

# ‘In the Interests of the General Peace’: The Architectural Development of al-Jahilī Fort and its Part within the Policy of Shaikh Zāyid Bin Khalīfa in al-‘Ain

Peter Sheehan

## Introduction

The fort complex at al-Jahilī contains within one site many of the different individual elements of traditional mud brick architecture preserved singly in other parts of al-‘Ain, including a round watchtower, a square fort with defensive towers at its corners, two large walled enclosures and a mosque outside the walls (Fig. 1). Each of these elements provides strong material and visual links to historically important events from the early nineteenth century onwards that left their mark on both the physical landscape al-‘Ain and the political landscape of the region. Today, its prominent location at the center of the city and the landmark status of the site is such that al-Jahilī has come to symbolize the traditional architecture and cultural heritage of Abu Dhabi.<sup>1</sup>

As with other historic buildings of al-‘Ain, written sources directly relating to the fort are rare. Unlike many of the other buildings, however, we are fortunate that its use from 1955-71 as a base for the Trucial Oman Scouts (TOS, before 1956 the

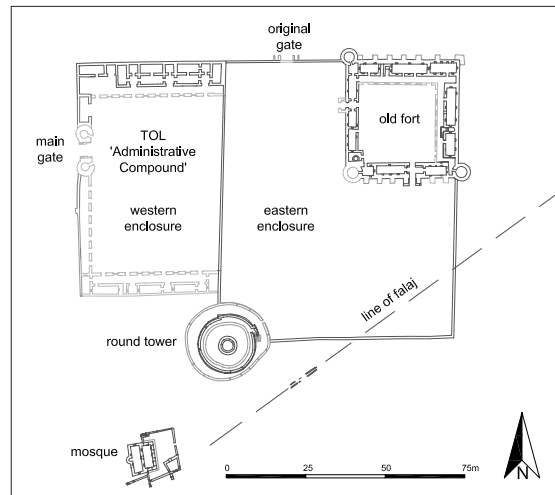


Fig 1 Plan of al-Jahilī showing the various component parts of the complex, including the round watchtower, the old fort, the eastern and western enclosures and the mosque. Later additions are shown in grey. Historic Environment Department, TCA Abu Dhabi.

Trucial Oman Levies, TOL) produced a large number of historic photographs of al-Jahilī, many of which are now held by Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority (TCA Abu Dhabi) or in the archives of the National Library and the National Center for Documentation and Research (NCDR) in Abu Dhabi. Careful examination of these archive photographs, in conjunction with a number of recent archaeological observations here and at other locations in al-‘Ain, allows us to reconstruct the architectural development of the fort and in turn throws new light on the historical context that produced each of its component parts.<sup>2</sup>

### **The foundation – *falaj* and watchtower**

The earliest extant photographs of al-Jahilī date from shortly before the TOS occupation and provide important views of one of the elements that seems to have formed part of the earliest phase of activity on the site, the single watchtower forming the central component of the current iconic and multi-tiered concentric round tower. Two photographs of the fort taken by the English traveller Wilfred Thesiger in 1948 (Figs. 2-3) show the appearance of the watchtower before the substantial changes carried out first by the Trucial Oman Levies and subsequently in the mid-1980s.



Fig 2 Photograph of al-Jahili from the northwest, taken by Wilfred Thesiger in 1948, showing the old fort, the single round watchtower and the original arched gate to the eastern enclosure. The photograph shows that the rooms of the western enclosure were in place before the later use of the fort by the Trucial Oman Scouts from 1956. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Fig 3 Thesiger's photograph of al-Jahilī from the southeast in 1948, showing the form of the round watchtower before the additions from the 1950s onwards. The mosque is also visible at the left of the picture, as are remains of other buildings probably belonging to the original settlement of al-Jahilī. © Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

Thesiger makes no mention of the fort in *Arabian Sands*, his account of travels in the region between 1948-49, but an account of a visit in November 1948 by another Englishman, Edward Henderson, at that time working for the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) describes “Jahili... a mud brick fortress with two large quadrangles set in high walls with corner towers and near the centre a robust but battered round turret”.<sup>3</sup> The latter is of course the watchtower shown in Thesiger's photographs, one of which (Fig. 2) shows the entrance set high in the wall of the tower. Additional details of the early form of the tower are provided by Peter Clayton's photograph taken in March 1956 (Fig. 4), which shows the original crenellations of the tower still in place at that time and, as in Thesiger's photographs, what appears to be a mud brick revetment of the elevated *ned* or mound on which the tower was first built. Clayton had visited al-'Ain for the first time in August 1954 and noted the “long abandoned Jahili Fort and its dried out gardens... (he) entered on foot through the double wooden doors, already ajar, in the north wall. The courtyard had sand drifted against the round tower in the far corner, and my quick look around the inner ‘keep’ (the old fort) confirmed that it was used to store Locust Control Poison as I had been so informed”.<sup>4</sup>

