



Al Zubarah Archaeological Site

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOMINATION DOCUMENT FOR THE INSCRIPTION
ON THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LIST

January 2011

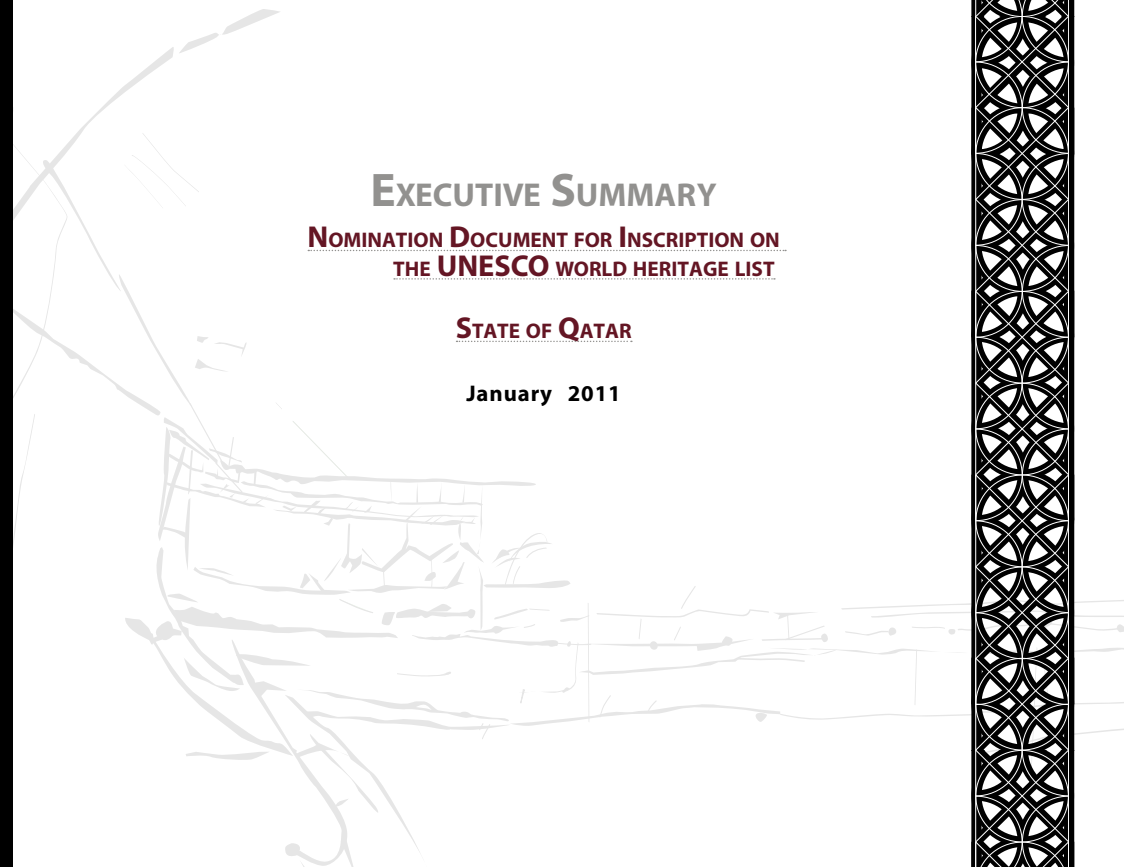
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STATE OF QATAR

January 2011





STATE PARTY

State of Qatar

STATE, PROVINCE OR REGION

Madinat Ash Shamal Municipality

NAME OF PROPERTY/SITE

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site

GEOGRAPHICAL COORDINATES TO THE NEAREST SECOND

The geographical coordinates of the centre of the Nominated Property (corresponding to Al Zubarah tower number 13 in the town wall) are:

Latitude: 25° 58' 41" N

Longitude: 51° 01' 47" E

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site covers an area of 415.66 ha.

The limits of the Nominated Property are identified by the following coordinates:

North limit: 51°01'32" E 25°59'17" N

South limit: 51°01'31" E 25°57'50" N

East limit: 51°02'52" E 25°58'24" N

West limit: 51°00'51" E 25°58'16" N

The Buffer Zone (not including the Nominated Property) covers an area of 7196.4 ha.

