, but now only a few patches of land exist without modern constructions. Nevertheless, matching the measurements in his maps to modern

satellite imagery allowed us to identify where most of the archaeological areas are located (Fig. 2).

The areas corresponding to the Al Qusais necropolis did not have to be searched as they had already been fenced off and protected from further destruction in the 1990s. It is now located within the southern limits of the modern cemetery. Here, Grave I, a large communal grave excavated by Taha (2009), is what he labelled as Area A. At a distance of 10 m northwards of Grave I, Grave II was identified and labelled by Taha as Area B. Nearby, in what was called Area C, twenty-four burial pits were also found during Taha's excavation (2009). We were not able to re-excavate them and it will therefore not be possible to compare data.

At a distance of 400 m west of this necropolis, still



FIGURE 2. Current GoogleEarth satellite image identifying the areas excavated by M. Taha in the 1970s (© F. Contreras).

within the limits of the modern cemetery but outside the fenced area corresponding to the archaeological site of Al Qusais, lies ‘Settlement I’, excavated by Taha (2009). Here, he mentions identifying several fragments of scattered pottery and soft-stone vessels, copper fragments, and a large hearth associated with animal bones. No structures were identified.

Finally, ‘Settlement II’, identified by Taha (1981; 1983; 2009), was located almost 1 km south of ‘Settlement I’, according to measurements taken from Taha’s map in his publication (2009) and modern satellite imagery (see Fig. 2). This area is now extensively built-up, and we believe that most traces of archaeological evidence were erased. He mentions that this was a large mound containing the remains of a small rectangular structure (3.20 x 2 m) built in *farush* stone and showing traces of burning. Associated to it were abundant fragments of

snake-decorated pottery, arrowheads, fish hooks, awls, and miniature copper daggers and snakes. From his description, it might have been another site associated with the snake cult that proliferated throughout the region during the Iron Age (Benoist 2007; Benoist et al. 2015).

Following Taha’s excavation, the site was abandoned; construction began in the area, which was only re-excavated in the 1990s by Hussein Qandil (1993). At that time, Taha’s Areas A, B, and C were also fenced off to prevent further destruction. However, many burial pits remained outside the fence and continued to be exposed and destroyed as new graves were dug. At the time, it was decided that only a small southern portion of the cemetery would be protected. The decision to fence off the area lacked any spatial distribution analysis of the ancient necropolis, as is attested by the fact that

