



RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Features of Life in the Neolithic Sites in Saudi Arabi's Eastren Region

Dr. Munirah Ali Saleh Alaqeel

History Department, Faculty of Arts, Dammam, Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University, Saudi Arabia.

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: Oct 19, 2024 Accepted: Dec 14, 2024	This study investigates human settlement and societal characteristics in Eastern Arabia during the Neolithic Age, with particular emphasis on the Ubaid period (6500–3800 BCE). Archaeological evidence from key sites, including Tarut Island, Al-Dosariyah, and Ain Qannas, reveals a flourishing civilization with strong ties to southern Iraq. Different aspects of Ubaid society are presented in this paper through an analysis of pottery, tools, and architectural ruins. It demonstrates the great connectivity of the eastern Arabian Peninsula with an ancient civilization of southern Iraq and makes this area one of the most outstanding centers of cultural and civilizational exchange within the region. Therefore, the definitive questions that this research has tried to answer about Ubaid civilization: about roots and cultural affiliation, was civilization originally from Saudi Arabia's Eastern Province or under the strong impact of the civilizations of ancient Iraq? This paper describes the economic activities during the Ubaid Period. Because scholars have different views about the issue, Ubaid civilization has become a primary focus in the region.
<b>Keywords</b>	
Al-Ubaid Eastern Region Tarut Al-Dosariyah Southern Iraq	
<b>*Corresponding Author:</b> maaqeel@iau.edu.sa	

## INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Region is among the five geographic regions of Saudi Arabia. In the past, many names were ascribed to it; some of them are Al-Ahsa, after its largest city, which is Al-Ahsa. Scholars have argued that there is some confusion concerning the etymology of this name and the area it covers. However, it is generally agreed that the name refers to the coastal region extending from Basra to Oman, an area previously known as "Bahrain" and "Hajar." At times, this designation is narrowly applied to the eastern portion of Najd, which includes both Al-Ahsa and Qatif (Al-Khudairi, 2007, p. 161).

The Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia. Historically, it has been referred to by several names, one of which is that of Al-Ahsa, its most important city. Among historians, there is some dispute regarding the exact origin of this name and the exact area that went under it. The consensus, however, holds that it refers to the coastal area from Basra down to Oman the area previously referred to as "Bahrain" and "Hajar." Sometimes, this term is used more narrowly to refer to the eastern part of Najd, which means Al-Ahsa and Qatif alike (Al-Khudairi, 2007, p. 161).

Like other regions of the Arabian Peninsula, the Eastern Region, for instance, has had a kaleidoscope of civilizations starting from the Stone Age civilization, Iron Age civilization, Dilmun civilization,

Parthian Empire, and Islamic Saudia civilization. Hunting amenities and accessories, diverse flint implements, and purely cultural artifacts such as clay cooking pots have been excavated and unearthed, attesting to the fact that there was human settlement in this area during the Neolithic age. One such example is Ubaid civilization, where many of its artifacts have been found in some places, namely Tarutf Island in Saudi Arabia, the Yabrin Oasis in Saudi Arabia, the Al-Dosariyah site again in Saudi Arabia, and the Ain Qannas, which is in Iraq. These areas are replete with relics of early human settlements and play a significant role in the explanation of human settlements and high-density populations during the pre-historic period, including the Neolithic period, according to Al-Khudairi (2007, p. 165).

### **The Ubaid Civilization: Early Development and Cultural Connections in the Near East**

Ubaid civilization is considered an extension of the Neolithic period in the Eastern Region. After the location of Tell al-Ubaid in the lower reaches of the country, Iraq, roughly more than 6. Approximately 5 km west of the modern city of Ur in southern Iraq (Kaple, Holger, 1973, Vol. XII, pp. 59–60). Towards the later part of the seventh millennium B.C., the Ubaid culture commenced development and was anchored in southern Iraq (Ashour, 2022, pp. 51-79). The centers of civilization included several regions of the Near East and regions within the Arabian Gulf. Ubaid civilization thus defines the period that many historians refer to as prehistoric but the start of history. This was first evident in southern Mesopotamia and was only later revealed in Iran and the Arabian Peninsula.

Ubaid civilization marks the transitional period between the Neolithic era and the dawn of history. It was first identified in southern Mesopotamia and later discovered in Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. With increased archaeological excavations in the Eastern Region, some historians and archaeologists have raised doubts about attributing this civilization solely to the inhabitants of southern Iraq (Al-Khudairi, 2007, pp. 165-166).



**Plate (1): Archival Image of Tarut Castle during Archaeological Excavations.**

Source: Al-Khudairi, *Encyclopedia of Saudi Arabia*, Vol. 8. Eastern Region, Saudi Arabia, 2007, p. 166.

Scholars believe that Ubaid culture existed in the area between 6500 and 3800 B.C. and have subdivided these periods into four stages. The first phase, Ubaid I (5300–5080 B.C.), is called the Eridu phase because of the pottery found in the Eridu area. Ubaid II (5080–4340 B.C.) is represented by Al-Hajji Muhammad pottery, whereas Ubaid III (4300–3900 B.C.) is characterized by pottery from the Ubaid core area. Finally, Ubaid IV (3900–3500 B.C.) is referred to as "Late Ubaid" (Yacoub, 2004, pp. 6-21).

During this part of development, early Ubaid civilization started developing large agricultural habitation areas and advanced water control systems. It was a cultural entity that reached many regions of the ancient Near East, encompassing the Arabian Peninsula, Arabian Gulf coast, southwestern Iran, Southwestern Turkey and Northern Syria. One of the most distinctive features of

the Ubaid civilization is its painted pottery (Plate 2), which is decorated with a variety of ornamental patterns (Ashour, 2022, pp. 51-79).