The limits of the Buffer Zone are identified by the following coordinates:

North limit: 51°01'32" E 26°03'17" N

South limit: 51°03'29" E 25°56'37" N

East limit: 51°04'57" E 25°57'47" N

West limit: 50°57'05" E 25°59'15" N



TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION OF THE BOUNDARIES OF THE NOMINATED SITE

MAP OF THE NOMINATED SITE

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Al Zubarah Archaeological Site lies approximately 92km north-west of Doha, on the north-western coast of Qatar, in the Madinat ash Shamal municipality.

The Nominated Property consists of two parcels owned by the Qatar Museums Authority (QMA). The larger area of land contains the coastal town of Al Zubarah and its immediate hinterland, including features related to the defence and supply of the town, as well as the early 20th century Al Zubarah Fort. Separated by a modern road, the second parcel includes the fort and settlement of Qal`at Murair, including wells for the water supply of Al Zubarah.

In the north, the Nominated Property is defined as a straight line between the coast and the existing fence around Al Zubarah Fort. The eastern extent encompasses the remains at Qal`at Murair, while the current road from Al Zubarah Fort to the Ras Ushairiq peninsula defines the southern limit. The intersection between the beach and the *sabkha* formation south-west of Al Zubarah town forms the western boundary of the Nominated Property.

A vast Buffer Zone, incorporating both the wider hinterland and the extensive coral reef system off the shore of Al Zubarah, surrounds the Nominated Property. On the hinterland, the Buffer Zone follows administrative and physical limits to the East, South and North of the site, and includes the archaeological sites of Qal`at Shuwail, Helwan, and the abandoned village of Ain Mohammad. In the sea, it draws a north-west quadrant at 6.2km from the north point of the Nominated Property.



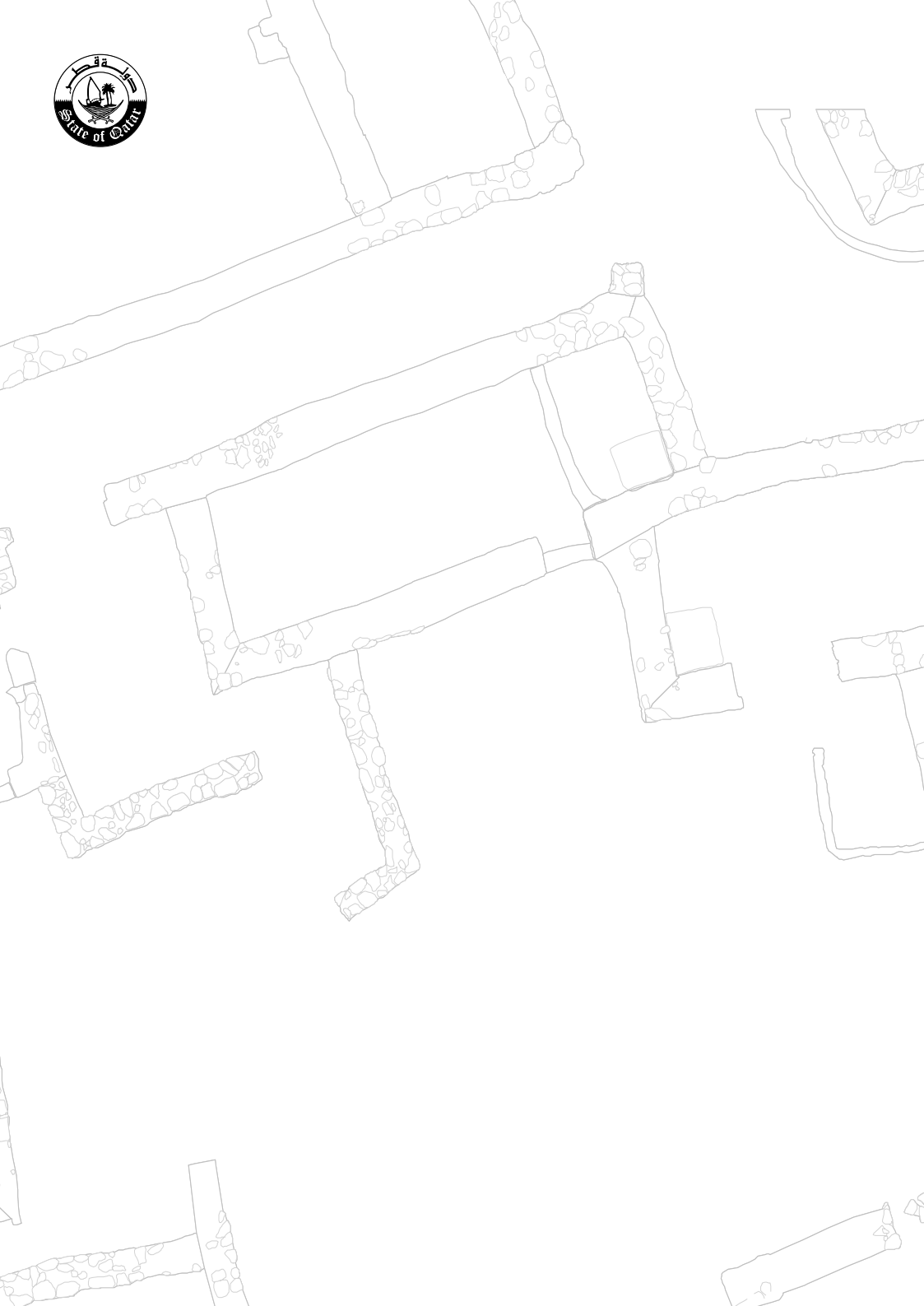
STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING UNIVERSAL VALUE