Clayton would later recall a conversation he had with Shaikh Zāyid Bin Sulṭān at al-Muwaijī in October 1954, during which he (Clayton) expressed the hope “again to command a squadron of the TOL and to be stationed in the Oasis in the Jahili Fort, then derelict...It was a classic example of Arab military architecture...and should be used for a more honourable purpose.”<sup>5</sup>



Fig 4 Peter Clayton's view of the watchtower taken in March 1956, showing the original entrance set high in the wall, as well as the steps leading to the top of the revetment around the tower. The photograph also shows drifts of sand against the inner face of the enclosure wall with a recessed wall walk. © Peter Clayton.

The position of the *ned* or mound on which the tower is built and which is shown in these early photographs is related to the earliest element of the historical topography of al-Jahilī, a feature that does not appear in any of the archive photographs but that was revealed in 2008 during the restoration and development project carried out at the fort. Several substantial sections of a stone-lined subterranean water channel or *falaj* (pl. *aflāj*), plastered with waterproof *sarūj* and capped with large flat stones to reduce water loss through evaporation, were noted running broadly northeast to southwest under the courtyard of the old fort before passing to the south of the tower mound (Fig 5).

Recent archaeological work in al-‘Ain indicates that much of the present landscape of sunken date palm oases and fields watered by *aflāj* took shape during the relatively stable period of Omani Ya‘āribid rule (c.1624-1744).<sup>6</sup> Excavation of the sunken palm gardens and the subterranean *aflāj* supplying them with water represented major capital projects based on intensive date production and a supply of slave labour, both features related to the wider Indian Ocean trade networks of the Ya‘āribids. Settlements grew up where the *aflāj* reached the surface and provided fresh water for human consumption before discharging into sunken agricultural basins or plantations, excavation of which created large upcast mounds like that at al-Jahilī.



Fig 5 A detail of the *falaj* recently revealed at al-Jahilī during conservation and development works carried out in 2007-2008. Credit: Peter Sheehan.





Fig 6 Extract from RAF aerial photograph of al-Ain taken in 1968, showing the final form of al-Jahili fort towards the end of the TOS occupation. Note the evidence of a number of earlier field walls that were still visible at that time to the southwest of the fort. (North is at the bottom of the picture)

The limited archaeological work so far carried out at al-Jahilī has produced little evidence of settlement associated with the *falaj*, although one of Theisiger's photographs (Fig. 3) shows the remains of earlier structures near the mosque, and even until the late 1960s the outline of numerous mud brick field walls in the area to the south-west of the fort can be seen in a number of photographs (Fig. 6).

Throughout the period of Ya'aribid rule the Na'im tribes resident in the three eastern oases of Buraimi, Sa'ara and Qamāsa appear to have exercised a degree of local control on behalf of the Sultan of Oman over the Dhawāhir tribes occupying the principal western oases of al-'Ain (Hilī, Qa'ārah, Jimī, Mu'tari and al-'Ain).<sup>7</sup> Between 1800 and 1869, however, this earlier status quo in the oases of al-'Ain and Buraimi was profoundly disrupted by intermittent raids and occupation by the Wahhābīs of Najd, who built the imposing Qar al-Khandaq in the Na'im village of Buraimi during one of these early incursions.<sup>8</sup>

During the same period, the Āl Bū Falah tribe and the ruling Āl Nahayyān family, established in Abu Dhabi from the second half of the eighteenth century partly as a result of eastward pressure on the tribes of the Qafrah following the creation of the First Sa'ūdī state in 1744,<sup>9</sup> became increasingly involved in the oases of al-'Ain. This growing influence was reflected in the acquisition of land and the formation of alliances with the Dhawāhir and the Sultan of Muscat against the Wahhābīs and their Na'im allies in Buraimi. The troubled politics of the period saw the construction of a number of watchtowers during the first half of nineteenth century, symbols of an unstable situation laconically described by Colonel Miles in 1875:

"The Na'im are at feud with the Beni Yas who occupy part of [al-'Ain] and their hostility is interrupted only by occasional truces; collisions frequently occurring between them."<sup>10</sup>

Determining a precise date for the foundation of al-Jahilī within the broader historical framework of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries presents some challenges, especially since archaeological dating of the individual *aflāj* of al-'Ain is a difficult task that requires careful stratigraphic analysis. However given the unstable conditions of the first half of the nineteenth century it is unlikely that the *falaj* was dug then, so two alternative dates either before or after this period present themselves from a review of the available archaeological and historical evidence.