We were able to identify the earliest evidence of the Ubaid culture within the Tarut Castle during our archaeological digging and found pottery and other artifacts right at the foundations of the site (Plate 1). These findings point to the fact that the ubaid culture might have started in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia and was not only a Mesopotamian culture that had spread to the south of Iraq, courtesy of traders' interactions.



**Plate (2): One of the Painted Pottery Styles from the Ubaid Civilization.**

**Source:** *Encyclopedia of Archaeology*, accessed by the researcher on July 28, 2024.

<https://archeologie.culture.gouv.fr/tell-feres/ar/alzahrt-albydyt>

## **2. Human Settlement during the Ubaid Period in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia:**

The excavations that have been carried out in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia have revealed that there is no sign of inhabitation by Paleolithic or Mesolithic people. Scholars have noted that the time range that belongs to the Ubaid culture is between 6500 and 3800 B.C. and can be subdivided into four stages. The first phase is Ubaid I (5300–5080 B.C.). These are also referred to as the Eridu phase because of the types of pottery discovered in the Eridu region. Al-Hajji Muhammad pottery is considered Ubaid II, which occurred between 5080 and 4340 B.C. Ubaid III is shown with Ubaid pottery from the core region dated between 4300-3900 B.C. The last stage is Late Ubaid, or Ubaid IV, which occurred between 3900 and 3500 B.C.

During this period, Ubaid began building large agricultural towns in the desert, together with complicated irrigation networks. Its cultural influence extended to almost all areas of the ancient Near East, such as the entire Arabian Peninsula, coast of the Arabian Gulf, southwestern Iran, southwestern Turkey, and northern Syria. In fact, one of the most distinctive features of Ubaid civilization is its painted pottery, which bears different ornamental patterns.

Before the 4th millennium B.C., people who inhabited the Eastern Region were nomadic groups inhabiting tiny shelters. Owing to changes in climate, some groups had to move closer to the coast and highland areas for rainfall exploitation. As a result, settlements were made permanently during the 3rd and 2nd millennia B.C. The early homes were made with reed huts, and with time, men used stones to build homes for their growing populations. The use of these houses ranged from mounded areas to actual stone houses that looked like traps. Further, tombs were made on hills or platforms, which could be considered as the first signs of early Iron Age burial (Ashour, 2022, pp. 51-79).

Thus, there are early ancient populations in the Eastern Region that began to appear as villages and settlements from the 3rd millennium B.C. due to an increase in population through water

management, the development of pottery, and housing construction. These developments, which occurred after the Neolithic revolution, helped in the formation of a more well-knit civilization in the region (Potts, 2001, pp. 28–29).

## 2.1 Ubaid Human Settlement Sites considering Archaeological Findings

Excavation undertaken in the Eastern Region by the Danish expedition under the Saudi Antiquities and Museums Authority, and later by Abdullah Masri in 1969, succeeded in unearthing about 40 Ubaid periods occupying settlement sites. This is through the abundant finds of pottery vessels, stone tools associated with shells, and bone fragments as remnants or remains. These include Tarout Island, Al-Dosariyah Ain Qannas, and the Yabrin Oasis.

## METHODOLOGY

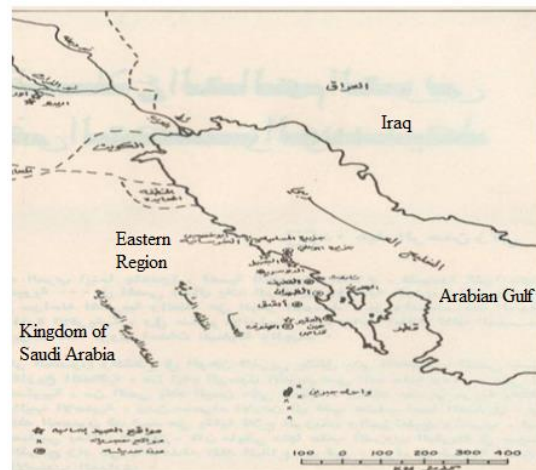
This paper uses historical-archaeological research methods to investigate the Neolithic craft antecedent and social dynamics of craft activities in the Eastern Region of KSA, especially in the context of the Ubaid culture. Analyzing the site data from the recent archaeological investigations of Tarout Island, Al-Dosariyah, and Ain Qannas, as well as the pottery and tools, the study examines the settlement patterns, economic subsistence strategies, and cultural interaction with southern Iraq. These observations are substantiated by a review of existing literature that contrasts Eastern Arabian archaeological findings with other Ubaid sites to emphasize the area's significance for early trade and cultural exchange. Excavation records are not fully documented, indicating the worthiness of conducting more advanced archaeological studies to discover the advancement of this part of the Neolithic period.

## Study Questions

- What evidence suggests that the Ubaid civilization had cultural and trade connections with Southern Iraq?
- How did the Ubaid people in Eastern Arabia engage in economic activities?
- What are the main archaeological sites associated with the Ubaid civilization in the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia?
- What role did pottery play in the Ubaid civilization of Eastern Arabia?
- What were the burial practices of the Ubaid people in the Eastern Region?

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings provide proof of human settlement.



**Map (1) illustrates the human settlement sites in the Eastern Region during the Ubaid period.**

**Source:** Masry, Abdullah Hassan, *The Effects of Eastern Arabia and Its Role in the Emergence of the Sumer Civilization*, Ministry of Antiquities, Saudi Arabia, 1980, pp. 66-75.