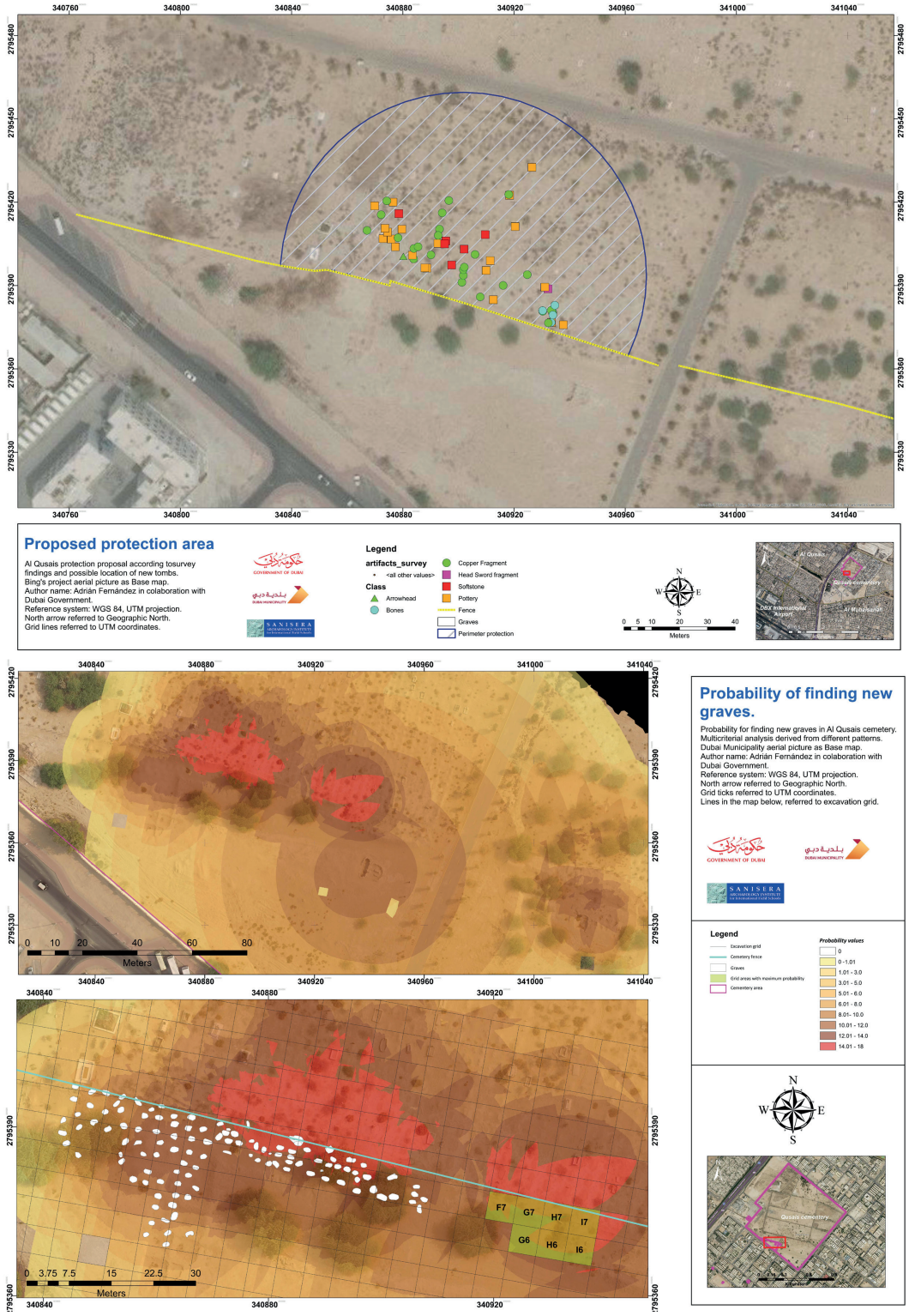


FIGURE 3. A probability map showing the distribution of burial pits (© A. Fernández).

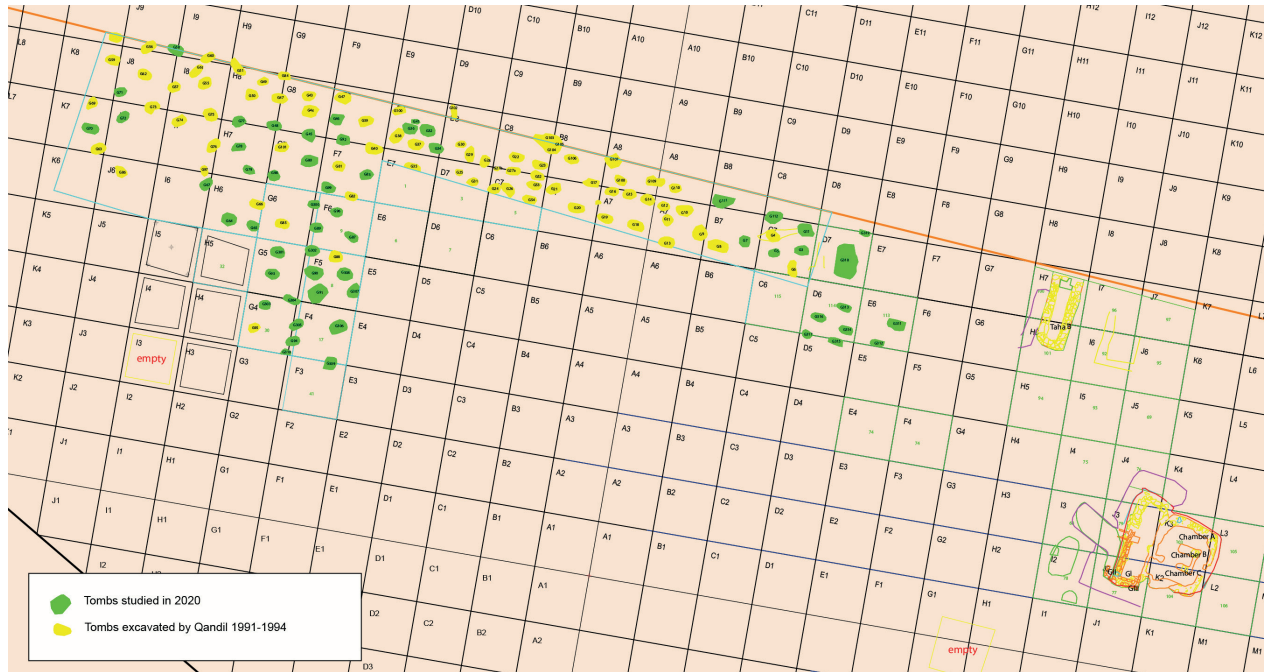


FIGURE 4. The distribution of burial pits in Al Qusais (© F. Contreras).

the communal grave in Area B was cut in half by the fence, as were several burial pits identified by Qandil in the early 1990s. From studies undertaken during the current project on both the distribution of burial pits and LBA/IA artefact fragments scattered on the surface, the necropolis area extended beyond the fenced area (Fig. 3).

In 1992 and 1993 Qandil initiated a new excavation of the site identifying 112 burial pits. Unfortunately, nothing was published at the time. Not much is known apart from what has reached the display cases of Dubai Museum. When this project began in 2020, priority was given to the area excavated by Qandil, of which so little was known and which was the most likely still to contain intact burials.

When the Sanisera Archaeology Institute team arrived at the site in early 2020, the area under research had already been gridded by our colleagues from Dubai Municipality, as they had undertaken a short survey in 2019 in squares I3, I4, I5, H3, H4, and H5 (Fig. 4). In January 2020 Hassan Zein also saved an enormous amount of time on this project by clearing all accumulated sediment since the 1990s excavation and exposing the burial pits excavated by Qandil, following maps and diaries left

at the Department. Those that possibly still contained human remains were marked as such and left intact to be excavated by our anthropologists; at the time of the 1990s excavation, Qandil (1993) mentioned that he had left all human remains *in situ* and only removed the artefacts.

In February 2020, when the remainder of the team arrived, it was divided into three working groups to facilitate research. One group remained in the Shindagha Restoration House to illustrate, photograph, and trace back the stored materials from the 1990s and 1970s excavations to their contexts on site. The second group re-excavated the burial pits identified by Zein as possibly still containing human remains. The third group finished excavating the trenches begun by Dubai Municipality in 2019 and started excavating new squares.

