

DILMUN UNKNOWN CULTURE

Is Dilmun the praised “Paradise” ?



by Thomas Kummert

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The Dilmun Culture is an interesting part of our history. The more you start reading about it, the more fascinated you will become about this intriguing culture. There are all these diverse stories around it, plus the many important questions still not having been answered to date.

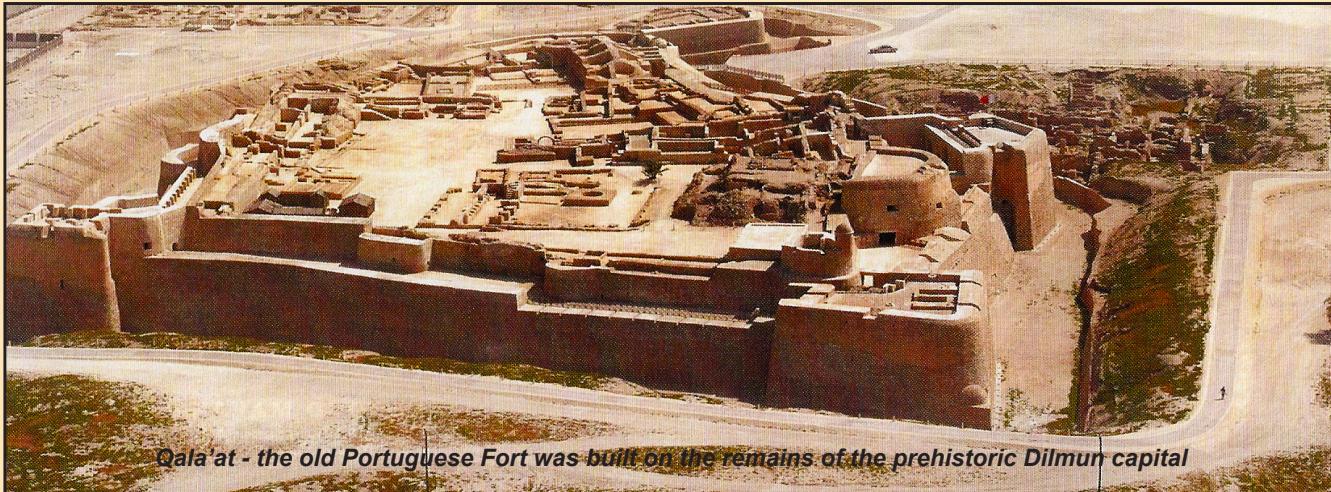
We know, that Dilmun was one of the very first highly developed cultures in the Middle East over 7,000 years ago. And experts believe, it might be the true origin of the famous Sumer Civilization, which was the starting point of the rapid cultural development in Mesopotamia influencing the whole Middle Eastern region.

First Recorded Creation Of The Earth
Still today a key question is unanswered. Where actually was the praised paradise? Some sources

point into the direction of Dilmun, but is it really possible, that this all happened in Bahrain? Why is Dilmun mentioned in the great flood story? What is it, the Dilmun myth tells us?

But let us start from the beginning to untangle these questions and through some light on to these mysteries. The Sumerian story of the creation of the world is recorded to have taken place in Dilmun, no doubt about that. But where was Dilmun really situated in our prehistory?

The key roles in this saga are those of god Enki, his virgin wife and sister Nin-sikila, who want to spend their first night in paradise. But paradise was not yet a reality. Therefore she asked him to create the necessary sweet water for the intended creation of their offspring and to change the



existing chaos to a paradise like environment with order and civilization. *they caused to dwell".*

So he created the sweet water wells in Dilmun, which were the basis for the unification of water and earth to create life and so it happened. God Enki thereafter went from Dilmun to Sumer land between Euphrates and Tigris embodied as a snake. So his children were installed as city gods across the Sumer lands. They received from him distinct tasks and responsibilities to serve their cities and people. This is the summary of the Sumer creation saga.

Interesting First World Flood Story

But the story telling does not end here. Now comes another interesting part. Most forgot, or are not aware, that there are actually three different written "biblical" type flood stories. These texts are all very similar and the first two are surprisingly over 3,000 years older than the biblical story of Noah's ark saving all animals on earth.