## Tarut Island

Tarut Island, in the Qatif Governorate, was assumed by historians to be more than five thousand years old, dating back to the Neolithic Age, and is considered one of the most ancient sites for human settlement in the Eastern Region, proving that settlement on Tarut Island dates back to the Ubaid II period, 4300–4000 BC, with some archaeological excavations in the area, especially in the castle. The major discoveries in archaeology were a cluster of mud-brick houses (Panel 3) made from clay and gypsum. (Alqanbita & Al-Sheikh, 2023, p. 9.)

Furthermore, scholars uncovered pure gold objects belonging to Ishtar or Astarte and several statues, the most significant being The Worshipping Servant, which reflects the characteristics of the Sumerians. The statue depicts a naked man, 94 cm tall (Panel 4). Furthermore, in this season, excavations revealed copper and pottery vessels, along with some traditional weapons (Al-Hammad, 2014, p. 26). Moreover, excavations have also revealed evidence of previous settlements dated to five millennia B.C., which were the oldest among the remains unearthed. These findings are considered the oldest archaeological evidence uncovered in the Eastern Province, which testifies to permanent human settlement during the Ubaid period (Alqanbita & Al-Sheikh, 2023, p. 9).



**Plate (3) illustrates a model of one of the mud-brick buildings on Tarut Island.**



**Plate (4) The statue of the worshipping servant - Tarut Island.**

**Source :**Alqanbita, Mohamed & Al-Sheikh, Abdul Rahman, *Tarot history*, Al-Yamamah Magazine, No. 2762, Saudi Arabia, 2023, PP.10-12.

## B. Yabrin Oasis and Ain al-Saih

The Yabrin Oasis is known as one of the most important human settlements in the Eastern Region and has gained popularity due to its ancient history. In general, the oasis and its surroundings were the targets of archaeological excavations where many settlements were found. Approximately 66 settlements were found at Site 1, proving that the first humans appeared in the Yabrin Oasis during the Ubaid period.

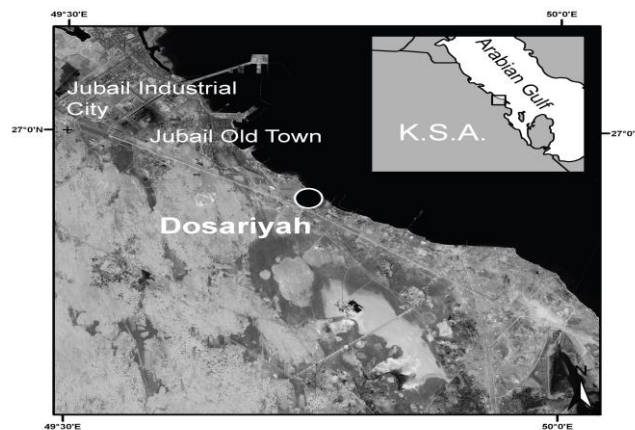
In addition, there were different artifacts from the Neolithic period in Ain al-Saih; this place is especially remarkable for its flint tools (Abdel Naeem 1995: p. 122). In the "Flint Dira" area, located about 25 kilometers from Yabrin Oasis, several stone tools were discovered: hand axes, hatchet-like tools, large rough scrapers, and blade-like implements were the most common. These outcomes suggest that the site was occupied during the Mousterian-Levallois industry period.

Learned from the Flint Dabtia site situated in the Yabrin area, in the south-west part of Yabrin district, several stone tools found included hand axes, hatchets, blades, as well as large scrapers. These bear close resemblance and are like those recorded in the Flint Dira area (Masry, 1974, pp. 84-90).

## C. Al-Dosariyah (Jubail)

Al-Dosariyah is on the coast of the Arabian Gulf on a sandy hill 4 m above sea level (Map 2). Nowadays, Al-Dosariyah lies 1,500 m away from the sea and 12 km from Jubail city (Al-Dawish, 2015, p. 36). Archaeological research has designated Al-Dosariyah as one of the biggest Ubaid sites; it also houses pottery in the third phase of Ubaid civilization. This site is primarily concentrated in the Eastern Region. It was initially discovered by Mrs. Burkholder in 1968, bringing the total number of Ubaid sites in Saudi Arabia's Eastern Region to 17. Al-Dosariyah is a significant Neolithic site in northeastern Arabia (Abdel Naeem, 1995, p. 309).

Systematic archaeological excavations at Al-Dosariyah began in 1972, under the leadership of Abdullah Masri. This revealed a series of strata comprising refuses. In 2010, a German mission with a Saudi team conducted further excavations at this site. It was confirmed from the excavation that this indeed represents a site dating from the sixth to early fifth millennium BCE. (Report of the German mission excavations at the Al-Dosariyah site, 2010).



**Map 2: Location of Al-Dosariyah in the Eastern Region.**

**Source: Drechsler, Philipp, " *Dosariyah Reinvestigating a Neolithic coastal community in eastern Arabia*", British Foundation for the Study of Arabia Monographs, Series editors: D. Kennet & St J. Simpson, Oxford, 2012, P.2, FIG.1.**

The site yielded over 3,000 pieces of imported black pottery from the Ubaid Period (Panel 6). Potts, as reported by Kainert and Drechsler, asserted that the site was the first archaeological site in the

Arabian Peninsula to feature Ubaid pottery. Ubaid pottery is dominant in both the Gulf and Arabian Peninsula (Kainert & Drechsler, 2014, pp. 223-224).