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site is of outstanding universal value as the Gulf's most complete and well-preserved pearl trading and diving town of the 18th-19th centuries. Until the introduction of the cultured pearl, and before the exploitation of oil and gas, the trade in pearls constituted the Gulf's most important industry, employing up to a third of the male population in the region. It created large economic surplus and wealth at a time when the Persian Safavid Empire had lost political influence and importance. Pearl trading was the foundation on which incipient city-states were formed and gained wider regional influence and importance, laying down the crucial geopolitical, social, and cultural trajectories of recent Gulf history, which shape the region to this day.

Al Zubarah played a pivotal role in this historic phase of development, as it represented one of the most prolific and crucial international trading ports in the region. As a traditional settlement located in Arabia in which trade, commerce and hence social and cultural interaction and exchange were the underlying tenets, the Nominated Property relates to a number of socially and culturally relevant themes. The site reflects the history of tribal migration in the Arabian Gulf, as it was founded by merchants arriving from Kuwait and Basra in the search for pearls. Al Zubarah also represents a unique mode of occupying a fragile desert ecosystem, which includes a particular system of water management. Moreover, during the mid to late 18th century, Al Zubarah was the Gulf's most important trading hub, connecting the Indian Ocean with Arabia and western Asia, and highlighting how trade and exchange connected people from East and West economically, socially and culturally. Collectively, these themes highlight Al Zubarah as a non-European, traditional form of settlement, which encapsulates anthropological and social historical themes.

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site's outstanding universal value pertains to the unique preservation of a complete urban town plan of an 18th-19th century pearling and trading settlement. This unique state of preservation highlights the authenticity of the site, and it provides crucial information on human interactions with the land and sea, trade links, and social and economic relationships, which are engrained and materialised in this exceptional assemblage of urban, historic fabric. Surrounded and protected by a 2.5km long wall, the town extended over an area of 61 hectares. Due to the abandonment of the site in the beginning of the 20th century, the entire layout of the settlement is preserved in great detail, providing key archaeological and anthropological data on economic, social and cultural relations between the inhabitants of the town, as well as traditional pearling practices.

