



(Left) Excavations at Qual'at al-Bahrain.
(Inset) Inside Bahrain Fort.

Alluring Antiquity

By Christina Fernandes

If the world of artefacts gets you enthused and amused, we have a special treat for you this month — the first archaeology conference on the island in 24 years!

Fans of all things ancient: get ready for an event focusing on two decades of archaeology in the kingdom. The Culture and National Heritage Sector is hosting "20 Years of Bahrain Archaeology (1986-2006)" from December 9 to 12 at the Bahrain National Museum in Manama. It will be held under the patronage of Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa and sponsored by Arcapita.

"In the past 20 years, many new discoveries have been made and results have been achieved," says Dr. Pierre Lombard, the scientific co-coordinator of the conference as well as the head of the French archaeological mission to Bahrain.

"Bahraini archaeologists as well as international teams have carried out a lot of work over the past two decades and this will be the focus of our conference, which we have been planning for several years now."

This is the first time since the 1983 "Bahrain Through the Ages" conference that scholars and experts have the opportunity to discuss the most recent developments in the fields of archaeology and history in the kingdom.

"It's a very important event for Bahrain,"

says Melissa Enders-Bhatia, the organisational coordinator for the conference. "The government has been very active in its policy of promoting Bahrain's rich heritage and the conference is partially a result of this drive."

Academics from far and wide will flock to the island to engage in dialogues, attend presentations and learn from each other. "We will cover as many aspects as possible," says Dr. Lombard.

"There will be about 25 speakers who are experts in their fields and who also have a strong link to Bahrain — meaning they have either excavated here or carried out research," says Enders-Bhatia. "We specifically ask them to present something new that hasn't been presented or published previously."

Participants will come to Bahrain from numerous countries around the globe.

"Most attendees are archaeologists, but there will also be some other individuals with an expertise in Bahrain's history. For example one specialist on the Portuguese period is attending," says Dr. Lombard. "We will also have three specialists from GCC countries outside of Bahrain to talk about

their excavations in those countries of material closely related to the kingdom."

But the conference will not be all talk. "There will also be two site visits, one to Qual'at al-Bahrain [Bahrain Fort] and one to Saar," says Dr. Lombard. "Not only panel discussions and presentations are important; small talk over coffee breaks and in the halls is just as critical."

To round off the conference, all papers will be collected in a publication to be completed within a year or so. This collection of knowledge as well as the opening of the new site museum at Bahrain Fort will provide a wealth of information for archaeologists and anyone else interested in Bahrain's history.

"It is absolutely fantastic that the National Museum and the Sector of Culture and National Heritage are sponsoring such a meeting," says Dr. Rob Carter, a British archaeologist from UCL, who has excavated in Saar and who will be presenting a paper on the Early Dilmun site there.

"Bahrain is extremely rich in history and archaeology, and both Bahraini and foreign teams have worked hard over the last 20 years to record this heritage," he says.

"We need to get together from time to time to establish our results," adds Dr. Lombard. "All attending archaeologists have something important to say about their work, which will benefit our entire community of researchers greatly," he concludes.

For information, visit www.archaeologyconferencebh.com. ●