The oldest version was recorded already in written form in cuneiform text on clay tablets and excavated at the main Sumerian Enlil Temple in the ancient city of Nippur. An exert and translation of the ancient text reads:

"Anu and Enlil (both gods) cherished Ziusudra (the ark builder and flood survivor), life like a god they give him, breath eternal like a god they bring down for him, Ziusudra the king, the preserver of the name of vegetation and of the seed of mankind, in the land of crossing (crossing meaning the Gulf waters), the land of Dilmun, the place where the sun rises,

Famous Gilgamesh Epos

The second version is the well known epos of Gilgamesh the heroic Assyrian king, who ruled in Uruk from 2,652 - 2,602 BC and these texts were excavated as part of king Assurbanipal's library. In the first flood story the flood survivor became immortal and was directed by god Enki to settle in Dilmun, the land of paradise and immortality.

And this is where he was visited 1,000 years later by our hero Gilgamesh, who was searching for immortality. But Gilgamesh called the ark builder and flood survivor differently Utu-nipishtim.

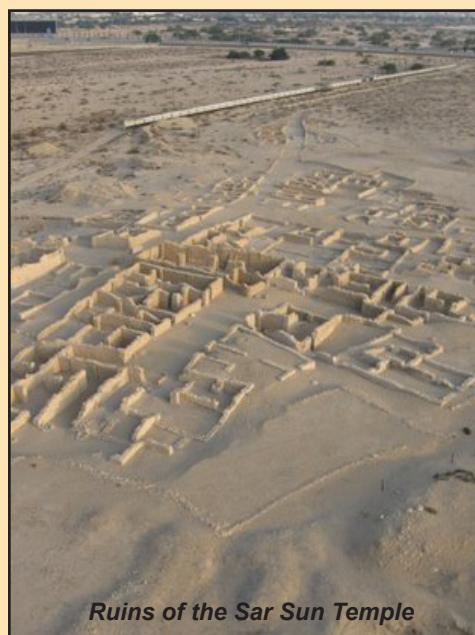
Important Maritime Trade

Looking at the proven archaeological facts, Dilmun dominated the sea route trade between Mesopotamia and the ancient Meluhhan Empire in the Indus Valley for over 2,000 years. In antiquity Bahrain was a lush garden island with many natural

sweet water springs and no wild carnivores such as lions and hyenas, which were roaming the Arabian Peninsula at the time.

Bahrain was then called Niduk-ki in Akkad language and Tilvun or Tilmun in Assyrian scripts. From those reports we have to assume, that the Dilmun Civilization was more sophisticated, than is apparent from the rather limited archaeological corpus discovered to date.

We know that Dilmun people had a good knowledge of



astronomy, the necessary basis for their high level nautical navigation skills, plus a developed complex mythology, and used early on various musical instruments.

Fascinating Dilmun History

The Dilmun civilization is mainly known for its burial mound fields, still visible today in the middle of various Bahrain residential areas. Experts have counted over 170,000 mounds and calculated, that ancient Dilmun possibly had a population of up to 46,000.

The first mention in history was about 5,300 years ago in old texts from Uruk and in 2,520 BC Ur-nanshe King of Lagash had his scribes to note, that "*ships of Dilmun brought me wood as tribute*", which he needed to build a new temple and to extend his palace.

Archaeologists established that 300 years earlier the first buildings were erected in Dilmun. Around 2,400 BC Rasal Qalah was developed as a second port to handle the rising trade volumes and number of ships docking at Dilmun.

At that time the Diraz temple was also built and the town was surrounded by a defensive wall covering an area of 250 x 600 meters. Dilmun made its money as intermediary supplying the many Mesopotamian kingdoms with sought after high value goods including copper, which was coming from Makkan in Oman and was necessary for the important bronze weapon manufacturing.

As a highly successful trading empire Dilmun lasted for over 1,300 years, but slowly vanished with the collapse of its prime trading partner the important Meluhha Indus Valley Civilization.

Profitable Long Distance Trade

During the high times of Dilmun trade a total of 42 different known products were traded. Minerals for example included: copper used for weapons and diorite used for statues both from Makkan in Oman, gold from Marali an unknown area, silver from Ur, lapis lazuli from Afghanistan, carnelian from Indus Valley, crystal from Marhashi also unknown and fire stone, antimony based eye paint.

Imported timber products included: es-shagan an unknown wood from Meluhha, sea wood, ebony hard wood from Bit Yakin in Sealand Babylon and mis tree or mulberry from Oman.