In the first of these scenarios the tower al-Jahilī and its *falaj* form part of the eighteenth century networks and plantations of the Ya'aribids, subsequently abandoned during the travails of the Wahhābī occupation, that were purchased and then renewed by Shaikh Zāyid Bin Khalifa (1855-1909), a process that began perhaps from as early as the 1870s onwards.<sup>11</sup> Lorimer, writing in 1907, mentions the 'hereditary connection' of the Āl Bū Falah with 'Baraimi' through their fort at Murajib and notes specifically that 'the Sheikh of Abu Dhabi' "has recently acquired (and is now engaged in developing) an estate at Jahali".<sup>12</sup>

Miles describes Shaikh Zāyid as “a man of strong character, and perhaps the sole individual possessing any real personal power and authority”,<sup>13</sup> while by 1905 Cox could state that “the real power in the neighbourhood is the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi, whose material possessions and consequent influence in the oasis are yearly increasing”.<sup>14</sup> Archaeological evidence from al-Jahilī, supported by some historical sources, raises the real possibility that Shaikh Zāyid put this power and influence not simply to acquiring land from the Dhawāhir in the older oases and abandoned plantations but also to the creation of entirely new estates at al-Jahilī and al-Muwajjī, watered by new *aflāj* dug specifically for this purpose. These estates were later supplemented by an entirely new plantation and settlement founded by his eldest son Khalīfa at al-Mas‘ūdī to the north-west of the oases in the late 1890s. The physical relationship between the Jahilī and Muwajjī *aflāj* is consistent with them being dug at the same time, and a date for these works taking place in the second half of the nineteenth century is also supported by the limited archaeological evidence from the environs of the fort at al-Jahilī. If this is the case, and al-Jahilī is a foundation of Shaikh Zāyid, then the physical relationship between the watchtower and *falaj* shows they are clearly related and probably together formed part of the first phase of activity on the site, while the stratigraphic relationship between the line of the *falaj* and the enclosure wall built above it suggests that the construction of the fort in the same strategic location may belong to a second phase of works by Shaikh Zāyid intended to reinforce and augment his earlier watchtower.

This second scenario is supported by some of the details contained in Percy Cox’s account of his second journey to ‘Baraimi’ in 1905; “due east via Muthariz and the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi’s new settlement at Jahali,... Jahali had only been in existence for about six years; it possessed a nice new fort and a walled date and fruit orchard, at that time in its infancy, but very promising. It extends to the foot-hills of Jabal Hafit”.<sup>15</sup>

The exclusive ownership of land at al-Muwajjī and al-Jahilī by the Āl Bū Falah appears significant in this respect, as does the special concern with the *aflāj* that served them that is mentioned in a letter dated 1925, now held at the National Centre for Documentation and Research, from Shaikh Zāyid’s son Sulṭān (Ruler of Abu Dhabi from 1922-26) to his wālī in the Oasis enquiring as to the number of workmen serving in the *aflāj* of al-Jāhilī and al-Muwajjī.<sup>16</sup>

### **Qal‘āt al-Jahilī - ‘a nice new fort’ for the Shaikh of Abu Dhabi**

A dated inscription (Fig. 7) from AH 1316 (1897/8 AD) over the south gate of the old fort at al-Jāhilī provides a clear link to the 1896 fariza agreement by which the Omani Sultan Sayyid Faiṣāl b. Turkī (r. 1888-1913) undertook to pay 3000 Maria Theresa dollars per annum to Shaikh Zāyid bin Khalīfa to defend and keep the peace in the Buraimi/al-‘Ain oases.





Fig 7 The inscription dated 1316 AH (1897/80 AD) over the south gate of the old fort at al-Jahilī. Credit: Peter Sheehan.