The site is today preserved in the form of low mounds, which mask the buried traces of traditional vernacular and religious architecture. The urban fabric of the Nominated Property includes courtyard houses, palaces, mosques, souqs, defensive walls and palm-leaf fishermen's huts and tents. This represents a unique mix and assemblage of building types, whose spatial organisation across an entire townscape is preserved in outstanding detail. The Nominated Property includes the entire town, harbour, canal, screening walls, cemeteries, and Qal'at Murair. Qal'at Murair, which was destroyed in the latter part of the 20th century, survives largely as sub-surface archaeology, but is an important, interconnected feature of the Nominated Property. The fort showcases how the desert's most precious resource – water – was managed and protected, and how Al Zubarah's rulers strategically protected access to it.



The integrity of *Al Zubarah Archaeological Site* is guaranteed, as it was abandoned in the early 20th century and is located far from any modern settlement. Only a small proportion of the site has been excavated and restored, and scientific reports have been – or are in preparation to be – published. The archaeological phases at the site are intact and showcase the development and evolution of the town. *Al Zubarah Archaeological Site* is under development to ensure the preservation and presentation of the site for future generations.

The Nominated Site is proposed for inscription under criteria (iii) and (v), as it is an outstanding example of a mid 18th to late 19th century pearl fishing and trading settlement, representing a traditional form of land- and sea-use, settlement and water management. Moreover, Al Zubarah is one of the last remaining localities that embodies the historical trajectories that shaped the economic, social and geopolitical landscape of the early-modern and modern Gulf. *Al Zubarah Archaeological Site* encapsulates the traditions and lifestyle of 18th-19th century urban populations in the Gulf, and reflects the relationship that existed between the people of the Arabian Peninsula and their natural environment.

The property is owned by the QMA, a distinct governmental organisation under direct control of the Amir's Office. The Buffer Zone around *Al Zubarah Archaeological Site* protects it from the impact of any development plan being considered for the region, guaranteeing the preservation of not only the archaeological remains, but also of their setting and the surrounding landscape. The Nominated Property includes the 1938 Al Zubarah Fort, itself an important visitor attraction and a source of national pride, while Qal'at Shuwail, an 18th century fort and settlement associated with Al Zubarah, is inside the limits of the Buffer Zone. Given the strong existing governmental planning and development control, in which the QMA has direct input for the protection of archaeological and historic building assets, the Buffer Zone will guarantee the highest level of protection for this outstanding site.



CRITERIA FOR NOMINATION

The nomination of Al Zubarah for inscription on the World Heritage List is based on criteria (iii) and (v) of UNESCO's *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*.

Criterion (iii) requires that Al Zubarah should:

"bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared"

The abandoned settlement of Al Zubarah is a unique testimony to the merchant and pearl trading tradition of the Arabian Gulf during the 18th and 19th centuries. The settlement was founded by Utub merchants emigrating from other towns, seeking to create a safe trading haven in the Gulf, as other long-established ports were destroyed, occupied, or ridden with plague.

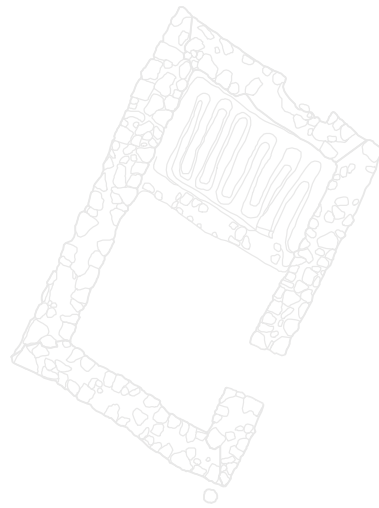
Over a very short period of time, Al Zubarah quickly rose to become the foremost centre for pearl-based trade and commerce in the region, and Qatar's largest and most important town.