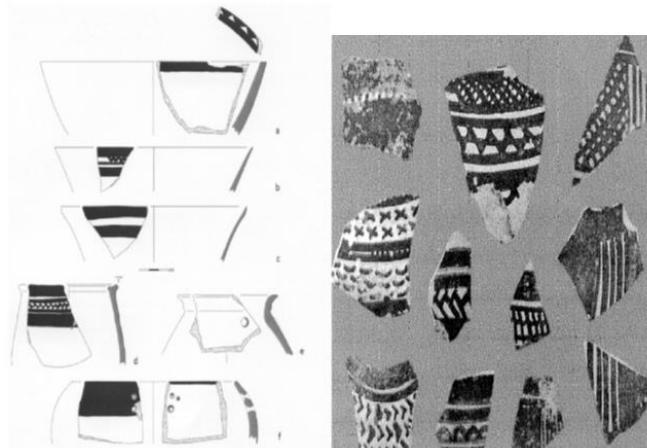


**Plate 4: Excavation work by Abdullah Masri at the Al-Dosariyah site, which was continued by the German mission.**

**Source :Drechsler, Philipp, " *Dosariyah Reinvestigating a Neolithic coastal community ineastern Arabia*", *OP.CIT*, 2012, P.5, FIG.1.4.**

Excavations in Al-Dosariyah have revealed several furnaces involved in the manufacturing and firing of local pottery. However, an examination of the pottery samples extracted from the site established that only approximately 20% of the pottery samples belonged to the local variety. This amount is too small to make it for its export since no sample of Al Dosariya pottery has been found in ancient Iraq, let alone in other areas (Drechsler, 2012, pp. 5–6). Recent excavations brought about 15,000 pieces of pottery from the Al-Dosariyah. This ceramic exhibited features and signs that are typical of the Ubaid period, such as geometrical design and ornamentation. Furthermore, spindle-like items have been discovered, which are identical to those found in the Ubaid villages of Iraq.

Artifacts unearthed at this site included scrapers, knives, arrowheads, grinding stones, polished axes, blades, and gemstone beads. This shows that the inhabitants practiced trade both internally and externally. Plaster fragments found all over the site revealed impressions of reeds, which revealed that during this period, people used reed structures (Al-Dawish, 2015, p. 36).



**Plate 6. Examples of Ubaid pottery from the Al-Dosariyah site.**

**Source:** Kainert, Christine, and Drechsler, Philipp, "An interplay of imports and local traditions? The pottery assemblage from Al-Dosariyah, Saudi Arabia", *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 44, 2014, 218. & Abdel Naeem, Muhammad, *Prehistory and Protohistory of The Arabian Peninsula, Vol. 1 (Saudi Arabia)*, India, 1995, p.310.

Al-Dosariyah exhibits clear Iraqi influences, particularly in its architecture, which features Iraqi characteristics, such as the use of reed huts and plaster and clay fragments (Drechsler, 2012, p. 10).

#### **d. The Sites of Tell Abu Khamis and Al-Kharasania**

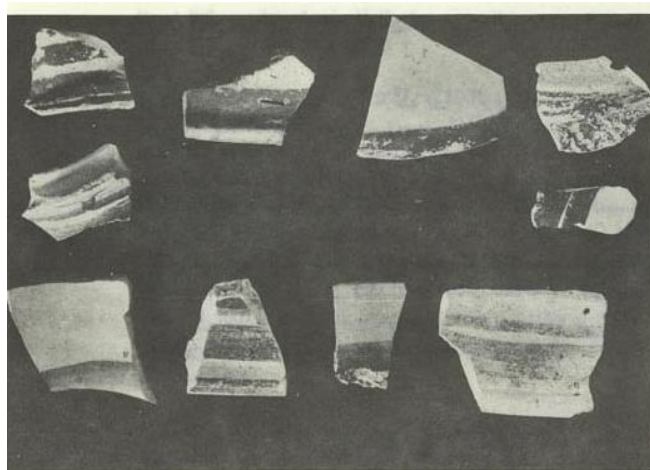
Tell Abu Khamis lies approximately 85 km north of Al-Dosariyah at an elevation of approximately 10 m. This site represents an important deposit of cultural remains, including awls, arrowheads, and pieces of Ubaid pottery, which look very similar to those from the third and fourth (late) phases of the Ubaid Period. Apart from pottery, the site has yielded pieces of plaster, fish bones, seashells, and animal bones such as those belonging to goats and sheep. The lowermost strata of the site date to the middle of the 5th millennium BCE.

The Danish expedition excavated the remains of the Ubaid pottery at the Al-Kharasania site in the third phase, along with pieces and arrowheads. The lower layers also received the same chronicle dating to the 5th millennium BCE. Among the two sites, these are partial excavations from the Ubaid period (Al-Dawish, 2015, pp. 37-38).

#### **e. The Site of Ain Qannas (Al-Marrah)**

Among such archaeological findings, they have identified a significant site near Al-Marrah Village, north of Al-Hofuf, called the Ain Qannas Site. It is also referred to as the Al-Marrah Site because it is relatively close to Al-Marrah Village. Excavations at the site were initiated by Abdullah Masry in 1972. The site includes a mound of about 3.8 m in height and 250 m in diameter; it is situated on the edge of a Sabkha (Potts, Daniel T., 2001, p. 109). Ain Qannas is the oldest Ubaid-period site in eastern Arabia and the furthest inland Ubaid site from the coast. It is situated 160 km south of the Al Dossariah site. Excavations at the site have made available different types of pottery dating back to the third phase of the Ubaid period, in addition to various flint implements.

