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Archaeological museography in Bahrain: to centralize or not ?

Pierre Lombard

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Abstract

In Bahrain, awareness of its strong heritage roots dates back to the 1950s, when the Danish Expedition from Moesgård locally revealed the civilization of Dilmun in its most concrete architectural or material features. Shortly after this, a National Museum was first established in Muharraq, mainly to house the archaeological collections that had been recently gathered. In 1988 these collections were relocated in a large contemporary complex designed specifically for this purpose. The current Bahrain National Museum remains today one of the major museum institutions of the Arabian Peninsula promoting, not only archaeology but also the popular heritage of the country and the works of local contemporary artists.

The creation in 2009 of a autonomous Ministry of Culture – later changed into the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities in 2015– led by a energetic shaykha and a member of the ruling family who is a historian by training, has accelerated the definition and development of a systematic programme of archaeological site museums. These include a museum at Qal’at al-Bahrain, which has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2005.

Beyond evoking these ambitious projects, we attempt to show how, in this Gulf state characterized by limited possibilities to extend its territory, the justification of such a museum programme could led to a crucial redefinition of the idea that it is indeed a “National Museum”.

Keywords : Bahrain, Museography, Bahrain National Museum, Qal’at al-Bahrain Site Museum.

Most national or local museums in the Gulf region have been often conceived after the independence of their countries, in a dynamic of study, affirmation and enhancement of the local archaeological or ethnographic heritage, rarely considered before (Erskine-Loftus 2010: 20; 2016: 75-79; Erskine-Loftus et al. 2016: 1ff).

Beyond this repeatedly discussed statement, the author proposes here to review the particular case of the present Kingdom of Bahrain and the treatment accorded to its historical roots based on an long and personal experience of the country's practices (1). Within the vivid museum activity observed today in the Gulf countries, the Kingdom of Bahrain occupies a pioneer position, largely due to the richness of its archaeological heritage, but also to an early exploitation of it.

Since the late 1950s, finding new and creative ways to place the national heritage before the general public has been of major importance in Bahrain. One should note that the archipelago of Bahrain, the smallest Arab country, does not exceed 690 square kilometers (2) (Figure 1). This small surface, coupled from the mid-twentieth century with a population equally characterized by its high density and one of the highest literacy rates in the region, has undoubtedly strengthened an already well-affirmed sense of identity and national consciousness. This fertile ground led the local authorities, in the early fifties, to establish a major and unique institution, the National Museum of Bahrain.

The present essay aims to trace the context and the main steps of a situation which concept and strategy have evolved dramatically under the leadership of the former Minister of Culture, now President of the Authority for Culture and Antiquities, Shaykha Mai bint Mohammed Āl Khalifah, who currently supervises all projects. The essential crossroads still represented by the Bahrain National Museum is now being placed in competition with other decentralized museum projects, which could largely modify the primary purpose of the country's national institution.

An exceptional archaeological heritage

The early development of museum activities in Bahrain is clearly based on a rich and diverse archaeological heritage. Although, unlike Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and especially Qatar, the occupation prior to the Bronze Age remains modest (Potts 1990: 29, 47, 52-53), it is indeed to Bahrain that the political and economic center of the Dilmun culture had migrated towards the end of the third millennium BC from its original cradle, located for centuries in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia. Around 2050 BC, the sudden rise of the site of Qal'at al-Bahrain, recognized as the new decision-making center of the kingdom of Dilmun, is reflected in particular by the appearance of a vast palatial quarter and an elaborate system of fortifications (Højlund & Andersen 1994: 469–475; Lombard 2016a: 124-128). This period also saw the extraordinary development of the burial mound cemeteries which contributed to the international fame of the 'Dilmun phenomenon'. These impressive funerary practices ("standard" *tumuli*, "chieftain" *tumuli* reserved for the elite, monumental mounds called "Royal *tumuli*", "honeycomb" burial complexes, underground pit-graves) now appear much more diverse than indicated by the first studies (Laursen 2008, 2017: 390-396; Olijdam 2010; Lombard 2016a: 119-124). They all testify to both the establishment of a complex, hierarchical social structure, a rarely studied network of the island territory, and to an unprecedented economic vitality in the late Bronze Age (Højlund 2007: 123–136; Laursen 2017: 379-384).