Stratigraphy

As we began excavating the necropolis, it was quickly established that the site's deposits had been heavily disturbed. So far, only two significant layers have been identified. A top deposit (Layer 1) (Fig. 5, left) is

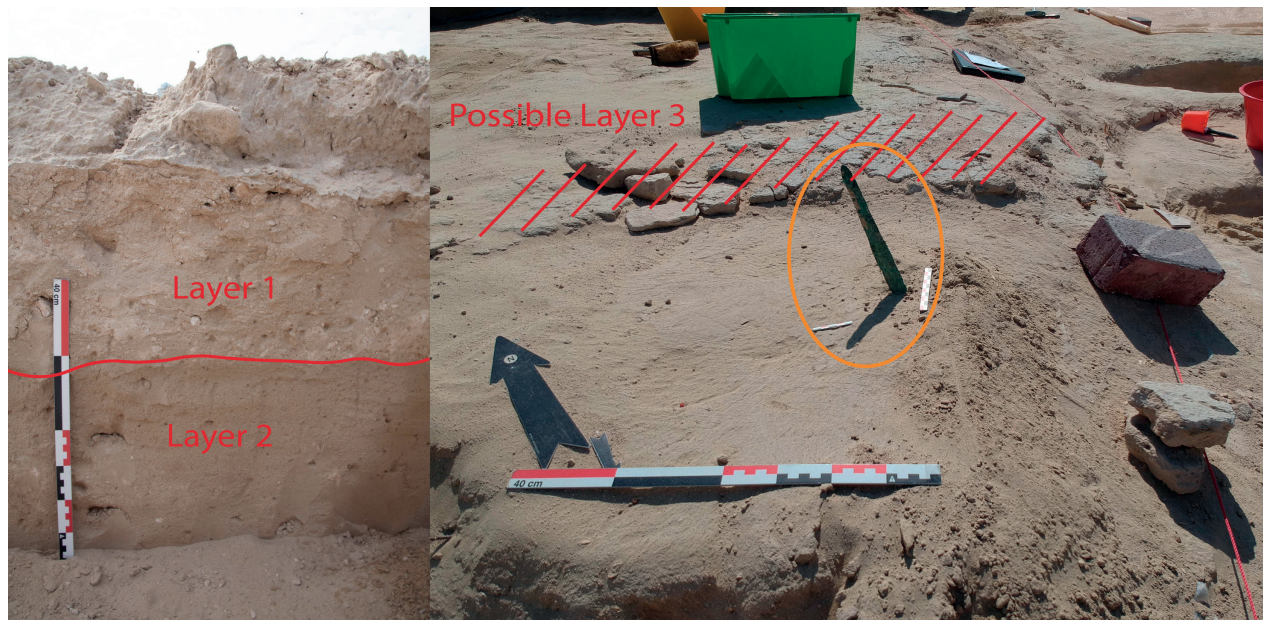


FIGURE 5. The possible stratigraphic sequence identified in Al Qusais (© T. Valente).

characterized by c.40–50 cm of sandy deposit, with a high content of silts and sodium, which gives a whitish colouration and high plasticity to this sediment. It also contains abundant fragments of the gypsum bedrock, which is a major component of the sabkha of the area (Kumar & Abdullah 2011). These fragments probably intruded in this top sediment due to all the construction in the vicinity, attested by fragments of materials such as cement tiles, mortar, iron nails, aluminium tins, rubber, and plastic commonly found in this top layer.

Below this disturbed deposit, Layer 2 (Fig. 5, left) corresponds to intact, relatively compact soil, although it is not yet possible to determine when it was formed. Given its homogeneity — again, a sandy sediment but with a higher preponderance of silts and less sodium than the top layer — we could not discern any changes in it. Almost no inclusions were found except for the occasional pebble and root. The squares where this deposit could be identified correspond to c.20–30 cm in depth.

In square E7 (Fig. 4 & Fig. 5, right), we might also have uncovered what seems to be the ‘floor’ where the burial pits were identified. The sediment does not seem dissimilar from Layer 2, but is slightly more compact. What prompted the identification of this deposit was the

discovery of a dagger placed vertically in the level of this floor. As this floor was being exposed, a slightly lighter colouration in the sediment, forming an oval shape (with the dagger at its centre), also seems to suggest the presence of another burial pit. This makes sense if at the time these burial pits were dug, there was some sediment accumulation and the pits were dug from the top of this sediment. There is no reason to believe that the area was cleared of sandy sediments all the way to the bedrock, in order to dig the burial pits. Nevertheless, it is still too early to confirm that this is actually a different occupation layer. New squares in this area need to be opened and more burial pits identified to prove that the vertically placed dagger was a common identifier/burial practice. The fact that no single burial pit overlapped another suggests that some identification existed, but we are not yet able to determine what it might be.