Mrs. Burkholder discovered more than 50 pieces of Ubaid pottery with painted surfaces. In addition, many other painted fragments were found (Plate 7). There were also enormous numbers of flint implements, such as arrowheads, knives, and scrapers. Hundreds of arrowheads have been collected by casual visitors (Potts, Daniel T., 2001, p. 109). Furthermore, archaeological excavations have revealed 14 occupational layers, representing successive stages of human occupation at the site and its habitational buildings. The findings also demonstrate that its inhabitants were engaged in domesticating cattle, goats, and sheep. The houses were circular in structure and were built around a well. The date of the settlement was placed in the late 5th millennium BCE (Al-Dawish, 2015, p. 38).



**Plate 7. Collection of pottery pieces from the Ain Qannas site.**

**Source :Masry, Abdullah Hassan, "The effects of eastern Arabia and its role in the emergence of the Sumer civilization", Ministry of Antiquities, Saudi Arabia 1980, PP.66-75.**



## f. Ain Al-Saih

The Ain Al-Saih settlement in the Eastern Province is approximately 10 km south of Dhahran. Located on a small oasis dominated by palm trees, archaeological excavations at the site uncovered one of the largest settlements in eastern Saudi Arabia dating back to the Ubaid civilization era. Black-lined geometrical designs of green pottery were also found during archeological digging. The archeological findings include those of Ain Al-Saih, which are spread over a section of about 750 m in length and 1000 m in breadth; this is suggestive of ruins of a civilization. It includes defensive walls, a built-up area in the form of a square on the elevated ground towards the eastern part, and boundaries probably of the residential area with few traces of water channels and mud bases of the rooms.

As shown in the following table (Table 1), the archaeological sites in the Eastern Province provide evidence of human settlement and habitation during the Ubaid period.

**Table 1 Archaeological sites where human settlement was found in the Eastern Province, (Prepared by the researcher).**

Archaeological Site	Geographic Location	Archaeological Evidence	Dating	References
Tarut Island	Qatif, Eastern Province	A collection of mud-brick houses, gold, several copper and pottery vessels, and traditional weapons	Ubaid II (4300–4000 BCE)	Alqanbita & Al-Sheikh, 2023, p. 9
Al-Dosariyah	Arabian Gulf Coast, 12 km from Jubail, on a sandy hill elevated 4 meters	Painted pottery from Ubaid III, polished axes, and black pottery	Dated to the 6th and early 5th millennia BCE – Ubaid Civilization	Kainert & Drechsler, 2014, pp. 223–224
Tell Abu Khamees	85 km north of Al-Dosariyah, Eastern Province	Spindles, arrowheads, shards, and fragments of Ubaid pottery like Ubaid III and IV (late)	Mid-5th millennium BCE – Ubaid Civilization	Al-Dawish, 2015, pp. 37–38
Al-Khurasaniyah	Eastern Province	Fragments of Ubaid pottery	5th millennium BCE – Ubaid Civilization	Al-Dawish, 2015, pp. 37–38
Ain Al-Saih	South of Dhahran, Eastern Province	Green pottery with geometric designs in black lines, defensive structure	Neolithic period – Ubaid Civilization	Al-Dawish, 2015, p. 39
Ain Qannas (Al-Marrah)	Al-Marrah village, north of Al-Hofuf, Eastern Province	Pottery from Ubaid III, flint tools, arrowheads, shards, and knives	Neolithic period – Ubaid III	Masry, 1980, pp. 66–75
Yabrin Oasis	Near Haradh	Hand axes, tools shaped like cleavers, large unpolished scrapers, and blade-shaped tools	Neolithic period – Ubaid Civilization	Abdel Naeem, 1995, p. 122
Ain Al-Saih	Near Haradh	Flint tools	Neolithic period – Ubaid Civilization	Masry, 1974, pp. 84–90

## 2.2 Economic Activities and Professions in the Eastern Region (Ubaid Period)

Arabia is based mostly on the production and exportation of pottery to neighboring regions, such as Magan, Dilmun, and southern Iraq. Other archaeological sites, including Al-Dosariyah, Yabrin Oasis, Ain Al-Saih, and Ain Qannas, showed thousands of arrowheads and stone instruments, along with seashells and fish bones, indicating that at least some Ubaidians of the Eastern Province engaged in hunting, fishing, and gathering. Moreover, trade was also a vital component of the Ubaidian economy since it facilitated cultural exchange with neighboring states and contributed to population stabilization in coastal areas. Agriculture and irrigation were also practiced by Ubaidians Dates, 1976, p. 20. Their professions within the Eastern Province were rather restricted and mainly centered on this job type.

### A. Agriculture

The Ubaidians encountered agriculture by the 5th Millennium BCE when they settled along the coast; an advanced irrigation technique involving pottery and stone vessels was constructed that allowed irrigation of land and storage of grains. People employed flint-tipped plows for tilling and sturdy pottery sickles to harvest crops before the advent of copper tools. The Ubaidians also employed models of actual copper tools to assist in plowing, particularly the pottery axes. In addition to agriculture, they also engaged in animal husbandry and reared domesticated animals. However, agriculture became merely a subsidiary occupational role for them, and they previewed it only as a way of satisfying their basic food requirements (Carter, 2010, pp. 2–6).