The other main archaeological and museographical wealth is represented by the Tylos culture (3), which developed from the third century BC until about the third century AD. This unique culture, combining indigenous or regional elements with others clearly influenced by the Greco-Roman Middle-Eastern culture, has clearly spread out beyond the borders of Bahrain, since traces of it are found in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia (Potts 2010: 376ff). Many rescue excavations conducted in Bahrain over the past twenty years have focused on this phase and have yielded previously unpublished material, although primarily related to burial customs (Ibrahim Salman &

Andersen 2009: 7–11; Lombard & Boksmati-Fattouh 2012; Lombard 2016a: 128–133).

While these two phases of Dilmun and Tylos are essential landmarks of the Bahrain chronology and have been satisfactorily documented in terms of material culture, we observe that the Islamic period, while relatively well documented historically, unfortunately remains the '*poor cousin*' of the local archaeological research, to use an expression of T. Insoll (2005: 13). Nevertheless, the settlement sites at A'ali, Qal'at al-Bahrain, Barbar and Bilad al-Qadim, have yielded occupation levels that clearly illustrate the material culture of the Early and especially Middle Islamic phases (Sasaki 1990; Kervran et al. 2005; Insoll et al. 2016). This evidence complements the available architectural data of several fortified buildings: the main Hormuzi-Portuguese fortress at Qal'at al-Bahrain, the ones in Arad and Abu Maher) or the religious ones (Al-Khamis Mosque, for example). Also worth mentioning, concerning the more recent periods, is the significant architectural heritage represented by the many traditional houses of the ancient centers of the capital city, Manama, and especially Muharraq, the second largest island of the archipelago (4).

Early awareness and actions

As already mentioned, knowledge of the archaeological heritage of Bahrain's archipelago, unlike that of neighbouring countries, spread out very early, both to local audiences as well as to the international scientific community. As early as the late nineteenth century, Henry Rawlinson in London and Jules Oppert in Paris, two epigraphers specializing in the Akkadian language, claimed the paternity of the discovery that Bahrain was actually the mythical land of Dilmun. Their findings were based on the observations and discoveries of Captain E. L. Durand, principal assistant to the British Political Resident in the Gulf, and amateur archaeologist (Durand 1880, Rice 1984: 10–11, 29–36, André-Salvini 1999: 16–17). At the end of his famous contribution in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* of April 1880 where he discussed the surprising cuneiform inscription recovered by Captain Durand from the mosque in Bilad al-Qadim/Abu Zeidan, it is interesting to note that Rawlinson mentions that at such an early date, the Royal Asiatic Society offered an annual grant of £100, for the organization of regular excavations in Bahrain (Rawlinson 1880: 227; Rice 1984: 66). This project was never set into motion, but the archaeological heritage of Bahrain had henceforth gained academic recognition. Travelers and professional archaeologists followed one another to the island until 1954, the year of arrival of the Danish Expedition to the Gulf, affiliated with the Museum of Prehistory in Moesgård, near Aarhus.

If the scientific works of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are generally available in academic publications, even if in uneven quality (Chevalier 1999) (5), the findings from these pioneering excavations have mostly disappeared or have joined the collections of European, American or Indian museums (6).

It is actually with the beginning of the work conducted by the Danish Archaeological Expedition, and the material excavated at Barbar Temple or at Qal'at al-Bahrain site, that the question of how to display these discoveries arose. In fact, a modest exhibition of Bahrain archaeology, showing the first results of the Danish Expedition,

was held at their initiative at the end of the 1956 field season. Organized somewhat hastily at the Al-Hidaya Al-Khalifia school of Muharraq (one of the first schools in the Gulf), this short three-day event was a huge success and had undoubtedly represented a key date in the history of Bahrain museums (Figure 2). For the first time ever, the pre-Islamic heritage of the island was presented to the general public. In his popular book *Looking for Dilmun*, Geoffrey Bibby (1970: 185–186) recalls the particular interest of the female audience, by far the most attracted by this topic.