Agricultural products included: grain, sesame oil from Ur, dates and honey from Dilmun, which were highly prized. Animal products included: ivory from Meluhha



Tempel excavations

in the Indus Valley, wool from Elam in Persia, Ur and Zlalmgar, animal skins from Ur and live animals from Makkan in Oman.

Products from the sea were also traded such as local pearls or fish eyes, white coral or sila and tortoise shells. Interestingly Dilmun did not trade in frankincense. Trading goods mentioned in ancient records, but not yet identified were: elligu, merahdu, arazum and hulumum.

Dilmun's Foreign Trading Colonies

To facilitate smooth trading relations and operations Dilmun traders established trading posts or colonies in Ur and Drehem both modern-day Iraq, Mari and Abla in Syria, Tarut Island in Saudi Arabia, Failaka Island in Kuwait, Makkan or Magan in Oman, Tepe Yahya or Kerman in Iran, Bampay in Baluchistan, Lothal and Mohenjo Daro in the Indus Valley. Both Makkan and Meluhha being the most important sources of goods.

Makkan was the sole source of copper, and ancient reports mention, that before 2,000 BC Makkan ships were used transporting copper, thereafter copper was shipped entirely by Dilmun.

Another historic source records, that Makkan produced chairs and Meluhha tables. At a later



Sar Temple details

stage Dilmun traded with Egypt scarabs found at Dilmun are dated 1,500 - 1,400 BC. An interesting report details some goods shipped back to Dilmun. Mentioned are 60 talents of wool, 70 garments, 180 skins and six kur, a weight or volume measure for sesame oil.

Informative Clay Tablets

Other ancient clay tablets dated between 1,813 - 1,790 BC are referring to a Dilmun copper shipment of 18.5 tons arriving in Ur, which were handled by a broker for delivery to other Ur traders. This attests two facts, firstly, that there were ancient Dilmun trade colonies and secondly, that ships at the time were able to carry a load of up to 20 tons.

The first ships were built of reed with lashings around reed bundles with bow and stern pointing upside. This ship type was depicted on seals. Some time later wooden double ended ships with greater freeboard were built for higher loads.

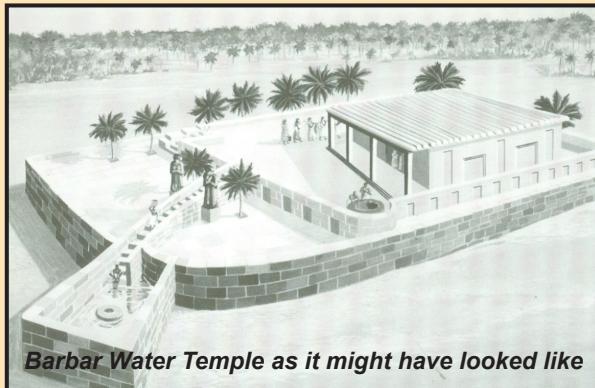
These featured a mast and aft steering oars and an animal head on the bow, a form which was again depicted on seals. A second version of wooden crafted ship had the same high double ended bow and stern as the initial reed boats.

Famous Dilmun Seals

A highly interesting and informative subject of ancient Dilmun research is providing the fascinating variety of detailed trade seals. These seals were used by ancient traders early on about 5,000 years ago to mark ownership and provenance of goods.

In total of over 1,250 Dilmun

seals were found to date across the Dilmun trading area, with the majority discovered in Failaka



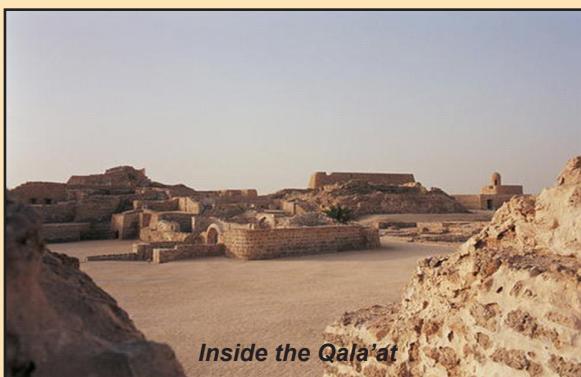
Barbar Water Temple as it might have looked like

Island and Bahrain. Seals found further away include numerous discoveries in Mesopotamia, Indus Valley at Mohenjo Daro and Elam.

