



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Monks beyond the monastery: the external cells on Sir Bani Yas Island

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Abstract

The 7th-8th century Christian church and walled monastic complex on Sir Bani Yas Island were discovered in 1993, alongside several small mounds to the north and north-west of the site. Subsequent excavations and survey revealed these to represent free-standing houses. They have been traditionally interpreted as monks' dwellings, based on contemporaneity with the monastery and on architectural similarities.

Recent reassessment of the archival documentation has indicated that at least the second factor has been substantially overstated. Regional precedent suggests that settlements clustered around a monastery could be either external cells, as previously assumed, or a village-type settlement with a church at the centre (cf. Al-Qusur, Kuwait).

Two houses will be excavated in winter 2025 to interrogate whether the cluster is more likely part of a monastery or of an independent settlement. Provisionally, this is done by examining evidence for: contemporaneity, architectural similarities, evidence of productivity/self-sufficiency, and settlement size. Evidence from excavations is combined with an "excavation in the archive" of past archaeological data and contextualisation through historical sources. The latter two suggest that the external houses were likely part of the monastery, but the core of the results will be available after excavations.

Keywords

Christian archaeology, Islamic archaeology, Medieval archaeology, Arabian Peninsula, Monasticism

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