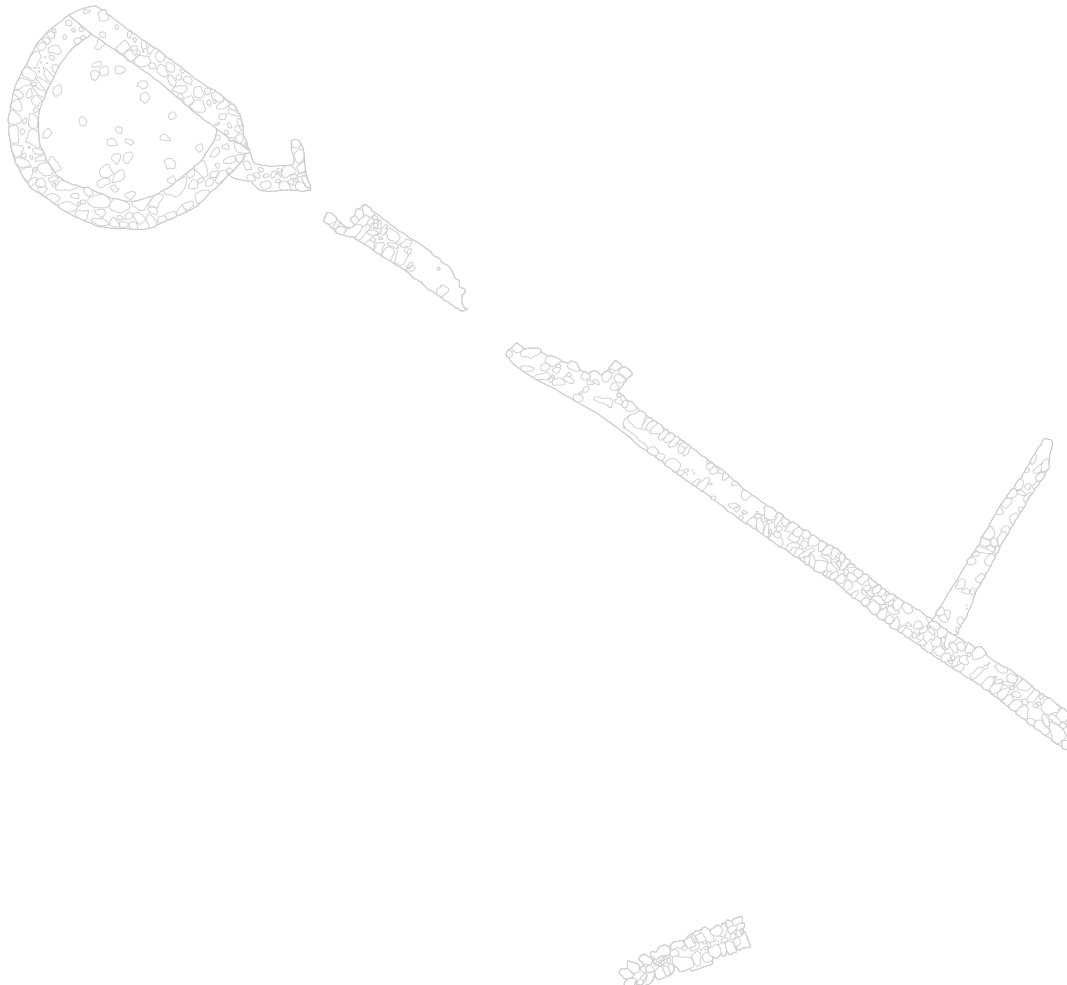
Al Zubarah Archaeological Site represents the only complete urban plan of an Arabian pearl-merchant town, with its unique combination of neighbourhoods, mosques, palaces, markets, defensive systems and a canal – in itself a unique testament to the achievements of Al Zubarah's inhabitants. The town plan of Al Zubarah encapsulates and preserves key ideas about urbanism and town planning during the 18th-19th centuries, and it is the best-preserved record of its type. The individual neighbourhood plots, plazas, mosques and markets that are discernable from the town plan also reflect a significant degree of urban planning and control.

The different components of Al Zubarah's urban plan show that the settlement was conceived and implemented from the outset. The layout of the town shows, therefore, both the sophistication of the planning principles, and the capacity of Al Zubarah's rulers to control and direct the social and economic forces driving the town's creation. Trade, commerce and pearling are ever-present in the archaeology of Al Zubarah. Ceramics attest to trade links along the "maritime silk route" connecting Al Zubarah with the Indian Ocean, eastern Africa, eastern and western Asia and Europe. Its geographic location in the Arabian Gulf, between the Indian Ocean and western Asia, facilitated its rapid rise as a key commercial centre. The economic surplus and wealth created by this trade provided the financial and political basis on which the early modern, incipient city-states of the Gulf were created.