For example 13 typical Dilmun seals were unearthed in Ur, they were different to Ur seals, which were all cylinder roll seals.

In a seal workshop found in Bahrain round domed stamp seals with diameter of two to three centimeters were discovered and steatite soap stone seals with a hole for a neck chain. These seals were low or high embossed and the dome seals featured three incised decor lines plus four circles with a central dot, which is a typical sun god symbol.

Some seals were double sided and others had cuneiform inscriptions.



Inside the Qala'at

A few seals were inscribed with Indus Valley originating letters, but these were a different form of seal.

Dilmun seals found in Bahrain are depicting sun symbols, men and animals, human faces, plus a star symbol. Seals found on Failaka Island have four dotted circles and three grooves and are depicting a woman playing a harp and a harp with a bull head. The bull certainly was a Sumerian deity symbol.

Interesting Seal Study

The results of a seal study show that in total 73 symbols were used. A high number of seals carry the sun symbol, linked to love goddess Inanna. Animals depicted on seals include: fish, bull, sea bird, snake, frog, goat, gazelle, scorpion and monkey which was a non local animal and symbol imported from Indus Valley.

Snakes and gazelle were most used on seals, as they have a religious importance. The snake has an immortal connotation (ref. Gilgamesh epos and "snake bowls"), the gazelle is linked to Love Goddess Inanna.

But the bull is the key animal in the Dilmun Culture, as it is the only one sculptured in bronze and used for ceremonial purposes. The bull head and sculpture found at the Barbar Temple site in Bahrain,

link the bull to Love Goddess Inanna, Sun God Utu, as well as Moon God Nanna.

Complex Seal Inscriptions

Inscriptions on seals used four different script systems, the Mesopotamian cuneiform, the Indus Valley type inscriptions, the Sumerian pictographic ideograms, and the Dilmun "reconstructed" writing. Over 700 seals with religious or mythological messages were created in a rather artistic style with over 100 different Sumer pictograms found



on Dilmun seals.

Experts established, that Goddess Inanna was written in 52 different styles to express her different roles and meanings using compound words with up to five words. These included nine single words, 16 compounds words, out of which four were compounds with three words and six were compounds with four words.

Sun God Utu had 53 different styles to show his pictogram or better ideogram. This attests a highly developed culture with complex pantheon and sophisticated rituals expressed in those seals. They are seeking divine protection for profitable trades and save transport.

First Weights

Next to communication for traders it was important to standardize the weight system they used in their transactions. Archaeologists were lucky to have unearthed during their excavations at the Dilmun capital Qala'at in Bahrain various weights.

Converted to our modern-day system based on kilograms, these weights were: 1,370gr, 685gr, 170gr, 27gr, 13.5gr and 1.7gr, all being equal to 1/2, 1/8, 1/15, 1/100 and 1/800 of a kilogram.

The big surprise was, that Dilmun weights were equal to the Harappa weight system from the Indus Valley.

But Sumerian and Babylonian weights were different we know from the thousands of cuneiform tablet records. One Ur talent was divided into 60 minas and one Ur mina was equal to 504gr, but compared to Dilmun one mina represented 1,370gr.

This is an interesting fact supporting the theory, that Dilmun people originated in the Indus Valley and moved with the river reed boats along the cost to first settle in Bahrain. And from there a part of their population founded Sumer, a fact, which is supported by the Sumer creation storey.

But how did Dilmun traders performed their trading arithmetic's? They calculated with the help of square boxes, as depicted on their seals. Seven different boxes were enough for trade purposes, and this kind of simple abacus allowed Dilmun traders to calculate up to the number 78,124.

Naked Dilmun Soldiers

All ancient civilizations knew, that wide ranging and high volume

trading interests and related income needed to be protected and defended, not different for Dilmun. In 705 BC it is reported by Assyria, that Dilmun soldiers assisted king Sennacherib to destroy Babylon.

Dilmun soldiers were depicted naked, with no similarity to any other cultures, but possibly this was linked to the hero status, as heros were depicted fighting naked.

This hero status must have survived in history as over 1,000 years later Greek sports men as Olympic games precursor also were competing naked. Dilmun soldiers were also reported to be dancing.

But the military side of Dilmun culture has not yet been researched, it is only known that 30 different weapon types were used as depicted on seals. These types of weapons include: daggers, two types of swords, either fully curved, or only upper portion curved, five types of spears, five forms of shields from small to very large, harpoons and bows and arrows.