### B. Industry and Craftsmanship

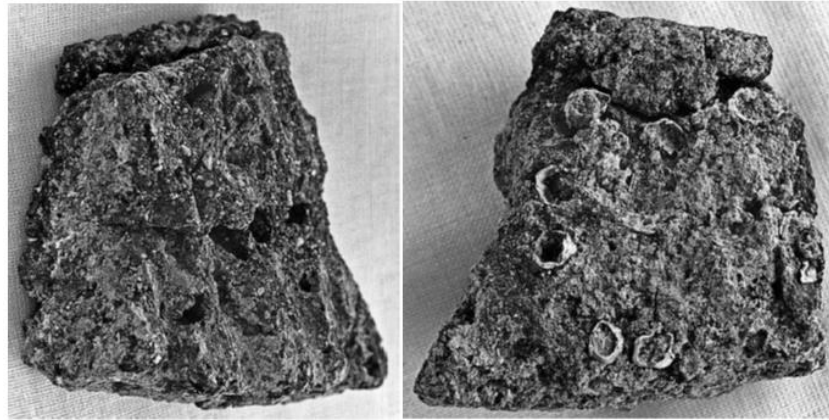
The strong industrial-based economy of Ubaidian relied heavily on pottery production as a significant craft. The quality and precision of Ubaidian pottery discriminated against others. For molding and polishing, archaeological findings indicate the use of the potter's wheel and the use of the kiln for firing by the Ubaidians. Various kilns were found at the Al-Dosariyah site for firing local pottery (Potts, 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 57–58). Most Ubaidian pottery was painted green, red, and black, and the raw materials for making it were imported from across the Arabian Gulf. Geometrical patterns have been made on them; different examples of painted and decorated vessels have been recovered onto sites such as Tarut Island and Al-Dosariyah (Plate 8) (Al-Hammad 2014, pp. 26–27).



**Plate 8. Parts of colored pottery vessels found on Tarut Island, with some showing geometric decorations."**

**Source :**Al-Hammad, Ali bin Ibrahim, *Soapstone vessels from Tarut Island, "3000-500 BC"*, OP.CIT, 2014, P.249.

The Ubaidians were also good at constructing sailing ships, probably influenced by the civilizations of Dilmun and Magan. According to archaeological excavation reports, the ships were unearthed and made of plant-based materials such as reeds (Carter, 2010, pp. 44-47). To fill these gaps, we used material from bulrush, mats, and ropes made of palm fronds, along with marine organisms, such as shells and oysters (see Plate 9). Animal skin was also used, as revealed by the findings of the Danish archaeological mission working in eastern Saudi Arabia, Ras Al Jinz in Oman, Dilmun in Bahrain, and As-Sabiyah in Kuwait. In its report, the mission stated that fish oils combined with sheep wool and goat hair, obtained from animals domesticated during the Ubaid period, were applied in shipbuilding (Cleuziou & Tosi, 1993, pp. 747-756).



**Plate (9) shows parts of the boats, with parallel impressions of reed visible on the interior side – Gulf region."**

Source: Carter, R., " *The Neolithic origins of seafaring in the Arabian Gulf* ", *Archaeology International*, 2010, PP.44-47, fig3 (a,b).

The Ubaidians were also competent in carving primitive statues, such as small female figures standing upright, whose heads were wrapped like a snake, which ended in a point made of dried tar, in addition to the male statues. The Danish archaeological mission found several statues belonging to the goddess Ishtar and worshipper-servant figures on Tarut Island, dating back to the Ubaid Period, influenced by Iraqi civilization. Moreover, the Ubaidians knew how to build wheeled robots.

### **C. Hunting**

In the Eastern region, archaeological expeditions determined that the Ubaidians still had to hunt and trap during the initial stages of settlement that is, into the late 6th millennium just to supplement the basic food needs. They survive by fishing and gathering marine organisms, as well as hunting terrestrial animals that are present in their environment. However, they were not settled enough to fully subsist on these activities altogether. (Kennedy, 2008, pp. 26-27).

The German and Danish expeditions' findings on stone tools with pointed heads, blades, and fragments, along with the numerous arrowheads found at places such as Tell Abu Khamis, Ain al-Saih, Al-Dosariyah, and Ain al-Qannas, directly showed that Ubaidians depended on food acquisition through terrestrial and marine hunting. Potts 1990, Vol. 1, p. 60. Basically, hunting turned out to be the Ubaidians' main occupation, especially after they started to build ships, which allowed them to hunt in wider territories.

### **D. Trade**

Studies and archaeological findings indicate that the Ubaidians exchanged trade and established commercial relations with southern Iraq, Dilmun, and the Magan. At the time, the strategic geographical location imposed on the eastern region was of equal strategic importance as a trade conduit and link. Distinctive pottery was an important commodity of trade exported to most of the

ancient world. The Danish mission found a great number of spindle whorls and semi-precious stones at Tell Abu Khamis and Ain al-Qannas (Hammond 1973, p. 70). Large numbers of pearls in Al-Dosariyah also indicate strong trade relations with their neighbors. If the pottery trade came from Ubaid, then the pearl trade had occurred with As-Sabiyah in Kuwait, particularly after a workshop for pearl production was discovered there, or with the United Arab Emirates (Carter & Crawford, 2010, pp. 208-209).

Another cuneiform text, placed on the statue of King Gudea of the Second Dynasty of Lagash (about 2150 BCE), confirms the importance of Magan (Ma2-gan, ma 2 gis-da3-a-bi, lagasa.ki-se3) for shipbuilding. This confirms the cooperation between cities in the Gulf and the development of a system of mutually advantageous trade relations.