Geomorphology and environmental setting

Given the environmental and anthropic changes that occurred, not only in the area but on the coast of Dubai, which has been drastically changed, we believe it is crucial to integrate geomorphological and environmental studies into this project to help

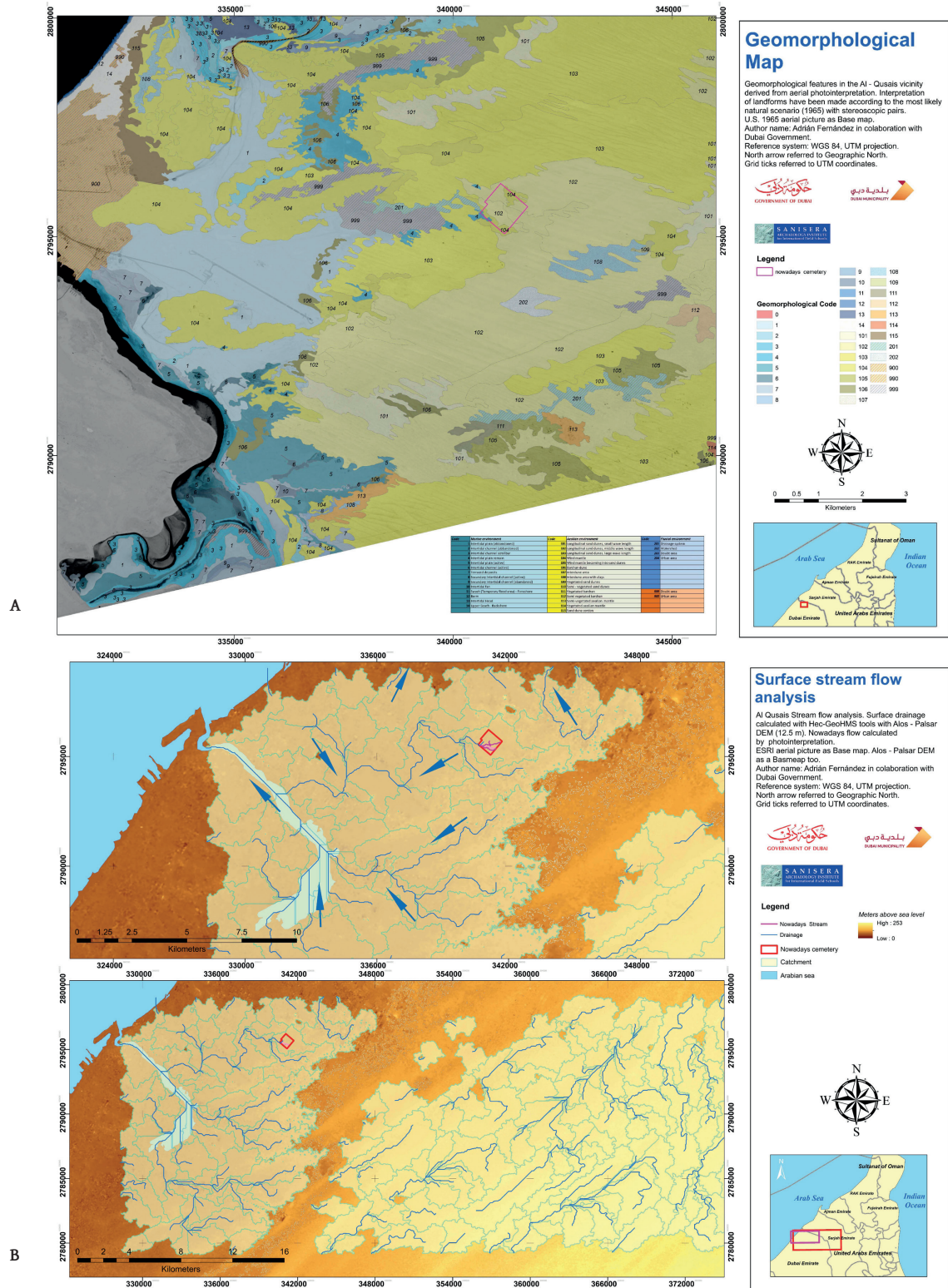


FIGURE 6A-B. a. Geomorphological and; b. hydrographic maps of the landscape surrounding Al Qusais (© A. Fernández).