It is also within the framework of the first Danish excavations in Bahrain that the *Bahrain Historical and Archaeological Society* was established in 1953, at the initiative of James Belgrave, adviser to the Government of Bahrain. In the years following its establishment, this institution played a vital role in the promotion of local heritage.

Unfortunately, the first archaeological exhibition held in 1956 was not followed by other initiatives to promote the local heritage for many years. In fact, at the end of each of its annual campaigns, the Danish Expedition exported all the excavated archaeological material to the Moesgård Museum for study and publication, following an agreement with the local authorities (7). However, the late sixties saw a clear acceleration in the economic development of Bahrain. Even if there was no question then of regular archaeological projects (exception made for the Danish operations), this period also evidently coincides with an increase in accidental discoveries, following rapid urban development. The need to coherently organize the rescue activities, but also the desire to create a framework for study, storage and public presentation of these new local discoveries, motivated the formal request made by the Government of Bahrain to UNESCO for specialized assistance. Dr. Amanalanda Ghosh, a well-known and esteemed Indian archaeologist, was quickly appointed and presented in September 1968 a detailed report on the situation of local archaeological heritage, with recommendations on the absolute need to edit an “Antiquarian Law”, to develop archaeological sites, historic forts and traditional houses of the archipelago, as well as to establish a National Museum (Ghosh 1968). Dr. Ghosh’s valuable suggestions were scrupulously respected. In the months that followed his report, a Department of Antiquities was created, initially placed within the Ministry of Education. The aim of this new service was to conduct “national” archaeological excavations and to ensure the maintenance and restoration of monuments, sites and artefacts. The first Bahraini team of excavators was constituted in 1969 and the first “Law of Archaeology” was promulgated in 1970 (Musameh 2004: 14). Obviously, this desire for the protection and the enhancement of the local historical and archaeological heritage was also motivated by tourism development within the country.

A centralized concept: the National Museum

The Ghosh report's recommendation concerning the creation of a National Museum was widely discussed during the preparation of the Third International Conference on Asian Archaeology in March 1970. The plan to organize this important international meeting in Bahrain undoubtedly accelerated the establishment of this institution (Musameh 2004, *ibid.*). The first inevitable step was to repatriate the major pieces formerly transferred to the Moesgård Prehistoric Museum in accordance with the

original agreement which had provided the Danish museum with a share of the artifacts. This process was apparently carried out objectively and smoothly, despite the concerns of the UNESCO expert (8). A first “Bahrain National Museum”, privately introduced to the Conference participants, was officially opened to the public on April 4th, 1970. The museum's first premises were temporarily housed in the former building of Government House in Manama. From the onset, it collected archaeological collections covering all chronological phases, from prehistory to Islam. As the museum became quickly crowded, it was transferred in 1973 to Busaiteen in Muharraq Island, where it occupied a former officers' mess of the Royal Air Force. Respecting the recommendations of the Indian expert A. Ghosh, the museum was organized around six separate halls (including new sections devoted to the geology of Bahrain, popular heritage, as well as historical documents and manuscripts), with large storage areas, a library, and an archive department (Vine 1993: 3; Musameh 2004: 14). For over a decade, this new institution acted as crossroads for culture and heritage, but also as an active center for archaeological research, then led by Shaykha Haya bint 'Ali Āl Khalīfah. A whole generation of visiting archaeologists remembers this invested and energetic official, and notably her small office where she kept an impressive safe from which she would proudly withdraw the latest Dilmun seals discovered by her department requesting the scientific advice of experts...