### 2-3. Social Activities of the Ubaidians in the Eastern Region

Archaeological findings are thus not very indicative of acquired social activities by the Ubaidians in the Eastern Region, although some findings on Tarut Island offer a link between the Ubaidians and Mesopotamian civilization. Social activities such as those involving temple-building celebrations or festivals of the gods, like the festivals of the goddess Ishtar, might have been common. Several statues of pure gold Ishtar were recovered from Tarut Island.

### 3. Religious Beliefs of the Ubaidians considering Archaeological Finds

Historical and archaeological studies have indicated that the Sumerians influenced the religious views of the Ubaidians. It is evident from the fact that, on Tarut Island, archaeologists have found massive signs of statues of the Phoenician goddess Ishtar worshipped in southern Iraq. Scholars found plenty of statues of the worshipper-servant, which corroborates the evidence for Mesopotamia's religious beliefs to alter Ubaidian people's lives.

Under Tarut Castle, several big stone blocks dating to the 3rd millennium BCE were found. The stones were very well polished and fitted tightly together, indicating that they were part of an ancient building or several old structures. A deep-water spring next to this building connects to a water channel, in which the water feeds into an open stone-built pool. Based on this, some scholars have speculated that the building was used as a temple to honor either the goddess Ishtar or Astarte; therefore, the name Tarut originates from this association, (Potts, 1990, pp. 69-85).



**Plate 10: A collection of stones forming a group of ancient buildings (or temples) dedicated to the goddess Ishtar - Tarut.**

**Source :** *Al-Khudairi, OP.CIT, P.331.*

Another animal, especially the bull, was worshipped by the Ubaidians because of its extraordinary physical strength and fertility. This has been a very common belief and trait in the ancient Near East since prehistoric times; the bull or parts of it are depicted very often as protection, strength, and



fertility in various ways. During the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE, bulls spread throughout southern and northern Arabia and along the western coast of the Arabian Gulf. Evidence that the bull was one of the favorite sacrificing animals in Arabia is typical for the statues of bulls with forward-curving horns, symbolizing the crescent-shaped form and later the moon cult. Evidence of this also comes from Neolithic period rock art sites in Hail, Wadi Damm, and Taif dated to that period (Edens, 1992, pp. 120-123).

This practice was immensely introduced and gradually gained also by the Ubaidians in the Eastern Region. The bull's head found on Tarut Island, which is now in the Bahrain Museum Plate 11, testifies to the evidence of cultural contact with Southern Iraq since the several bullheads excavated all over reflect the same style as those of the Gulf civilizations and Saudi Arabia's Eastern Region (RICE, 1994, p. 282).

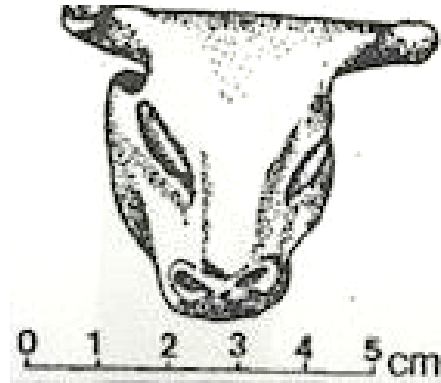


Plate 11: **Bull's head as evidence of the Ubaidians' reverence for it and their influence by the civilization of southern Iraq – Tarut – preserved in the Bahrain Museum.**

Source: Al-Dawish, Sultan Mutlaq Muhammad Sattam, OP.CIT, 2015, P.96

#### 4. Funerary Rites and Burial Customs

Archaeological missions in the Eastern Province have discovered many burial sites, helping researchers learn much about the burial practices of the Ubaidians. In most cases, the Baidwans buried their dead in circular or rectangular pits, often with stone structures shaped like tails. The resemblance of these tombs to those from the Dilmun and Ubaid cultures of Qatar leads one to believe that the Ubaidian chiefs or heads in the Eastern Province also maintained these tombs to themselves also (Nayeem, 1998, Vol. 5). Along with the Danish mission, Abdullah Masri also found many graves in the Eastern Province. Based on these discoveries, some common patterns of burial that existed during the Ubaid period in the region included the following:

**A. Cairn Tombs** Discovery of cairn tombs around Tarut Island indicates the time when independent cities emerged in this region and the population stabilized no earlier than at the end of the fourth millennium B.C. or the beginning of the third millennium B.C. Cairn tombs are formed of heaps of collected stones, with different pattern. Several thousand graves were grouped together in some places. Tombs are also associated with other building features of stone circles and tailed installations, and they vary in both size and height. According to Potts (1990), Vol. 2, pp. 69-85, a cluster of cairn tombs was unearthed that had been buried by sand dunes at the Rafi'ah site southeast of Tarut Island. Among these tombs were several vessels in steatite that is, a stone called soapstone indicating that local workshops conducted this kind of stoneware (Al-Khudairi, 2007, p. 332).

These tombs have also been found in a variety of other locations in the Eastern Province, including Barr Al-Samar, Jebel Bumkharuq in the Yabrin Oasis, Al-Ahsa Oasis, Buqayq, 'Ain Dar, south of Dhahran, Sabkhat Al-Dhubatayah, Rafi'ah, and Rabiyyah on Tarut Island. There were also reports about tombs in the Eastern Province by Western explorers who visited the area, while the Danish Mission in 1968 mentioned that a large number existed in the area. Archaeological reconnaissance reports in

the Eastern Province state that stone tombs dating to the Chalcolithic period existed. In addition, fragments of walls and huge amounts of pottery fragments were found, and analysis proved that these places were being settled from the third to the first millennium B.C. (Burkholder, No. 78, pp. 162-165).