Finds of coins of Faiḳāl b. Turkī of the same date recently made at a number of historic buildings throughout the al-‘Ain oases provide eloquent evidence of this financial incentive, while Shaikh Zāyid’s ability to fulfil this role is further illustrated by Cox’s earlier comment in 1902 that; “(his) influence was much stronger than that of the Sultan of Muscat throughout the Dhahireh district of Oman; and was as far as one could judge almost invariably exercised in the interests of the general peace”.

The ‘nice new fort’ mentioned by Cox comprised a roughly 35m square inner ‘keep’ with crenellated walkways and tall round towers at the diagonally opposite northwest and southeast corners. The southwest corner was originally provided with a square tower, whilst the northeast corner appears from the outset to have contained the residential buildings still visible in Thesiger’s 1948 view. (Fig 2)

In size and the layout of its defensive and internal features, it is therefore worth noting that the fort at al-Jāhilī is more or less identical to both the earlier inner fort at Qaḳr al-Hosn in Abu Dhabi and the later Sulḳān Fort in the oasis of al-‘Ain, providing clear evidence of a continuity in the approach to fort building by the Āl Bū Falah from the end of the eighteenth century right through to the early years of the twentieth century. The inner fort at Qaḳr al-Hosn may date to the foundation of Abu Dhabi in 1761, and in any case it was certainly in place by the early years of the nineteenth



Fig 8 Ronald Codrai's photograph of the main southern façade of the old fort at al-Jāhili showing the south gate and the square tower that originally stood at the southwest corner. Ronald Codrai, © TCA Abu Dhabi.

century.<sup>17</sup> The size and appearance of the round towers at al-Jāhili, with the distinctive 'beaked' machicolations for raining down missiles on attackers, are similar to those used in the northeast corner tower of the inner fort at Qaṣr al-Hosn, the only part of the original structure to survive, above ground at least. Like al-Jāhili, the fort built by Shaikh Sulṭān Bin Zāyid in 1910 in the heart of the Dhawāhir settlement of al-'Ain appears to have been originally set within one corner of a larger protective enclosure or sūr.<sup>18</sup>

Ronald Codrai's photograph, probably taken in the early 1950s, (Fig 8) confirms there was originally a square tower at the southwest corner of al-Jāhili that was later gradually dismantled and finally replaced by a third round tower during the restoration works of the 1980s. A single gate with a stout wooden door surmounted by the inscription was set centrally in the south wall. Within the fort no archaeological investigations have yet determined which of the ground floor rooms built against the curtain wall date from the original foundation, but it is likely that the well in the southwest corner, again a feature common to the forts of Abu Dhabi, belongs to this first phase.

A rectangular courtyard some 90m x 60m between the inner fort and the earlier watchtower was created by joining them within a single enclosure wall. Archaeological observations have shown that the enclosure is contemporary with the fort, and it seems likely that the mud brick revetment of the watchtower mound took place during this phase of Shaikh Zāyid's works. This arrangement appears to derive from



Fig 9 Peter Clayton's view in May 1957 showing the rebuilt entrance to the eastern enclosure which had been earlier knocked down by a truck. As with Thesiger's earlier photograph (Fig 2), the condition of the rooms of the western courtyard later used for barracks by the TOL, clearly shows they were actually built at some point between 1897 and 1948. © Peter Clayton.

the traditional sur plan found in the earlier sixteenth and seventeenth century tower houses of al-'Ain such as Bin Hādī in Hilī Oasis, which comprise a three storey stronghold at one corner of a walled compound. As with these earlier sūrs, the enclosure at al-Jāhili could function as a place to safely gather people and livestock during raids.<sup>19</sup> Entrance to the enclosure was through an arched gate in the northern wall similar to that still preserved in the inner fort. This original gate to the enclosure, facing the main roads north to the coast and northeast for a distance of about 3.5km to Buraimi, was still standing in 1948 when it appears in Thesiger's photograph of the fort taken from the northwest (Fig 2).

The location of the mosque (Fig 10) in relation to the course of the *falaj*, as well as its strong similarities in size and form with the early mosque shown in Thesiger's photographs of al-Muwaijī from 1948, suggest that it may well date from the period of the foundation of the fort at al-Jāhili by Shaikh Zāyid.