The importance of new archaeological discoveries in the late 1970s and 1980s, and the desire to develop a more coherent and wider ethnographic section, finally led the authority in charge in 1982 to seek a permanent and better adapted building. The selected Danish architects, Knud Holsher and Sven Axelsson (9), then proposed a very innovative concept and constructed, on a specially reclaimed area of 12,05 hectares between Manama and Muharraq, a museum complex of 22,400 square meters involving nine exhibition halls of 625 square meters each, a large central foyer of 1,450 square meters, an auditorium, class-room, cafeteria, shop and bookstore, as well as an administrative wing combining offices, conservation laboratories and storage areas.

This remarkable complex, unique in the Gulf at the time of its inauguration in December 1988, still houses the Bahrain National Museum today (Figure 3). The layout of the permanent exhibition, created in 1988 by Thorkild Ebert, was organized according to the same distribution of thematic sections conceived for the previous Muharraq museum, but with a better focus on texts (mostly written at the time by Danish archaeologists and ethnologists, in collaboration with their Bahraini counterparts) and allowing the display of 1:1 scale reconstructions. The popular, so-called “Hall of Graves”, particularly suitable to highlight the specificity and originality of the funerary practices in pre-Islamic phases of the island was notably very noticed and appreciated by visitors, who can discover, in chronological order, the various types of burials in use from about 2500 BC to the first centuries of our era, all impressively rebuilt under the careful control of archaeologists (10) (Figure 4).

A special hall, dedicated to Natural Sciences and the diverse ecological elements of the present archipelago, has been since replaced by specific areas reserved for exhibitions and scientific events.

From its first conception, this remarkable building strategically located in Manama, was considered as a unique, central institution, and in many ways the guarantee of the

identity and heritage of the people of Bahrain. It has become indispensable and normal for the local schools to visit it regularly, and the simple fact that it has hosted, for almost fifteen years, the annual “Heritage Festival”, a true conservatory of local traditions, is highly significant. In addition, this building was designed from the onset to house the administration of Archaeology and Museums, and more recently to include the complete services of the new Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities as well, both help to confirm the National Museum as a major decision-making center.

A new policy of site museums: towards decentralization ?

Anticipated for many years, the inscription of Qal'at al-Bahrain site in the UNESCO World Heritage Site List in July 2005, is in the author's view a major turning point in the museum policy of the country. Indeed, the President of the Authority for Culture and Antiquities, Shaykha Mai bint Mohammed Āl Khalīfah (then Assistant-Undersecretary for Culture and Heritage at the Ministry of Information) expressed the strong wish that a site museum project needed to be included in the nomination file submitted to UNESCO. On this occasion, contact was established again with a Danish agency, Wohler Arkitekter, who proposed an ambitious project in 2003. It should be noted that the President's strategic choice was actually, and unintentionally, in line with the conclusions of an earlier expertise report submitted to UNESCO in 1980, more restricted in diffusion, which already recommended the construction of “*a series of small site museums built gradually to present all available material and information associated with the site*” (Saidah & Lewcock 1980: 7).

The choice of such an option was not without consequences and then gave rise to many internal debates. What would be the exact purpose of this museum? Which elements would be displayed there? Would they be original pieces, so far presented in the National Museum, or merely copies of them? What about the risk of duplicating information covered in the other institution?

Such questions may appear legitimate today when a genuine policy of museum decentralization is gradually being introduced in Bahrain by the Authority for Culture and Antiquities. A specific page on the Authority's website identifies for instance the current projects which are appealing for local sponsorship (*Projects and Achievements*, online. Cf. also *Pillars of Culture* 2016: 8-11; Boksmati-Fattouh 2016: 60-65). As far as archaeology is concerned, and in addition to the site museum at Qal'at al-Bahrain (inaugurated in February 2008, see below) and the Visitors' Centre at Al Khamis Mosque (also conceived by Wohler Arkitekter and inaugurated in January 2017), there are three additional projects directly related to promoting archaeological findings which are currently being developed:

- Barbar Temple Visitors' Centre (draft)
- Saar Site Museum & Regional Research Centre (draft)
- A'ali Burial Mounds Visitors' Centre (draft).