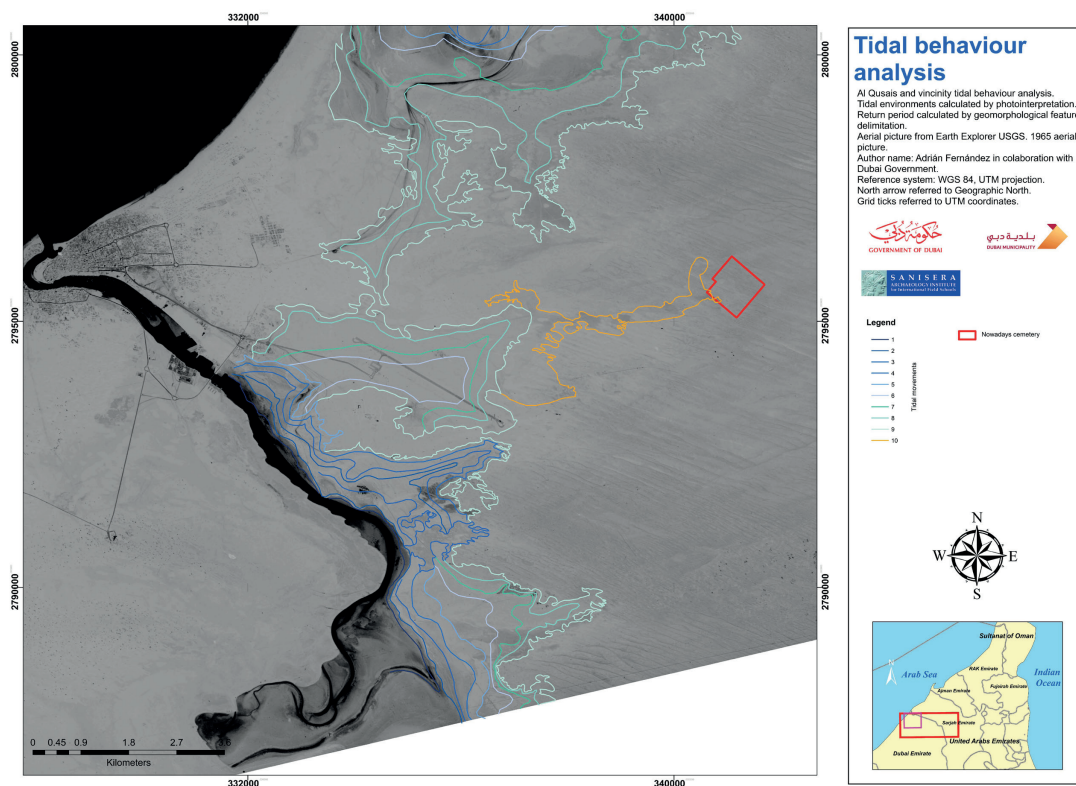


FIGURE 6C. Tidal map of the landscape surrounding Al Qusais (© A. Fernández).

us contextualize the archaeological evidence found within the prehistoric landscape. Although such studies are only in their infancy we hope that, in time, they can help to explain the circumstances that made it possible for people to settle there and in areas more suitable for settlement. So far, a combination of published environmental and geomorphological data, along with old satellite imagery, have helped us create landscape analyses through GIS software, showing considerable changes in the tidal area corresponding to Dubai Creek, together with changes in the surrounding environment.

To begin our studies, a geomorphological map (Fig. 6a) was produced by interpreting stereographic pairs taken in aerial photography in 1965. These pairs were obtained from the United States Geological Survey – Earth Explorer database and correspond to the aerial missions of information and documents declassified in 2017. The image was selected from this

time because it corresponds to photographs taken during the pre-construction period, which would reflect the most natural conditions possible. From these, several geomorphological forms were identified around Al Qusais, which correspond to three main types of environments: marine – tidal; wind; and fluvial (Selley 2000; Boggs 2009; Nichols 2009).

The geforms identified in the geomorphological map were then translated into an estimated direction of movement according to the forecasts for the dynamics of marine transgression and migration of shapes. According to these, the area around Al Qusais was observed to be a dynamic medium influenced by the mobility of dunes and tidal flood areas. Such dynamics are, however, still difficult to comprehend from the evidence recovered at Al Qusais.

In Figure 6a–c, a reconstruction of the direction of migration of the marine and tidal geforms can also be observed, along with fluvial dynamics. The results



FIGURE 7. Graves I and II after re-excavation. The areas outside the graves were also excavated, where several anthropic depressions were identified in the bedrock. In the depressions outside Grave I, several soft-stone and copper fragments were identified as well as two pottery vessels (bottom left) (© F. Contreras & T. Valente).

show that there is no drainage network of great length near Al Qusais, but there are small networks of temporary river courses.

Thus, the information points to Al Qusais being a place where populations could supply themselves with resources found in these intertidal environments. Nevertheless, they are still connected to coastal areas (9 km away) or inland nearby sites, such as Muweilah

only 8 km away. In fact, the proximity to this site should be addressed in the future as both sites may belong to the same territorial landscape. It should be remembered that Al Qusais itself does not possess an actual settlement. Taha mentions the existence of an ephemeral occupation in both Settlements I and II, which are simple hearths, and a building that might be associated with the snake cult (Taha 1983; 2009).

The burial tombs and pits

Turning to the burial structures identified in Al Qusais, we will begin by commenting on Graves I and II identified by Munir Taha. There is not much more that can be said besides what he already published (Taha 1981; 1983; 2009), but we have identified some characteristics in our re-excavation that we believe are significant.

Outside Grave I, the floor presented several depressions, possibly indicating external structures or passageways that we could not define more precisely; there was very little stratigraphy and it was entirely disrupted for the installation of the possible structures or passageways. Nevertheless, although we could not define the function of these depressions, what is interesting is that external areas seem to have been an integral part of the structure, perhaps used for burial or post-burial rituals.

The numerous fragments of bone, shell, copper, and pottery are significant in the context of these external areas. These were found in contact with the bedrock and covered by the abandonment deposit, which suggests that they were either part of the assemblage used in those external areas or evidence of looting not long after the tombs' abandonment. The latter seems more likely given the fragmentary state of the remains, although two pottery vessels were relatively intact (Fig. 7, bottom left). These resemble other examples from the Late Bronze Age (Velde 2003: 106).

Grave II (Fig. 7, right) could not be entirely re-excavated because it was cut by the fence that delimits the archaeological area. No significant materials were found outside it, but there appears to be a squared structure carved into the bedrock east of it. Unfortunately, due to the pandemic excavation could not be completed.