### **B. Rogum Tombs**

Several rogum tombs have been discovered in Eastern Province. Rogum tombs, a type of burial mound, generally occur with other architectural forms, including stone circles and tailed monuments. They occur in large groups, although sometimes only two or three mounds may be present. Many of these tombs appeared outside the ground at the Yabrin Oasis (see Plate 12) (Potts, 1990, Vol. 2, pp. 69-85).



**Plate 12: Remains of a rogum tomb connected to a tailed structure – Yabrin Oasis.**

*Source: Al-Khudairi, OP.CIT, P.332.*

### **5. Connections of the Ubaid Period in the Eastern Province with Civilizations (Southern Iraq – Gulf Sites)"**

Several rogum tombs have been discovered in Eastern Province. Rogum tombs, a type of burial mound, generally occur with other architectural forms, including stone circles and tailed monuments. They occur in large groups, although sometimes only two or three mounds may be present. Many of these tombs appeared outside the ground at the Yabrin Oasis (see Plate 12) (Potts, 1990, Vol. 2, pp. 69-85).

In addition, discoveries at As-Sabiyah, Kuwait, and Mughayra and Delma in the United Arab Emirates have recorded evidence of trade and cultural exchange between the Ubaid people of the Eastern Province and the people of centers in the Gulf, as attested by the assemblage of similar types of pottery recovered (Al-Dawish, 2015, p. 35). Piesinger (1983) states that the people of the Ubaid civilization and the people in the Gulf regions had ethnic contact, which gave rise to the finding of Ubaid cultural aspects in the Gulf and on the Arabian Peninsula. There was transportation of goods and crafts whenever people moved across these regions. In addition, the population groups of Eastern Arabia played a significant role in shaping the demographic structure of southern Mesopotamia, which can explain the religious meaning of Dilmun, Magan, and their gods in Sumerian myths (Cleuziou & Tosi, 2000, pp. 13-73).

The influence of Ubaid society in the Eastern Province is seen by its interaction with the communities of southern Iraq, as many Sumerians were involved in maritime trade, a profession originally associated with the Gulf inhabitants. Some scholars suggest that maritime traders interested in fishing and pearl diving, which was a major industry at the site of Al-Dosariyah, may explain the

presence of Ubaid artifacts in the Gulf regions. This is like the findings of a pearl workshop at the H3 site in As-Sabiyah, Kuwait, where pearls formed a substantial commodity in the area's commerce (Rutkowski, 2011, pp. 23-24).

## **CONCLUSION**

This research paper greatly relates to Ubaid civilization and its impact on the Eastern Region of Saudi Arabia during the Neolithic Era. The major conclusion derived from this study involves human settlements and economic and cultural linkages between the Eastern Arabian Peninsula and Southern Mesopotamia. This would have depicted a very strong cultural and trade exchange, which was depicted through pottery styles and other archaeological discoveries found within these regions. This evidence thus supports the dissemination of Ubaid cultural features and their influence on the development of humanity in settlements within the region of the Arabian Gulf.

The results emerged after reviewing studies and archaeological finds in the Eastern Province during the Ubaid period, concluding that such origination of civilization had its beginning in the East Province of Saudi Arabia and stretched further to Mesopotamia because of the trade and cultural relations that occurred between the Arabs in southern Iraq. The researchers divided the stages of civilization into four, ranging from 6500 BC to approximately 3800 BC.

The distinctive features of the Ubaid civilization were their painted pottery, mainly with decorative and geometric patterns, which later became common in the neighborhood, including southern Iraq and the Gulf. An example is As-Sabiyah in Kuwait. Several archaeological artifacts revealed 40 inhabited sites from the Stone Age, including pottery vessels, arrowheads, hand axes, traditional weapons, awls, and other tools. Some conspicuous sites are Tarout Island, Al-Dosariyah, and the Yabrin Oasis.

The different economic activities of the Ubaidians during its geographical expansion were confined mostly to trade and light industries. In fact, evidence shows active trade relations with the Gulf countries, especially Kuwait, where large amounts of pearls were found, unlike in the case of the workshop site at As-Sabiyah's site H3. In addition, the cultural relations between Ubaid regions, southern Iraq, and the Gulf influenced Sumerians' beliefs regarding religion.

The recent finding of cairn and tumulus graves on Tarout Island settlement reinforces the existence of independent cities and settled populations that can be dated as early as the late fourth millennium BC or early third millennium BC.

In conclusion, this research substantiates the role of Ubaid civilization in shaping the socio-economic and cultural configuration of Eastern Arabia. This allows for a continuing avenue for further research, especially on the extent of the Ubaid influence in the wider Arabian Gulf region and the possible interactions that might have taken place between the Ubaid people and other civilizations in antiquity.

## **Recommendations Limitations and Future Directions**

The study is aware of several limitations arising from the scarcity of documentation and literature on the micro-archaeology of diverse areas in the Eastern Province. Lack of a General Archaeological Survey of All Relevant Sites Has Presented Some Challenges, Causing Some Cultural Economic Aspects of the Ubaid Period to Be Largely Unknown. Also, the sharing of Ubaidian culture with other synchronous cultures, especially cultures of southern Mesopotamia, does not allow for clear-cut distinctions.

Thus, further studies should be more extensive and intensive archaeological research in areas that remained uninvestigated today, using new equipment and technologies to search for more artifacts of the Ubaidian civilization. It is also suggested that an interdisciplinary approach with an environmental-geological focus should be used to identify whether natural resources within the region influenced the Ubaidians in their trade and economy. Stugitive will have the capability of

offering a more comprehensive snapshot of the Ubaid period in the Arabian Peninsula and its greater importance.

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