Although some of these projects are modestly described as “Visitor's Centres” it is clear that they are proper site museums, certainly different in size and importance, but in theory they are all supposed to potentially host original archaeological artifacts. Most of these projects await proper funding, but each one has been outlined with precise conceptual drafts by renowned international architecture agencies: Tadao

Ando Architect & Associates Osaka (Saar site), Wohlert Arkitekter, Copenhagen (A'ali Burial Mounds), and Basmaji Bielinska & Architects, Lebanon (Barbar Temple) (11). Other site-museums are funded entirely on government budgets and the first of them has just been inaugurated at Rifa'a Fort in January 2013. The questions raised above thus remain valid, or will soon be placed on the President of the Authority's agenda.

A specific case: Qal'at al-Bahrain Site Museum

Being responsible for the French Archaeological Mission operating at Qal'at al-Bahrain site since 1989, the author has had the opportunity to be closely involved in this project, to be briefly presented here. The complex, which celebrated its 10th anniversary in February 2018, was designed by the Danish firm Wohlert Arkitekter, whose competence in museum conception is internationally recognized (The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, The David Collection of Islamic Art, Copenhagen; Jelling UNESCO World Heritage Site Museum, Vejle, etc.).

Built along the water front, on non-archaeological, reclaimed land, the 2,000 square meters museum is situated at the north of the Qal'at al-Bahrain tell (Figure 5). The building, placed on a podium which forms a dock on the Gulf, consists of two elements: an elongated two-storey museum wing, housing the Museum hall, arrival court and Café; and a one-storey square building that houses administration and auditorium, as well as accommodation rooms, technical lab and storage facilities for the site archaeologists, all surrounding a small garden court. The museum itself makes up the gateway to the archaeological tell. Both are connected by a discovery pathway, which includes audio-guide and service facilities.

The exhibition space, separated into six distinct and organized chronologically sections, is laid out around a monumental central display, the "Tell Wall". This 30m long recreation of the archaeological strata, which reproduces at the scale 1:1 the various levels surveyed by the archaeologists, constitutes the main axis of the exhibition, and accompanies the itinerary of the visitor at every moment (Figure 6).

From the earliest Dilmun period exhibition on the lower level, one ascends to the most recent Islamic period exhibition on the upper level on the first floor through a succession of planes, following the chronological evolution of the successive "cities" identified at Qal'at al-Bahrain. At each stage of the path, the visitor stands facing the corresponding levels of the "Tell Wall" which reproduce the principal sedimentary or architectural elements observed in the neighbouring excavations, using natural materials: archaeological layers made either of sand, gravel or ash, floors and walls in sections or elevation, storage devices, looting pits, etc. (Figure 7). These chronological sections are illustrated using over 500 objects uncovered during the excavations carried out from 1954 to 2008 by Danish, French and Bahraini teams. These discoveries are accompanied by introductory texts and detailed captions in both Arabic and English (Lombard 2016b).

The museum hall is primarily lit by natural daylight, both by a continuous skylight over the museum's central exhibition element, the Tell Wall, and by the unique and ingeniously designed facade display-cases. These are recessed in the exterior walls,

forming the characteristic protruding light towers in the building's facades.

The Qal'at al-Bahrain permanent exhibition, the first site museum established in Bahrain, provides a useful complement to a visit of the neighbouring archaeological site. Attached to the ancient harbor and capital of Dilmun, it seeks to document and interpret, in the most educational way, the historical features of one of the major archaeological "tell" of ancient Eastern Arabia (Lombard 2018).

In search of a necessary balance

One may wonder about the consequences of this new policy of museum diffusion, which can vary considerably from one project to another. In the case of the Qal'at al-Bahrain Museum, we observe that, out of the 500 pieces exhibited, only 20 old discoveries from the Danish Expedition were transferred from the showcases of the National Museum. The rest of the artifacts came from the storage rooms. These pieces were either not displayed during the conception of the National Museum in 1988, or they were discoveries from the 1989-2005 excavations of the French Archaeological Mission, or they were artefacts discovered during the clearing out and recent restoration of the Hormuzi-Portuguese fortress.