The burial pits identified during the 1990s excavation were all oval pits dug in the bedrock, roughly oriented east-west. None of them presented any covering, and after the deposition of the deceased and the burial goods, they were filled with sandy sediment. Contrary to Taha's description of the burial pits in Area C (Taha 1983; 2009), these are relatively simple, without any interior niches for the deposition of burial goods or cover stones. The burial pits excavated in the

necropolis's west zone measured between c.100 x 80 cm and 140 x 110 cm and between 40 and 60 cm in depth. They were all randomly distributed across the area, and there were no visible groupings of specific tombs (Fig. 8).

Of the re-excavated pits, we established that most of them were devoid of their contents, both human remains and burial goods. A comparison with original photographs taken at the time the pits still contained human remains shows that their state of preservation was greatly degraded. We found them devoid of all burial goods, although most of these are now in the Shindagha Restoration House, and we were able to trace them to the original pit.

The human remains

Although we wished to identify intact burial pits that could provide us unbiased evidence of burial rituals, it was also part of this research project to recover any data from the 1990s excavation left *in situ*, because that intervention had been done without a physical anthropologist among the team members. Because of the Covid pandemic, of nineteen newly discovered burial pits, only nine could be excavated. Of those excavated in the 1990s (Fig. 9), thirty-two contained relatively intact human remains, and only eight could be re-excavated. Dozens excavated in the 1990s were at that time already found to be devoid of human remains, with many exhibiting traces of looting.

Of those found intact, the bodies identified were lying in a flexed position, oriented east-west, with their heads facing north. Exceptions are graves 5, 27, 31, 57, and 81, with the individuals facing southwards. Some graves contained two individuals, one adult and a sub-adult, or two adults, one on top of the other, indicating the reuse of some graves. Secondary burials also seem to exist. Nevertheless, the majority presented only one individual. It would be interesting to investigate further to see if there is some familial relationship or kinship between the individuals in the same burial pit. This question becomes pressing when we observe adults buried with sub-subadults. In some double burials, it was also observed that adult individuals were locked in an embrace or had one arm over the other.

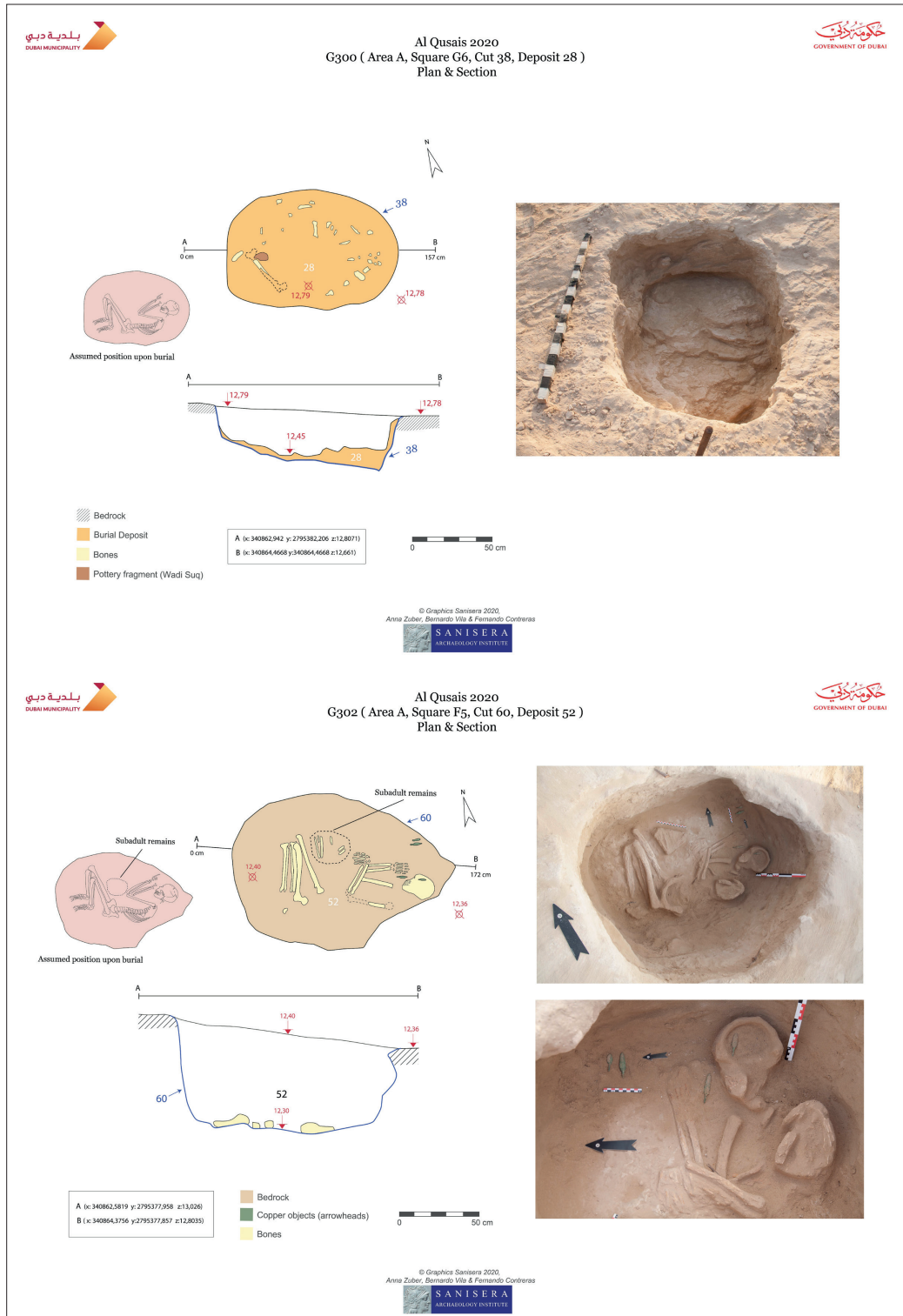


FIGURE 8. Section and plan of two new burial pits discovered and excavated during the 2020 research project (© A. Zuber).