The size of the enclosure and the location in its northeast corner of the inner fort with its prominent towers and crenellations, makes it clear that the prime intention of the fort at al-Jāhili was to provide, in this highly visible and strategic location, a suitably large scale symbol of the new predominance of the Āl Bū Falah in al-'Ain. The fort thus represented a visual and political counterpoint to the Qaṣr al-Khandaq of the Na'im, resurgent after the final departure of the Wāhhābīs in 1869, as described by Miles in



Fig 10 Al-Jahili mosque in a view taken by Colonel Edward ‘Tug’ Wilson from the roof of the tower in the 1960s, showing the outline of a number of earlier fields, and in the background Jabal Hafit. Col. Edward Wilson © TCA Abu Dhabi.

1875: “They occupy el-Bereymi proper and Su‘ areh [Sa‘ara]...their possession of the fort enables them to overawe the whole of the settlement”.<sup>20</sup> The potency of the Qaṣr al-Khandaq continued into the early twentieth century, with Lorimer commenting in 1906 that: “The Na‘im are the original owners of the oasis, and possession of the fort in Baraimi village still gives them prestige and a local superiority over the Dhawahir. Tellingly however, he also notes that: “At the present time the Sheikh (Zāyid Bin Khalifa) could probably seize Baraimi if he wished to do so, but his policy seems to be one of pacific penetration.”

It is these twin policies of ‘pacific penetration’ in ‘the interests of the general peace’ that characterize the approach of Shaikh Zāyid to al-‘Ain and provide the context for the principal importance of al-Jāhili as a demonstration of his power to the Na‘im, just as earlier his gradual dominance over the Dhawāhir had culminated in the capture of their principal village in al-‘Ain in 1891 and the construction of the ḥiṣn al-Nayyādāt there in the same year.<sup>21</sup>

In the context of his policy toward the Na‘im (and their allies of the Third Sa‘ūdi state from 1902 onwards) it is also worth noting that the physical area covered by the enclosure at al-Jāhili is very similar to that not only of the Qaṣr al-Khandaq but also the existing fort at Mezyad, which appears likely to have been constructed with the similar purpose of overawing the nearby Na‘im settlement located on the eastern flank of Jabal Hāfit, at the beginning of the route that leads along the western

foothills of the Hajar mountains to Dhank, Ibri and Nizwa. In the absence so far of much archaeological or historical evidence from Mezyad, this appears to link the fort there firmly to the period of Shaikh Zāyid.

The subsequent history of al-Jāhili between its description by Lorimer in 1906 and the abandonment described in the late 1940s is unclear. The foundation of other forts by the Āl Bū Falah at al-Muwaijī around 1909 and al-‘Ain in 1910 (the Sulḡān Fort) may reflect changing tribal and political circumstances and new priorities, particularly a resurgent Sa‘ūdi threat in the years following the First World War. However, the major reason for the abandonment appears to have been a more practical one related to the ultimate failure of works on the *falaj* mentioned in the letter of 1925, leading Henderson to conclude; “the underground channel, called a *falaj*, which served it with water from a spring some three miles away, had ‘died’, in the local phrase, and the gardens had died with it, so that the fort had been abandoned and was partly in ruins”.

It is however important to note that the photographs of Thesiger (Fig 2) and Clayton (Fig 9) show that the rooms of the western enclosure subsequently utilised by the TOS as barracks and stores actually date from the earlier period of occupation though it is still not clear at what points between 1897/8 and 1948 these were first built and then later abandoned. It was probably these rooms that Henderson describes in 1948: “We reached Fort Jahili and found it empty and forlorn. The rooms were bare, their floors of sand, and the windows unshuttered and without glass. This was to be our home...”

## **The TOS years, 1955-71**

Contemporary descriptions (Henderson, Clayton) and photographs (Thesiger, Clayton and Codrai, Figs 2-4; 8-9) show that the fort and earlier buildings around it had fallen into disrepair by early 1956, when Sheikh Shakhbut offered al-Jāhili to the Trucial Oman Levies (TOL) following the resolution of the Buraimi Dispute on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1955.<sup>22</sup> In his entertaining account of the force and the events of these years, Clayton links the funding for the renovation of the fort with sums of cash found in Buraimi after the expulsion of the Saudi force there.<sup>23</sup>

The first stages of the military occupation involved the creation of a new ‘Administrative Compound’ in the western enclosure, with accommodation for the troops and stores arranged in what appear to have been two existing symmetrical blocks north and south of a central courtyard. Access between the western and eastern enclosures was created via openings made in the wall of the latter, and an additional gate to the western compound was provided in the position of the present monumental entrance to the fort. The northern block contained the armoury and the wireless post and surviving details of both these elements were revealed during works to install the present permanent exhibition of Wilfred Thesiger photographs in this part of the building during the 2007-2008 project. (Fig 11)