One may anticipate similar consequences during the development of the future site museum site at Saar. This small town, which chronology covers the entire period of occupation of Early Dilmun (c. 2000-1700 BC) was excavated for the most part by the London-Bahrain Expedition between 1991 and 1998 (Killick & Moon 2005), thus well after the installation of the current scenography at the National Museum. With few exceptions, therefore, the artifacts likely to be displayed in the future are presently being kept in the National Museum storage rooms. One can also imagine that such a museum will leave an important space to multimedia presentations to best highlight what will be one of its major attractions: the reconstruction of the daily life of this well preserved settlement.

In contrast, finalizing the "Visitor's Centres" at the Barbar Temple and the A'ali burial mounds area, whose discovered objects already form major displays at the National Museum, must be accompanied by a serious study of the roles assigned to these decentralized museums, which could easily "upset the balance" within the central institution for their own profit. As far as ethnography is concerned, a similar reflection must also concern the future interpretation facilities of the "Pearling Path" at Muharraq.

Moreover, we note that for the last two years the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities has actively supported the creation of travelling archaeological exhibitions, accessible to a more international audience. These prestigious ventures actually appear as a judicious choice, both for their promotional and eminently diplomatic role, but also for the number of potential visitors they may attract as long as the chosen foreign institutions retain an excellent reputation (12). Again, it is important to ensure that their material content will not have an adverse effect on the current displays of the National Museum, which is not always easy, even in light of Bahrain's rich archaeological collections.

Conclusion

At the very moment when a complete restructuring of the hall's scenography is being considered at the National Museum, along with a policy to promote Bahraini heritage through international travelling exhibitions, it is the main purpose of this central institution as well as the social and cultural messages it conveys that must be redefined and with utmost care.

The 2011 social-political unrest highlighted the urgent need to foster mutual understanding within the present-day Bahraini society, diverse in its origins, history and particular traditions. While some sites museums or visitor's centres might privilege a particular historical phase or social group (as is the case of the Al-Khamis Mosque or Rifa'a Fort site museums), the essential role of interpretation and representation of the National Museum, as a unique institution and federative crucible of the Bahraini society, must be obviously strengthened. As already pointed out by N. Boksmati-Fattouh (2016: 65), the national museum primary role is to provide a common space for "alternative identities and histories".

Notes

(1) The author of this article has collaborated since the 1980s with local authorities of the present Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities (BACA), as head of the French Archaeological Mission in Bahrain, and as curator of several scientific exhibitions on the archaeological heritage of the archipelago, as well as of the Site Museum at Qal'at al-Bahrain.

(2) This corresponds to the natural area of the archipelago. For over twenty years now, a policy of land reclaiming on the foreshore areas has greatly increased the size of the present Kingdom of Bahrain, which today officially reaches some 760 square kilometres (CIA 2018, online)

(3) "Tylos" originates from the Greek name assigned to the main island of the archipelago, apparently by the admirals of Alexander's fleet, Androthenes of Thasos and Hiero of Soli, who reached Bahrain in 324/25 BC

(4) This particular aspect of Bahrain's national heritage was consecrated in 2012 by the UNESCO World Heritage Center under the heading "*Perling, Testimony of an Island Economy*". According to its official description, the nominated site consists of "*seventeen buildings in Muharraq City, three offshore oyster beds, part of the seashore and the Bu Maher fortress on the southern tip of Muharraq Island, from where boats used to set off for the oyster beds. The listed buildings include residences of wealthy merchants, shops, storehouses and a mosque*" (WHC-UNESCO 2012; Rudolff 2018).

(5) In addition to the overall contribution of N. Chevalier (1999), it is very useful to refer to the volume of reprints edited by M. Rice (1984), which includes facsimiles of several major scientific contributions published between 1880 and 1946.