The early abandonment of Al Zubarah at the beginning of the 20th century has helped to preserve the most detailed urban layout of an 18th-19th century pearl fishing and trading town anywhere in the region.

Al Zubarah reflects the heyday of the pearl trade, during which the key trajectories of the Gulf's early modern history were established, before the introduction of the cultured pearl brought this centuries-old tradition to an end.





Criterion (v) requires that Al Zubarah should:

“be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change”

Al Zubarah Archaeological Site bears unique testimony to the human interaction with both the sea and the harsh, desert environment of the region.

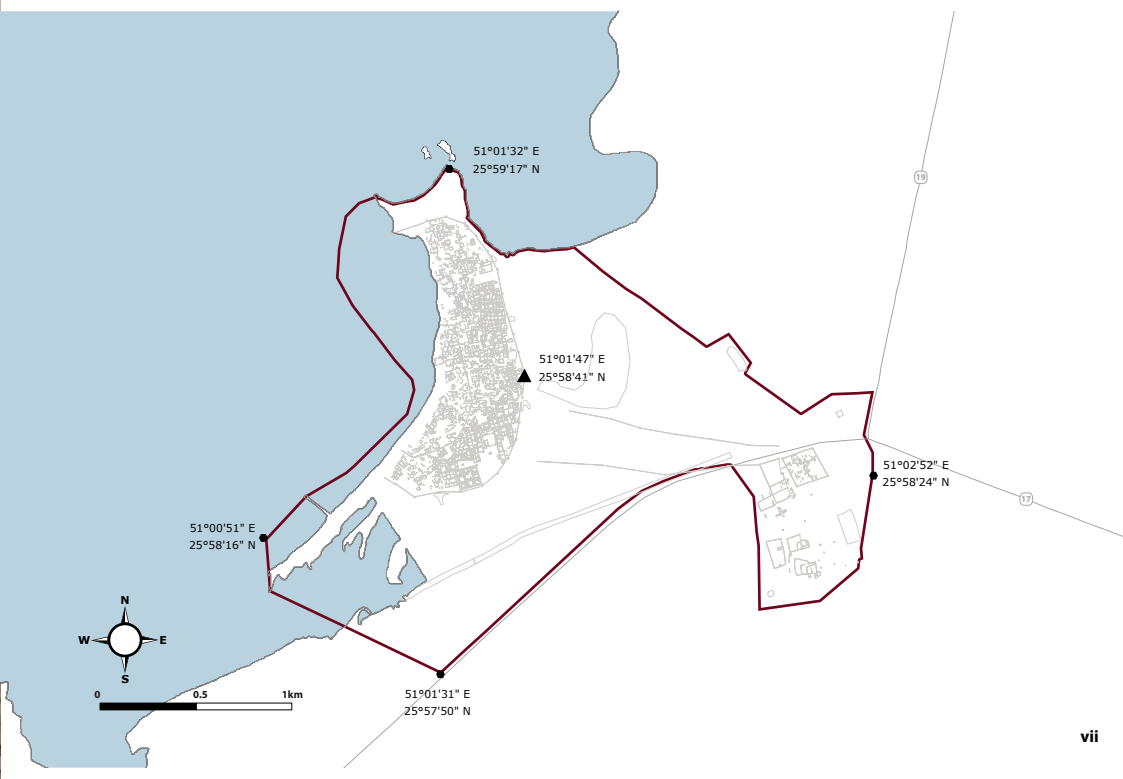
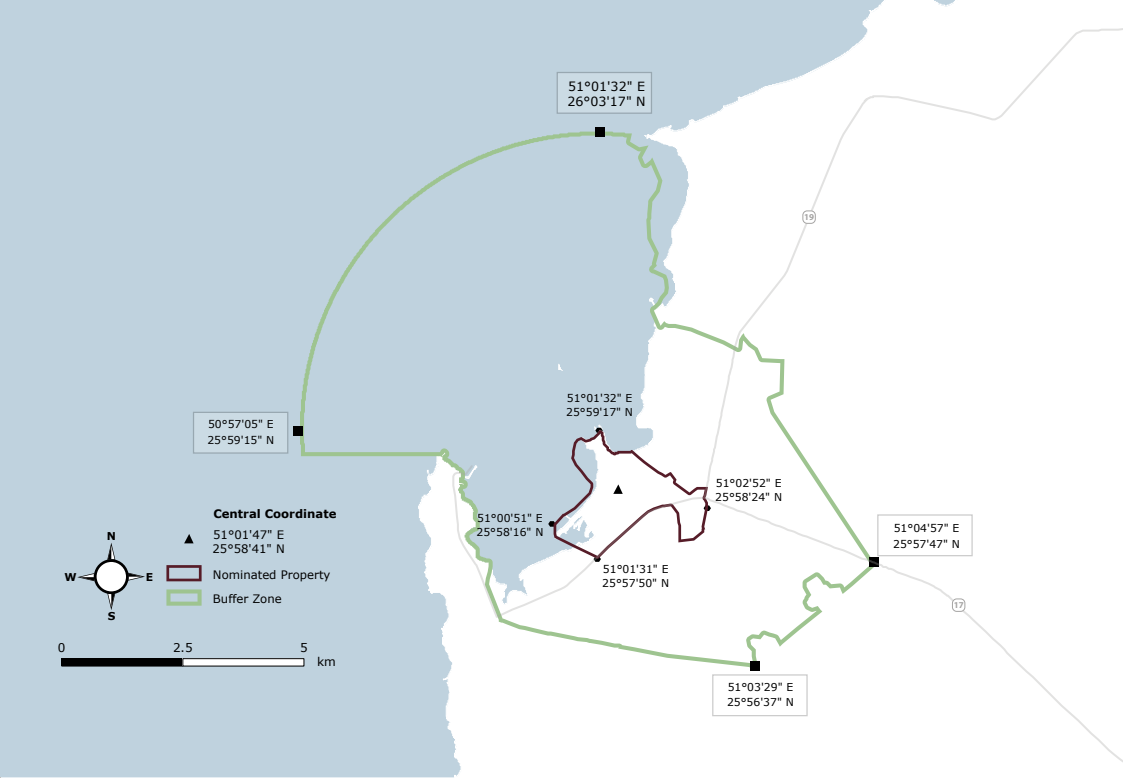
Pearl divers’ weights, depictions of *dhow*s, and imported ceramics show how the town’s development was driven by trade and commerce, and how closely the town’s inhabitants were connected with the sea.