Clayton's account indicates that the original arched entrance in the north wall of the eastern enclosure was either widened deliberately or knocked down for access by three ton military trucks.<sup>24</sup> (Fig 12) During a later phase of works in the 1960s the gate was whitewashed along with the rest of the fort and furnished with twin covered sentry boxes. Archaeological work during the recent redevelopment project revealed evidence of both phases of the gate, including the painted cement floor of the sentry boxes and the reinforced concrete laid at the entrance for vehicles. (Fig 13)



Fig 11 The location of the la silki (literally “wire less”) post in the buildings of the ‘Administrative Compound’ noted during work on the fort in 2007-8 and now incorporated into the permanent exhibition wing. Credit: Peter Sheehan.



Fig 12 Photograph of the entrance to ‘Fort Jahili’ when B squadron were in residence, probably around 1958, (before the sentry boxes were added to the gate of the eastern enclosure). Note in the background the recently completed officers quarters and mess around the base of the watchtower.



Fig 13 Louis Wilkes' aerial view of al-Jahilī fort from the north in the 1960s, when the eastern enclosure of the fort was used for helicopter landings. The photograph shows the buildings of the 'Administrative Courtyard' and the vehicle yard behind this, with the western (Sana'iya) ridge of Jabal Hāfit in the distance. ©Louis Wilkes.

A cookhouse for the troops was built in the angle between the inner fort and the eastern wall of the enclosure, and a large barracks with a tin or 'chincó' roof was constructed for other ranks inside the courtyard of the old fort, with further buildings erected against the exterior of its western wall. The lone fuel drum shown in Clayton's photograph of the tower (Fig 4) became the nucleus of an extensive vehicle yard enclosed by a stone wall that now forms part of the exterior wall of the temporary exhibition gallery and reception area in the refurbished fort. Archaeological evidence for changes and refurbishment carried out to the mosque in this period are supplemented by a number of photographs showing a thriving garden around the mosque, and it may be that the *falaj* still provided enough water to support this small scale use.

The round watchtower was initially used as a sentry post but was converted to officers' quarters in 1957 by the addition of the existing intermediate storey (Fig 12). Subsequently many of these mud rooms were rebuilt in more durable materials after a devastating rainstorm caused much of the north side to collapse. A postern gate let into the south wall of the old enclosure immediately adjacent to the tower led via a flight of steps to the 'overflow' accommodation for visitors in palm frond arish or '*barasti*' huts. The quest for refinements to the officers' quarters seems to have been a compelling feature of life in the desert fort, with the addition of a small but enviable swimming pool on the west side of the tower and the planting of the shrubs on the



Fig 14 This startling view of the round watchtower with the officers' quarters and mess was taken just after a devastating rainstorm had caused the collapse of some of these additional mud rooms. Postern gates let in to the enclosure wall to provide access to the exterior of the fort can be seen at the right and left of the picture. Col. Edward Wilson © TCA Abu Dhabi.

lowest tier of the tower that are now immortalized on the back of the 50 dirham note, one of many by now familiar images of the then exotic tower taken at this time. The upper room in the original watchtower itself, at the highest point of the fort and



Fig 15 General view of the fort today, with the old fort and the round tower in the background. The present monumental entrance to the fort was added during restoration works in the 1980s. Credit: Peter Sheehan.

therefore in receipt of the coolest breeze, was reserved for the commanding officer.<sup>25</sup> (Fig 14)

Further changes made around 1962 saw the fort take its final form and appearance under the TOS. These included the application of several layers of military whitewash and the construction of a series of stone buttresses around the exterior of the inner fort along with another one located at the southwest corner of the southern block of the administrative courtyard that is still visible in the external facade of the fort. (Fig 15)