Bronze arrow and spear heads were cast in mass production very early on as the necessary

copper was available from Makkan.

Great Dilmun Capital

Qala'at is the ancient Dilmun capital in Bahrain with a natural port. During the main period about 2,300 BC the city extended to 40 acres. Today's ruin mound is about 12 meters high and measures 600 by 300 meters with eight occupational levels and four cities built on top of each other until 600 BC.

After the first early settlement, a first village was established around 2,800 BC at this stage without any protective walls. But 500 years later this settlement burnt down and potsherds are similar to the Umm an-Nar Culture close to modern-day Abu Dhabi.

The second re-building happened around 2,300 BC with the first city wall and this was called the Barbar Temple period. The occupation during the Babylonian Kassite Period between 1,750 - 1,200 BC was identified by the typical brownish pottery ware.

Unique is the huge width of the



street at this time with over ten meters. This occupation ended in 1,190 BC with the renewed destruction and burnt down of the Dilmun capital.

The next step was a proven Neo-Babylonian Period until 330 BC followed by reconstruction after 300 BC, when Dilmun became independent again during the Seleucid Period in Mesopotamia. The final phases are attested by an Islamic Fort and the today still visible remains of a Portuguese Fort.

The Fort Built On Dilmun

The Qala'at ancient buildings comprise of residential, military, public, commercial and religious structures. The city wall was made

of limestone blocks with extensions added during the Barbar period and full reconstruction during the Kassite Period.

Three city gates regulated access with the main sea facing gate being three meters wide for goods transport. Behind this gate a small square with well and customs house was situated. Here all the weights were found.

Various City Palaces

The city contained two palaces next to each other with separate entrances. The first palace featured a main hall measuring nine by nine meters with two pillars and two double winged doors on opposite sides. The single winged wooden entrance gate was only 1.2 meters wide, but 2.7 meters high.

The palace had two floors and the outside walls were five meters high. The second palace again had an entrance hall and a chapel with altar similar to major Ur houses dated around 1,800 BC.



Qala'at internal view - Portuguese Fort built on old Dilmun capital in Bahrain



Water Temple



Desert Temple excavations

Both palaces had at least three toilets, which is an indication of the high level of quality furnishings at the time. Interesting is the burial discovery with six bath tub type sarcophagi found under the floor of first palace main hall.

All sarcophagi were earth ware, either rounded or square edged with skeletons laid to rest in embryo position, and were dated to the Neo-Babylonian Period. One male burial was untouched equipped with an iron dagger dated 650 BC, plus an agate seal found around his neck depicting a standing man before a tree plus a winged sun above.

This burial also included a bronze drinking set consisting of: flat shallow bowl, deep vase with hinged bucket handles, tea strainer with animal head handle, little dipper, deep ladle with long handle hinged to top of bowl, plus glazed pottery deep vessel wine

jar with a pointed base.

Below the East Palace an older building of Kassite origin with walls double as thick was excavated. The layout consisted of a long narrow courtyard with five rooms on each side with two store rooms for dates. The building burnt down about 1,180 BC.

Barbar Water Temple

The Barbar Temple is a rather interesting structure and has a different layout, than other temples dated around 2,500 - 1,800 BC. It was simply named after the adjacent modern-day Bahraini village.

The temple was re-built and extended three times in short time span during the so-called Barbar Culture. The unique layout includes a central circular structure with a platform with three major items discovered here including two plinths, a bench and altar.

The small round plinths area assumed to have carried twin statues. The small bench is situated in front of the cubical stone altar with square hollow plus stone with round hollow. Any draining liquid was supposed to disappear via an open hole in the perimeter wall.

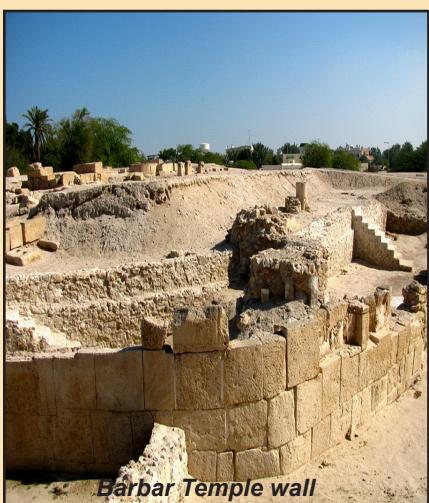
A square pit in the courtyard was framed by standing stone slabs and its purpose was to deposit

offerings. The central courtyard featured three stones, one bearing a naturalistic bull head being a typical deity symbol.