FIGURE 9. A selection of photographic records from H. Qandil at the time of the Al Qusais excavations in 1992–1993 (© H. Qandil [Dubai Municipality]).

In terms of demographics, work on the people buried at this necropolis was left unfinished. Although many burial pits contain highly fragmented human remains, which will make analysis difficult, others also show some promise in delivering intact skeletons that can be assessed, in order to thoroughly understand this population's demographic make-up and burial rites and the items that accompanied their beliefs.

The burial goods

As mentioned above, one of the primary goals of this project was to reassess the data from the 1970s and 1990s excavations, particularly the burial goods collected, and to organize and publish the information since much was left unpublished, especially the data collected in the 1990s. Most artefacts had been stored in the Shindagha

Restoration House without proper labelling and without a systematic register of their original context. Some other artefacts were also exhibited in the Al Ain and Dubai Museums. It was our intention to include all the materials collected at Al Qusais in the same database, whether from the necropolis or the 'Settlement' areas, in order to view the site as a whole.

Due to the short time available for this project, we could only organize the information stored in the Shindagha Restoration House. Not all the artefacts could be traced to their original context, although about two-thirds of those stored in Shindagha could be traced to their former excavation zone and about one-third to the original burial. Although the amount of recovered information is still not ideal, it already provides a glimpse of what was buried along with the deceased and will, furthermore, help to establish a chronology for the



FIGURE 10. A selection of artefacts found in Al Qusais burial pits (from known contexts) (© A. Zuber).

necropolis. However, this work is still in development and will need further research.

As regards both the newly discovered burial pits and the photographic records taken during the 1990s excavation, most of the burial goods were placed close

to the upper body of the interred individual. Copper daggers are frequent and often found near the waist of the individual (see Fig. 9). Arrows seem to have been placed in bundles near the head of the deceased, and traces of wood around their tangs suggest that they

were fully mounted. Nevertheless, isolated examples distributed throughout the burial pit, but without wood traces, are also present. Shells are common burial goods as well, sometimes containing a greenish residue. Pottery vessels seem to have been a rarity in these burial pits, with only a handful of examples identified so far; there was a preference for copper and soft-stone vessels as burial goods. Individuals with bracelets on their ankles have also been observed *in situ* in some burial pits, as well as some bead jewellery. In the Shindagha Restoration House, numerous bead necklaces have been reported from the Al Qusais necropolis, although only a few could be traced to their original pit. It is possible that they belong to the communal graves or Area C burial pits identified by Taha, as none of Qandil's photographic records showed beads among the remains.

Chronologically speaking, in burial pits where pottery, soft-stone, or copper objects were attested, it seems that we might be in the presence of Late Bronze Age and/or Iron Age examples (Fig. 10). Most of the pottery examples identified are similar to typologies dated from the Late Bronze Age (as seen in Velde 2003: 106/3,4,5), as well as some of the soft-stone boxes and vessels (2003: 110). However, most other materials seem to apply to Iron Age examples. Arrowheads, particularly those incised, reported as likely from the LBA (Yule & Gernez 2018: 54/Ar2), are common in burial pits, but there are also many examples of arrowhead typologies that seem to correspond to Iron Age types (such as Ar5, 6, and 7 in Yule & Gernez 2018: 54). The same is observed in the axe heads (similar to A6 and A7 types in Yule & Gernez 2018: 70) and daggers (similar to D8 and D14 in Yule & Gernez 2018: 82), dated to the Iron Age. Several examples of soft-stone closed vessels, bowls, and lids also exhibit an Iron Age style (such as those published by Lombard 1985: figs 97–98; Zutterman 2004), and the same can be said of several alabaster vessels found by Taha in Area C and Grave II, as imitating soft-stone examples (studies on alabaster vessels are minimal in the region, and as far as we know, no examples similar to those of Al Qusais have been published).

Discussion

The transition between the Bronze and Iron Ages is a highly uncertain period with much contradictory evidence concerning tomb architectural styles, the

number of individuals interred, burial placement, and funerary assemblage. This, in addition to the reuse of tombs from previous eras such as the Hafit and Umm an-Nar periods, creates uncertainty concerning the dating of assemblages and even agreement about standardized time frames. This uncertainty extends to the understanding of the necropolis of Al Qusais, where we find an assortment of materials, from both the second and first millennia BC, often without their original context.

When assessing assemblages from the second millennium BC, a consensus is difficult. The typological standard for tomb architecture seems to be inexistent, with above-ground as well as semi-subterranean tombs containing 50 to 100 individuals (Degli Esposti et al. 2018; Potts 2012; Carter 1997), whereas at other sites, there are other mortuary structures, for example, cist-style tombs or oval mounds lined with stones (ElMahi & Al-Jahwari 2005; de Cardi, Kennet & Stocks 1994) that show the internment of between one and no more than three individuals. This creates a wide variability of burial structures and internments that are difficult to pin down to one homogeneous culture/period (Gernez & Giraud 2015; Gregoricka 2013; Jasim 2012). The distinctive architectural designs of these tombs, along with the minimum number of individuals interred within them, have led to the hypothesis by D.T. Potts (2012) that this variability is the result of local burial practices evolving in isolation, contributing to all this heterogeneity.

