

The Great Marib Dam – the eighth wonder of the world

Styrodur® lets the Kingdom of Sheba rise once again



An ancient dam. Without it, the Kingdom of Sheba would not have existed for long.



A model of an ancient structure brings history to life. Only the material has changed – after all, the polystyrene rigid foam Styrodur® was not yet available in ancient times.

Everyone knows about the seven wonders of the ancient world – but there is a monumental structure archeologists and historians like to call the eighth wonder of the world: the Great Marib Dam in southern Arabia, in what is today Yemen. The ancient society there demonstrated great engineering ingenuity in order to take advantage of the periodical monsoon rains. Without water there is no life. True to this maxim, the subjects of the ancient Kingdom of Sheba in Marib collected water by building a gigantic dam so as to be able to supply their cities with this precious liquid.

Antiquity brought to life

Time and again, archeologists and historians have ventured back into history to discover new chapters. Whereas the archeologist in the movie “Indiana Jones” – whose fourth sequel is being filmed right now – was more interested in lost treasures and life-threatening adventures, the researchers studying the Marib dam are dealing with hardcore science. Then again, the history of the great dam is certainly “movie material”.

In fact, a piece of ancient history has now become a hands-on reality. At the College of Applied Sciences in Hamburg, Germany, under the leadership of Prof. Dr. Michael Schütz, an imposing model of the dam has been created that can almost rival the original; in fact, the replica of just the south structure of the dam is a full seven and half meters wide by three meters long. The model provides an insight into the ancient construction and allows us to experience up close the sheer dimension of the dam, a real feat of engineering for its time. This model was made possible with the assistance of BASF: it donated the requisite amount of Styrodur® as the anything but “ancient” construction material. Owing to its low water absorption and high pressure resistance, this foamed material is absolutely ideal for the miniature version of this irrigation wonderwork and it enabled the Kingdom of Sheba to rise once again.