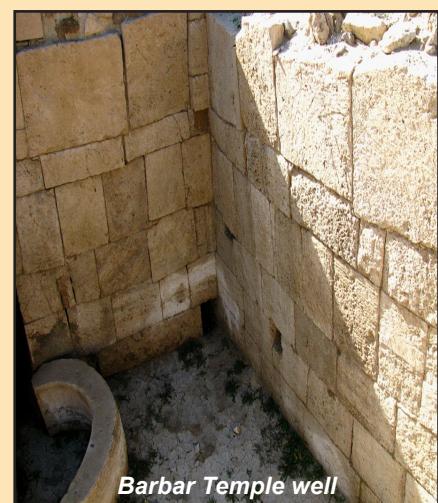
The same type of temple set up and offerings found on many Mesopotamian cylinder seals. Showing a god seated on a bench in front of an altar and worshippers arriving on the other side of the altar, pouring libations like wine, beer, milk, blood in the hollow space. And thereafter standing praying with their hands clasped in front of their chests.

The Barbar Temple was possibly the sweet water well mentioned in god Enki and Nin-sikila Sumer creation saga taking place in Dilmun. This is supported by the discovered of a holy spring with a rectangular stone chamber built over it and ceremonial steps leading down to the water level.

Underground tunnels were



Barbar Temple wall



Barbar Temple well

directing water to agricultural fields via qanats and the Barbar priests possibly distributed water to land owners. A rather interesting item found at this spring was a bronze bull mask attesting again the divine purpose of the spring and possibly later construction of the temple around it.

From items found in the offering pit, interesting conclusions can be drawn. These items included: potsherds, lapis lazuli beads, alabaster vases, bird copper figurine, copper statuette of a naked man standing praying. Many similar statuettes have been found in Mesopotamia, mainly made of stone or terracotta, which were only found at temples.

Other items found at the Barbar Temple include many twisted copper sheets with row of nail holes and hundreds of copper nails assumed to have covered a holy object, as copper was rare and expensive at the time.

The pottery finds include lots of uniform thin red pottery ware decorated with low horizontal ridges, globular form, plus round bottomed pots between 30 to 45 centimeters high with neckless or broadened rims. The Dilmun pottery is called "Barbar Ware", as it was first found at the Barbar Temple.

It is typically found in all burial

mounds and consists of egg-shaped, necked and ridged vessels made of the typical red clay. Another typical form is the high bag shaped vessel with a cylindrical rifled neck.

Water From Fossil Aquifers

The sweet water natural springs were certainly the main reason of the existence, creation and growth of the Dilmun civilization. 36 natural springs have been recorded in Bahrain, 15 on land and 21 today submerged. Most springs suffered from reduced water flows, since 1930 the oil production began changing the geological situation underground.

Springs finally dried up in 1990 due to excessive borehole drilling. The Bahraini springs were supplied by the Dammam Aquifer, which splits in Bahrain in the Khobar and Alat Aquifers. They are part of four huge interconnected aquifers named Aruma, Umm er-Radhuma, Dammam and Neogen.

They are part of the worlds biggest aquifer system situated on different underground levels underneath the Arabian Peninsula with a valuable fossil water reserve over 25,000 years old. The high mineral content of 2.5 to 3.5 gram per liter is still under the limit making it fit for human consumption.

This water also has a high level of fluoride, which leads to teeth coloring problems and more

seriously to osteosklerose. This can be seen in ancient Dilmun skeletons, which show several lower backbones grown together.

But a fact few people know is , that the underwater springs with its sweet water being released, are reason for high quality pearls found close to these springs. And here lies the true reason for Gilgamesh's trip to Bahrain to find immortality with finding the "flower of life".

Dilmun Snake Bowls

The numerous ceramic "snake bowls" represent a Dilmun specific ritual only found here. Snake burials were unearthed in various rooms of major Dilmun houses and over 40 "snake bowls" were so far excavated in Qala'at. Alone twelve "snake bowls" were found below the floor right next to one of the bath tub terracotta human sarcophagi.

This ritual had various forms including: "snake bowls" lidded with inverted bowls, or covered with large potsherds, or sealed tight with gypsum. Most "snake bowls" were empty and only ten "snake bowls" contained entire snake skeletons or loose snake bones.

