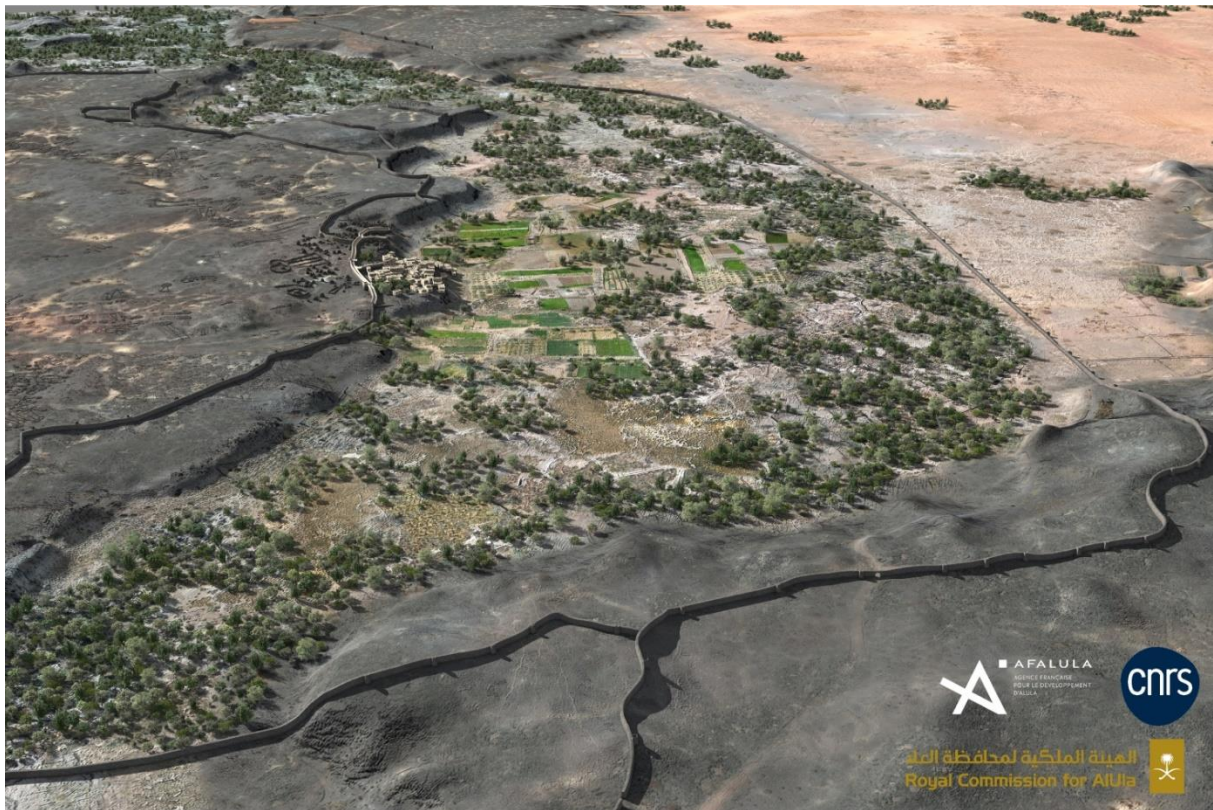


Press release

Paris, January 10, 2024

The discovery of a long rampart protecting the Khaybar oasis revolutionizes the history of the Arabian Peninsula



Reconstruction view of the network of ramparts in the northern part of walled oasis of Khaybar around 2000 BCE, © Khaybar Longue Durée Archaeological Project, M. Bussy & G. Charloux.

The French Agency for AlUla Development (AFALULA) and the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) are delighted to announce a breakthrough in scientific research on the Arabian Peninsula, thanks to the team from the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) as part of the Khaybar Longue Durée archaeological project led by AFALULA in collaboration with RCU.

The discovery of a mighty rampart that protected the Khaybar oasis over a length of almost 15 km at the turn of the 2nd millennium BCE sheds new light on the human occupation of north-west Arabia during the Bronze Age.

Khaybar Oasis was entirely enclosed by a rampart in pre-Islamic times, like several other large regional walled oases in north-west Arabia (Tayma, Qurayyah, Hait, etc.).



The cross-referencing of survey and remote sensing data, architectural examinations and the dating of stratified contexts have revealed a rampart initially some 14.5 km long, preserved today over just under half of the original route (41%, 5.9 km and 74 bastions).

This rampart dates back to the Bronze Age, between 2250 and 1950 BCE, and had never been detected before due to the profound reworking of the local desert landscape over time.

This crucial discovery confirms the rise of a walled oasis complex in north-west Arabia during the Bronze Age, a trend that proved to be central to the creation of indigenous social and political complexity.

To mark this discovery, an article by Dr Guillaume Charloux and colleagues entitled "The ramparts of Khaybar. Multiproxy investigation for reconstructing a Bronze Age walled oasis in Northwest Arabia" has just been published in the prestigious scientific journal JASREP - Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports.