(6) The most known cases are the artefacts uncovered by Ernest Mackay in the Dilmun “Royal” cemetery at A’ali (partly kept in the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities of the British Museum) or some of those found at the same site by Francis Beville Prideaux in 1906-08, recently identified in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya Museum of Mumbai (formerly Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, see Laursen 2017: 397-401). Additional archaeological and anthropological collections from Peter B. Cornwall's excavations in Bahrain during the winter of 1940–41 are now kept in the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley (Porter & Boutin 2012).

(7) “*The excavation finds were sent by sea to Aarhus to be conserved and studied, so their contribution to history could be extracted*” states not without a certain lyricism the catalog of the 1999 exhibition organized at the Moesgård Museum (Højlund 1999: 51). This situation lasted until the creation of the first “National Museum” in 1970.

(8) “*It has been stated above that almost all the antiquities excavated by the Danish exhibition have been removed to Aarhus and that according to an agreement between the government of Bahrain and the Expedition fifty per cent of them will come back to Bahrain when a museum is ready there to receive them. (...) The agreement entered into in the initial years of the Expeditions’s work is admittedly unfair to Bahrain, which has to start its museum practically out of nothing. It may also be reiterated that the Bahrain Government contributed substantially to the expenditure on the Expedition’s work, not to speak of permission to operate on its soil. The government should therefore initiate the negotiations with the Danish authorities concerned for interpreting the agreement very liberally in Bahrain’s favour*” (Gosh 1968: § 56-57).

(9) In association with the firm of Krohn & Hartvig Danish architecture Rasmussen (KHR Arkitekten) and engineering company COWIconsult.

(10) After several years of work, this iconic hall has been fully remodelled and upgraded in June 2018 to keep up with the last developments in museography, update the latest archaeological knowledge and provide the visitors with an enhanced approach of the unique Dilmun burial traditions.

(11) All these projects are part of a larger architectural and cultural program (“Investing in Culture”), initiated by the current President of the BACA Shaykha Mai bint Mohammed Āl Khalīfah, and based on government funds or private sponsorship. In addition to projects linked with archaeology, one notes a project for a Museum of Contemporary Art designed by the late Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid on the island of Muharraq, a Children's Museum in Manama proposed by the Jordanian agency Faris & Faris, and the Bahrain National Theatre, which opened a few years ago near the National Museum, and was designed by Architecture Studio (Paris, France). The “Investing in Culture” program also includes several exhibition or interpretation centres within the “Pearling Path” at Muharraq (Al Sayeh 2018).

(12) The exhibition “*Tylos. The Journey Beyond Life. Funerary Rituals and customs in Bahrain (2nd cent. BC - 3rd cent. AD)*”, first presented at the National Museum of Bahrain as part of the event “Manama, Arab Capital of Culture 2012”, was then hosted at the Hermitage State Museum, St. Petersburg (nearly 450,000 visitors during the Summer of 2012), and at the State Museum of Oriental Art, Moscow (Winter

2012-2013). The Hermitage Museum welcomed again, with great success, the temporary exhibition “*In the Land of Dilmun, Where the Sun Rises... Archaeological Treasures from the Bahrain National Museum (3rd-1st millennium BC)*” during the winter 2017-2018.

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Figures captions

Figure 1 *Map of the Bahrain Archipelago, with the sites mentioned in the text. The shaded areas correspond to the land reclaimed on sea since the 90s.*

Figure 2 *The exhibition held at Al-Hidaya Al-Khalifia school by the Danish Expedition in 1956.*