Al Zubarah’s natural harbour provided ample protection against piracy or bad weather, and it supported a sizeable pearling fleet, which travelled twice annually to the oyster banks along the north-eastern coast of Qatar.

A canal to the south of the settlement connected Qal’at Murair to the sea, allowing freshwater to be transported to supply ships, and goods to be ferried between the harbour and the fort. Intra-tidal traps built of low walls utilised the natural tides to catch fish in a complex, dense trapping system that can be found in association with numerous settlements up and down the coast, including Al Zubarah.

These reflect an intensive exploitation of marine resources. Date presses – *madbasat* – found in the settlement, and traces of field systems found in Qal’at Murair show that the exploitation of the seas was complemented by an equally intensive use of Al Zubarah’s hinterland. Palm groves provided a food source for the settlement, while wells in and near Murair were the principal source of freshwater. Remains of enclosures provide evidence for the keeping of livestock, helping to feed the town’s population.

The town of Al Zubarah and the fort of Murair therefore formed a symbiotic, economic and social relationship. Qal’at Murair protected the town’s crucial freshwater resource, and two screening walls allowed people to safely transport water from Qal’at Murair to Al Zubarah. The local geology and geography shaped the traditional settlement system in the area, with freshwater wells only existing on the higher ground to the east. These ecological conditions led to the establishment of small-scale settlements in Al Zubarah’s hinterland in support of the town. With Al Zubarah at its centre, the site and region represent an outstanding example of traditional human settlement, land-use and sea-use.





**NAME AND CONTACT INFORMATION
OF OFFICIAL INSTITUTION**

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