



The roofed cistern



Another cistern in the upper terrace



Location of the Queen of Sheeba's Palace



Government of Ras al-Khaimah



Department of
Antiquities
and Museums

www.rakmuseum.gov.ae



RAK Tourism
Office

www.raktourism.com

Queen of Sheeba's Palace



The palace area seen from the south

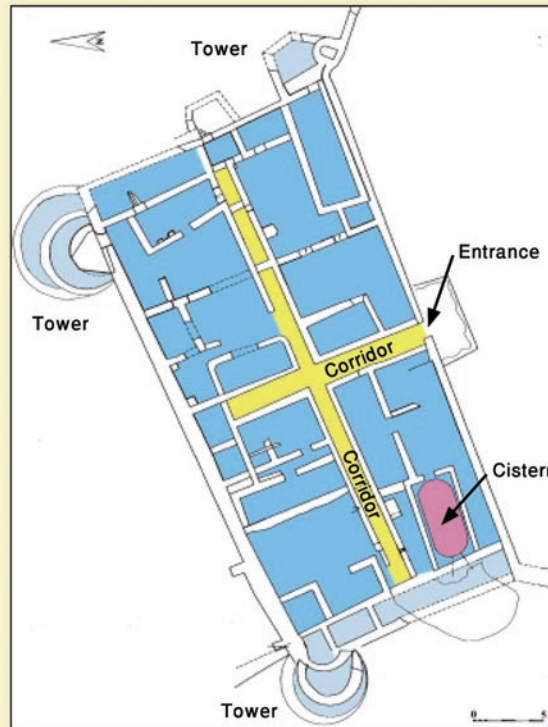
This medieval palace is situated on a ridge above the village of Shimal.

It is the only ancient Islamic palace known in the UAE and dates back to the Julfar period (13th-16th century AD). It was most probably the residence of the ruler of Julfar, once the most famous and prosperous trading town in the whole lower Gulf.

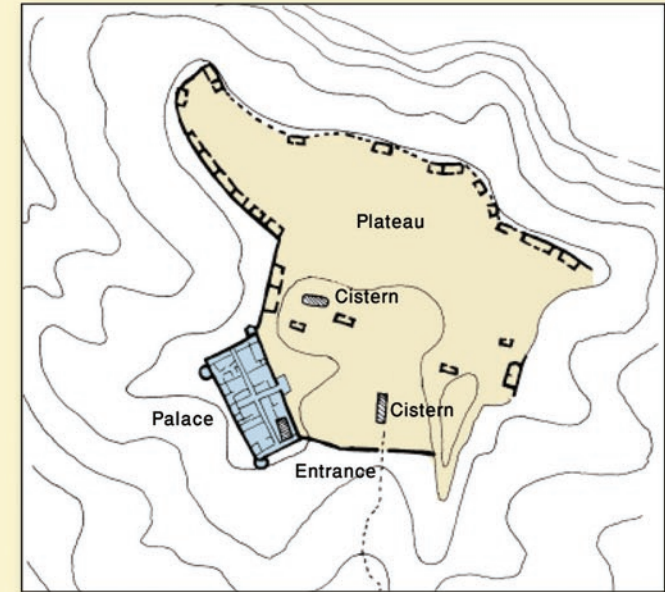
The term "Queen of Sheeba's Palace" refers to the famous queen, who is mentioned in the Quran, and is said to have ruled the Kingdom of Marib in Yemen around 1000 BC. The attachment of her name to this site developed from a local legend and has no historical or archaeological background.

The palace is situated on a rocky spur overlooking Shimal, an ideal location for defensive purposes and a cooler climate. The medieval palace and its impressive roofed cistern were carefully examined during an architectural study by German specialists, who also restored the water reservoir.

Today, the palace is accessible via a modern stairway which follows the original medieval approach. At the top of the steps one passes the remains of a wall, which once secured the only entrance to the plateau. Here, the first cistern can be seen, one of three large reservoirs built to collect and store rain water. Walking on, the natural division of the plateau becomes visible. The western area towards the palm oasis contains the remains of the palace, while the much larger eastern part houses the remains of several single-room buildings. They are attached to the defense wall which runs along the edge of the plateau.



The plan of the palace



The Plateau with palace and fortification

Standing inside the remains of the palace, one understands immediately its advantages, a cool breeze combined with a magnificent view over the extensive palm oasis of Shimal. Although only its foundations remain, they still provide us with enough information about the former medieval residence. Built as a rectangular building (15m x 35m), its corners were strengthened with round towers and the main entrance was built into the centre of the southern wall. The interior layout consists of two rows of rooms running along the length of the building and divided by a corridor. Everything was well built with plastered walls and floors. The best preserved area is a room in the south-western corner of the palace. It was constructed as a cistern and covered with an impressive arched roof which is still standing today.

After the 16th century, the medieval complex was no longer used as a palace. Instead, the whole plateau served as a retreat ("Sur") for the inhabitants of the Shimal palm gardens in times of danger. For this reason, the top of the hill was completely surrounded by a stone wall. It ensured the safety of the people and their animals in times of attack and raids from the desert.