Next to snakes other items were added, such as beads made of turquoise, agate, amethyst or faience. It can be assumed that snakes were buried with pearls



for eternal life and as guardian of the dead. But pearls disintegrated over time, therefore only one pearl was recovered. The Snake-Pearl Cult is an important part of the Dilmun Myth of the praised paradise and immortality.

Burial Mounds

Burial mounds were not new on the Arabian Peninsula, as they were already used by Neolithic inhabitants in the northern part. But the Dilmun mounds are quite different as we will see.

Archaeologists excavated and studied over 300 burial mounds in Bahrain and some also in Dhahran. They established, that they were built in advance before the death of a mound owner and by a team of experts burial mound builders like in Egypt.

They started with a long ring wall with a diameter of four to nine meters and heights of one to two meters and a central stone crypt was situated under burial mound. Huge mounds could reach up to three floors as seen close to village of Ali in Bahrain.

Most burial chambers were east-west orientated with a western entrance for the later burial. The majority of burial chambers are "T" shape formed by two side alcoves. But not all chamber had alcoves and some had two pairs of alcoves at each end of chamber.

Some burial chambers were "double deckers" with a second chamber built on top. The sorry part is, that all tombs have been robbed in antiquity, therefore only potsherds

were found with pottery pieces belonging to same bowl or jar were found inside and outside

But Qatar tumuli are not part of the Dilmun Culture, they have a different chamber shape and mound construction technique, and no grave gifts were added here. The Umm an-Nar Culture mounds are actually not mounds, but collapsed round funerary buildings, similar to the Hilli Culture in the al-Ain Oasis half way to Makkah.

picture	meaning	picture	meaning	picture	meaning	picture	meaning
	temple		in-store		scrubbt		gazellet
	sherad		freind		air		mountain
	star		net		spear		orchard
	sun		field		bow		ruin
	city wall		belong		stake		plant
	rope		Dilmun		temple		male sex
	open		lyre		beyond over		jar
	LAND field		pipe		bundle		female
	war mace		good sweet		brought		in
	date tree branch		moon		wood		wheat stalk
	female		open down		boat		heart

the mound as clear indication, that burial mounds had been disturbed.

Ancient burial furnishings included: pottery, ivory objects, seals, copper weapons and baskets sealed with bitumen. Burial mounds are found across the southwestern Gulf Coast in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates and Qatar. The Kuwaiti and Yabrin (Saudi Arabia) burial mounds are all from the Dilmun Culture. It is interesting to note, that three burial mounds in Bahrain

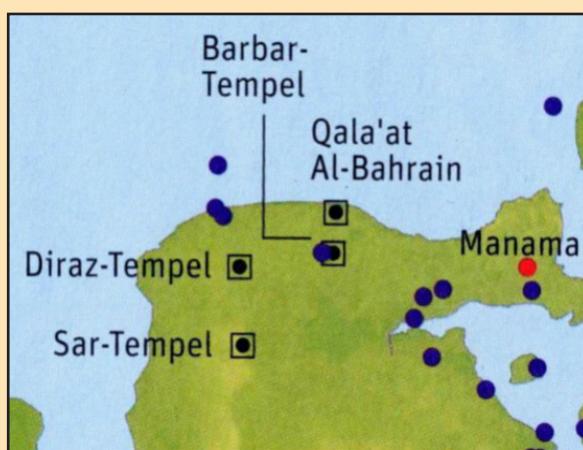
then moved to the bigger Bahrain Island, because more space was needed for a growing population of successful traders, fishermen and farmers?

Dilmun was mentioned as prehistoric Sumerian "paradise land", but at that time where actually was Dilmun? It was also mentioned as immortal land and home of ever-living gods.

Now Dilmun being described as an island with natural springs and pearl fishing activity it could be both Tarut or Bahrain. This

leaves another question open. Where does the Ubaid early pottery culture come from? Is it possible, that Ubaid as well started on the eastern Gulf coast first?

Consider this, Ubaid pottery was found rather early all along the Gulf coast on Tarut Island, in Qatar and the coastal areas of the United Arab Emirates. Is it possible, that Ubaid pottery moved with the Dilmun Culture from Bahrain to Sumer?



contained Indus Valley Harappan pottery dated over a long period between 3,000 - 1,700 BC.