Furthermore, the common reuse of Wadi Suq graves during the Iron Age, as seems to have been the case at Graves I and II of Al Qusais, makes it difficult to assess burial goods and consequently, establish their chronological identification, particularly when it relates to intermediate periods (especially in this case, between the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age). Moreover, as many of the assemblages known for this period originated in burial sites rather than in domestic areas (whose assemblages often differ from burial ones), reaching a consensus is even more challenging, not to mention that most tombs cannot be dated by radiometric methods. This has led to interminable discussions, with some experts stating that the Wadi Suq should be split into two eras: the Wadi Suq and the Late Bronze Age. This idea first came about when Carter (1997) split the period between 'Classic Wadi Suq' — 2000–1500 BC; and 'Late Wadi Suq' — 1500–1300 BC. Velde (2003) took up

this idea and elaborated on it, suggesting that the period should be split into two distinct periods: the Wadi Suq (2000–1600 BC) and the Late Bronze Age (1600–1250 BC).

A similar situation was observed during the Iron Age but with reversed assemblages. For the Iron Age, there is a great deal of information from domestic sites and less from burial sites, which are mostly reused old sites. The Al Qusais burial pits are possibly one of the few examples where interments might be only from the Iron Age. The single parallel known for this type of burial pit can only be seen in the burials of Mleiha, in which simple burial pits are cut into the marl (Verdonck, Haerincx & Overlaet 2014), although dated much later, c.300 BC onwards. Nevertheless, it helps to illustrate the change to another type of individualized burial, perhaps associated with increased social differentiation. Whether the interments were made in burial pits like those of Al Qusais or in above-ground cists like, for example, those of Ādam (Gernez & Giraud 2015) and Samad ash-Shan (Yule 2001), they diverge from the previous funerary sites in that they contain just one or two individuals and the chosen burial locations are disassociated from all habitation and at the edge of agricultural areas.

The individualization of the deceased observed at Al Qusais, whether through the type of structure chosen or through the grave goods that accompanied each individual (mainly weaponry, some jewellery, and containers) into the afterlife, seems to go hand in hand with the social complexity that appears to have emerged during the Iron Age, which was pointed out by authors such as P. Magee (1998). There is still much to research on matters of Iron Age social individualization and complexity. However, it is clear that sites such as Al Qusais can contribute significantly to this subject and narrow the chronologies between the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age, including the start of the social changes in question.

Although the amount of pottery is minimal at Al Qusais burial pits, as mentioned above, the pottery that was identified has been dated at other sites to the Late Bronze Age. The same goes for some of the arrowheads with inscriptions. If the dating for those examples is correct, therefore, the question is whether changes in social individualization had already started at the end of the Bronze Age. Whatever the case, more research and radiometric dating are required to confirm this.

What we are confident about, however, is that most

of the other materials identified in the burial pits, particularly copper and soft-stone vessels, date to the Early Iron Age. We know that according to the usual chronological divisions (Magee 1996), we should refer to Iron Age I and/or II contexts. However, studying metal and soft-stone elements on their own prevents us from reaching a definitive conclusion. Had there been examples of pottery among the assemblages, our chronological distinction would be facilitated, but unfortunately there are none. It is therefore preferable simply to suggest that most of the burial pits identified in Al Qusais are from the early Iron Age, with some perhaps from the Late Bronze Age.

Conclusions

The 2020 research project at Al Qusais, despite all its logistical difficulties associated with the reassessment of data from the previous excavations and its unexpected interruption due to the pandemic, allowed us to share important information that had been stored in the Shindagha Restoration House for decades, including the unique burial pits that were found at the necropolis. Furthermore, although the site (particularly the ‘settlement’ areas) is mostly destroyed, we believe that rescue excavations can still be undertaken to recover what is left.

From the data highlighted here, we believe that even though the remainder of the site has been destroyed, the necropolis itself still has a tremendous potential to answer a significant number of sociological questions regarding social complexity and individualization, as well as helping us understand how this shift occurred from the Bronze to the Iron Age.

By examining the extensive material assemblages that the site holds, particularly the metal artefacts, comparisons with nearby sites in the region can also help us establish distribution patterns for such products and spheres of economic, social, and political influence. Data comparison with sites such as Muweilah, for example, less than 8 km away, is essential as it is possible that the Al Qusais necropolis – and the (probably) destroyed structure dedicated to the snake cult – was under the direct influence of Muweilah.

The demographic study of buried individuals shall also be given priority in the future. There is only a small number of population studies in the region, and even

less of the Iron Age in particular, despite the significant number of burial sites scattered throughout the region. The population of Al Qusais and the fact that many burial pits are still intact, make them perfect time capsules from which to obtain information on funerary rituals, social beliefs/culture, dietary habits, common pathologies, and stresses as well as common causes of death.

Finally, attention should also be given to the areas surrounding these structures. Not only the surrounding landscape should continue to be investigated to paint a better picture of the reasons a particular location was chosen for burial, but also the immediate surroundings to identify possible structures associated with burial and post-burial practices, like those that began to be exposed around Graves I and II.

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