From 1986-89 the former Department of Antiquities and Tourism, incorporated in 2005 into the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH, now TCA Abu Dhabi), undertook a comprehensive restoration of the fort. These works included the demolition of the southern block of the western administrative compound to create a single large courtyard now used for public events such as the Al Ain Classics and WOMAD. The present monumental entrance flanked by large round towers was added at this time, along with the arcaded gallery forming the western edge of this new courtyard. Further works included the blocking of the original gateway to the earlier eastern enclosure and the creation of a new gate in the western wall of the inner fort. All the new parts of the building added at this time were built using the same traditional combination of mud bricks with palm log roofs. The development project carried out by ADACH from 2007-2008 aimed to showcase the traditional mud brick architecture of al-Ain, particularly its thermal qualities, by combining these with an innovative system of chilled water pipes to provide cooling for the exhibition and information spaces within this new visitor facility for the city.<sup>26</sup>



## Conclusion

As with many historic buildings of the region from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is clear that even a brief review like this of the evidence contained in historic photographs provides a great deal of information on the history and architectural development of the fort at al-Jāhili.<sup>27</sup>

Proximity in time, anecdotal interest from former soldiers (the last reunion of the TOS paid a special visit to the fort in March 2012) and the sheer numbers of historic photographs (at least relative to the paucity of archaeological and historical evidence) from the TOS period has in recent times focused attention on this later use of the fort and rather overshadowed the central importance of al-Jāhili to the earlier story of Shaikh Zāyid and his ultimately successful 'policy of pacific penetration' into the oases of al-'Ain.

Paradoxically, what these same photographs make clear is that the changes to the fort carried out during the TOS years and subsequently have combined to obscure the extremely close similarities between al-Jāhili and a number of other important forts, particularly Qaṣr al-Hosn, as well as its place within a long tradition of 'Arab military architecture', probably deriving its origins from the tower houses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and continuing into the early years of the twentieth. Also obscured, this time by the growth of the modern city of al-'Ain, is the visual and physical challenge the construction of the fort at al-Jāhili was intended to represent not only to the Na'im stronghold of Qaṣr al-Khandaq but more generally to a political landscape that had existed in the oases for nearly a hundred years.

Ironically, the only part of the history of al-Jāhili that is not illuminated by historic photographs is that of its earliest component, the *falaj*, but here a little archaeology and history combined raise the possibility that the increase in the 'material possessions and consequent influence' of Shaikh Zāyid from the 1870s onwards did not simply consist of the acquisition of old abandoned land but the creation of entirely new estates and the excavation of the *aflāj* to supply them. Taken together, the various elements of the fort and its setting thus provide a remarkable testimony to the power of Shaikh Zayid b. Khalifa to effect fundamental changes to both the physical landscape and the political status quo of al-'Ain, an achievement 'in the interests of the general peace' which clearly influenced the policies of successive rulers.

## Endnotes

1. The multi-tiered round tower is the symbol of the Al Ain Club as well as numerous businesses in al-'Ain, whilst on the international stage there is even a gold-plated model of the fort at the UN in New York! <http://www.unmultimedia.org/photo/gallery.jsp?query=jahli>
2. Acknowledgements are due to my colleagues in the Historic Environment, Strategic Planning & Conservation Departments of ADACH (now TCA Abu Dhabi), who were involved in the Jahili Fort rehabilitation project between 2007-2008, as well as to all at



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3. Henderson, 1999: 31.
4. Clayton 2007.
5. Clayton 1994: 59.
6. Power & Sheehan, 2012.
7. Kelly, 1964: 45.
8. Kelly, 1964: 51.
9. Al-Rasheed, 2002: 38.
10. Miles 1877.
11. Kelly, 1964: 96; Heard-Bey, 1982: 225. Maitra & al-Hajji, 2001:182-183.
12. Lorimer, 1906: 260-264.
13. Miles, 1877:
14. Cox, 1925:207.
15. Cox, 1925: 208.
16. Letter in NCDR collections from Shaikh Zāyid b. Sulṭān to Ahmed bin Muḥammad b. Hilāl al-ḥāhirī, 24<sup>th</sup> Dhū'l-Qaḍa 1343 / 16<sup>th</sup> June 1925.
17. Maitra & al-Hajji, 2001:55.
18. The outline of this enclosure wall can be traced in a 1968 RAF air photograph, part of the same series as Fig 6.
19. Power and Sheehan, 2012. Malekabbasi and Sheehan, 2012.
20. Miles, 1877.
21. Kelly, 1964: 96.
22. Kelly, 1956. Clayton, 1994:71-75.
23. Clayton, 1994: 82.
24. Clayton 2007.
25. Personal communication, David Neild, former TOS officer stationed at al-Jāhili.
26. El-Masri & Sheehan, 2009.
27. See also, for example, Power & Sheehan, 2011.

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