The article can be read at: [https://authors.elsevier.com/sd/article/S2352-409X\(23\)00530-8](https://authors.elsevier.com/sd/article/S2352-409X(23)00530-8)

The project at Khaybar is one of 12 current archaeological specialist projects conducting fieldwork overseen by RCU in AlUla County and nearby Khaybar. This ambitious research programme with teams from around the world is aiming to further unlock the mysteries of antiquity in this region, with each new discovery showing us how much there is still to learn about the human history of north-west Arabia.

"For a long time, researchers considered northern Arabia before the emergence of the caravan kingdoms, to be a vast, inaccessible desert, inhabited only by nomads. The discovery of a monumental rampart in the Khaybar oasis dating from the Bronze Age, around 2000 BCE, has considerably altered this view, bringing to light a vast group of connected walled oases in the Saudi Hijaz region. The large and famous Khaybar oasis had never been explored in detail prior to our Saudi-French research project, and the heavily eroded state of the rampart had hidden it from the rare visitors to the site. The Khaybar rampart network is therefore a major archaeological discovery in more ways than one, from both a heritage and scientific point of view. This publication also paves the way for many other revelations on the prehistoric, pre-Islamic and Islamic past of the Khaybar oasis, which are currently under preparation for publication." **Dr Guillaume Charloux, Co-director of the Khaybar Longue Durée Project, CNRS**

"When AFALULA was asked in 2019 by its Saudi partner to mount a major archaeological mission at Khaybar, we expected this rich oasis to reveal major information for the proper understanding of this ecosystem at the heart of Arabia. Thanks to the Khaybar Longue Durée project team, co-directed by Dr Guillaume Charloux, the discoveries have already exceeded our expectations. The phenomenon of walled oases in the Bronze Age, as revealed by this article, is redrawing the map of our knowledge of this region of the world. The results published today will be a milestone, and we are proud to be carrying out such a high-quality project in collaboration with RCU." **Dr Ingrid Périssé, Director of Archaeology, AFALULA**

"The rampart discovery at Khaybar is a valuable addition to emerging evidence that demonstrates north-west Arabia's centrality to understanding the greater region and beyond. It joins other recent findings by RCU-sponsored fieldwork teams – originating from countries ranging from France to Germany to Turkey to Australia – in beginning to clarify the extraordinary richness of life in this pivotal zone of the Arabian Peninsula from the Palaeolithic through to the Islamic period. The Bronze Age walled oasis phenomenon raises many questions, which the details of this research are already helping to answer." **Dr Rebecca Foote, Director of Archaeology and Cultural Heritage Research, RCU**

About AFALULA (French Agency for AlUla Development)

Born as a result of an intergovernmental agreement signed by France and Saudi Arabia in April 2018, the French Agency for AlUla Development (AFALULA) was founded in Paris in July 2018. In the spirit of collaborative development, AFALULA's objective is to support its Saudi partner, the Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU), in the sustainable economic, tourism, and cultural development of AlUla, a region with an exceptional natural and cultural heritage located in the north-west of Saudi Arabia. The Agency's mission is to mobilize all of France's expertise and know-how and to bring together the best operators and companies in the fields of archaeology, museography,



architecture, urban planning, tourism, hotel management, infrastructure, education, security, agriculture, botany, and sustainable natural resource management.

About RCU (Royal Commission for AlUla)

The Royal Commission for AlUla (RCU) was established by royal decree in July 2017 to preserve and develop AlUla, a region of outstanding natural and cultural significance in north-west Saudi Arabia. RCU's long-term plan outlines a responsible, sustainable, and sensitive approach to urban and economic development that preserves the area's natural and historic heritage while establishing AlUla as a desirable location to live, work, and visit. This encompasses a broad range of initiatives across archaeology, tourism, culture, education, and the arts, reflecting a commitment to meeting the economic diversification, local community empowerment, and heritage preservation priorities of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 programme.

About the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS)

The French National Center for Scientific Research is one of the most recognised and renowned public research institutions in the world. For more than 80 years, it has continued to attract talent at the highest level and to nurture multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research projects at the national, European and international levels. Geared towards the public interest, it contributes to the scientific, economic, social and cultural progress of France. The CNRS is above all 33,000 women and men, more than 1,000 laboratories in partnership with universities and other higher education institutions bringing together more than 120,000 employees and 200 professions that advance knowledge by exploring the living world, matter, the Universe, and the functioning of human societies. The CNRS ensures that this mission is carried out in compliance with ethical rules and with a commitment to professional equality. The close relationship it establishes between its research missions and the transfer of acquired knowledge to the public makes it today a key player in innovation in France and around the world. Partnerships with companies are at the heart of its technology transfer policy, and the start-ups that have emerged from CNRS laboratories bear witness to the economic potential of its research. The CNRS provides also access to research findings and data, and this sharing of knowledge targets many audiences: scientific communities, the media, decision-makers, economic players and the general public. For more information: www.cnrs.fr

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