Figure 3 *The main entrance gate at the Bahrain National Museum (2018).*

Figure 4 *The "Hall of Dilmun Graves" (2018, after renovation).*

Figure 5 *Aerial view of the Qal'at al-Bahrain Site Museum (2008).*

Figure 6 *The Qal'at al-Bahrain Site Museum: organization schema.*

Figure 7 *The Qal'at al-Bahrain site museum: the "Tell Wall" (2018).*

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Figures

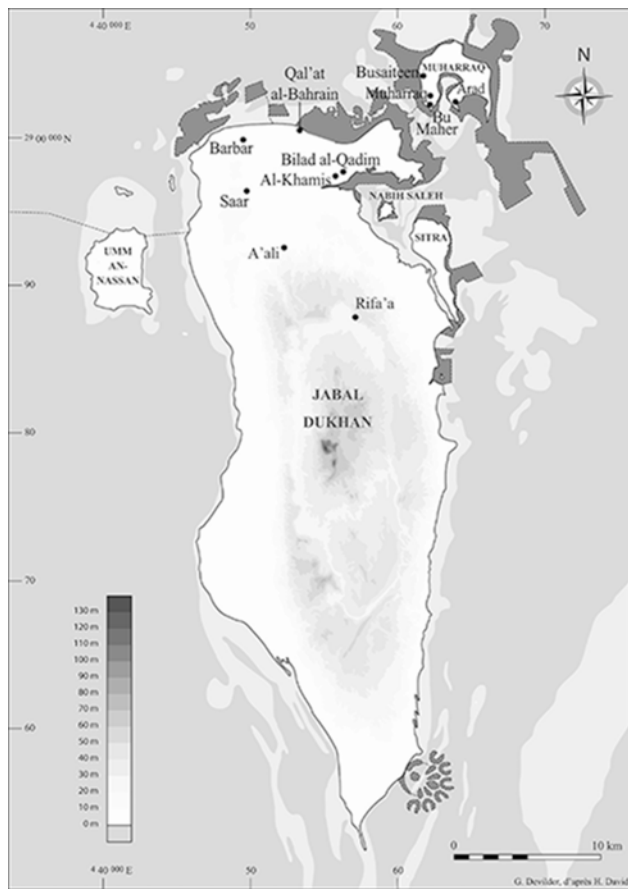


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

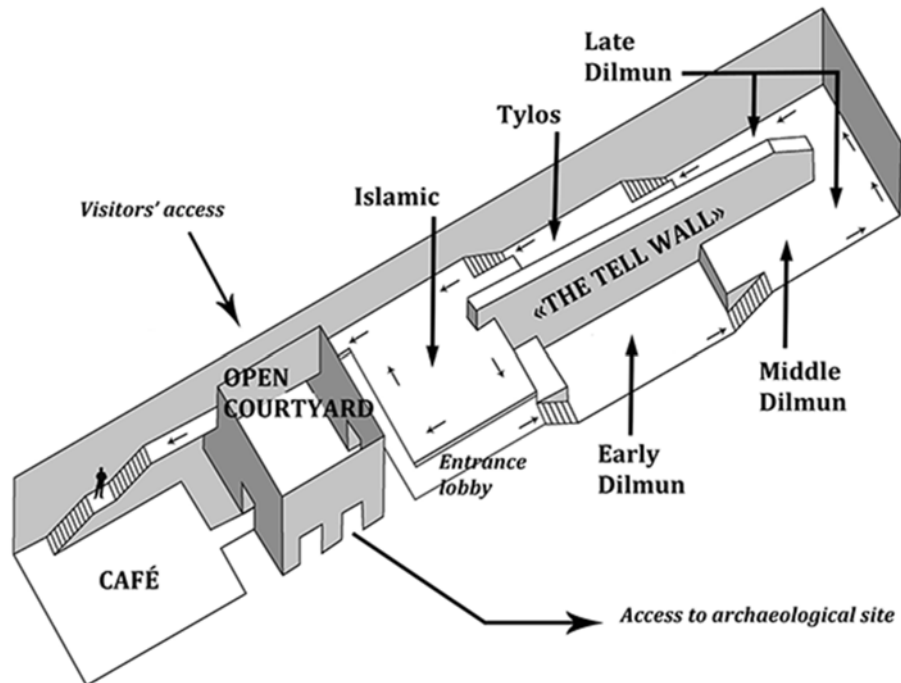


Figure 6



Figure 7