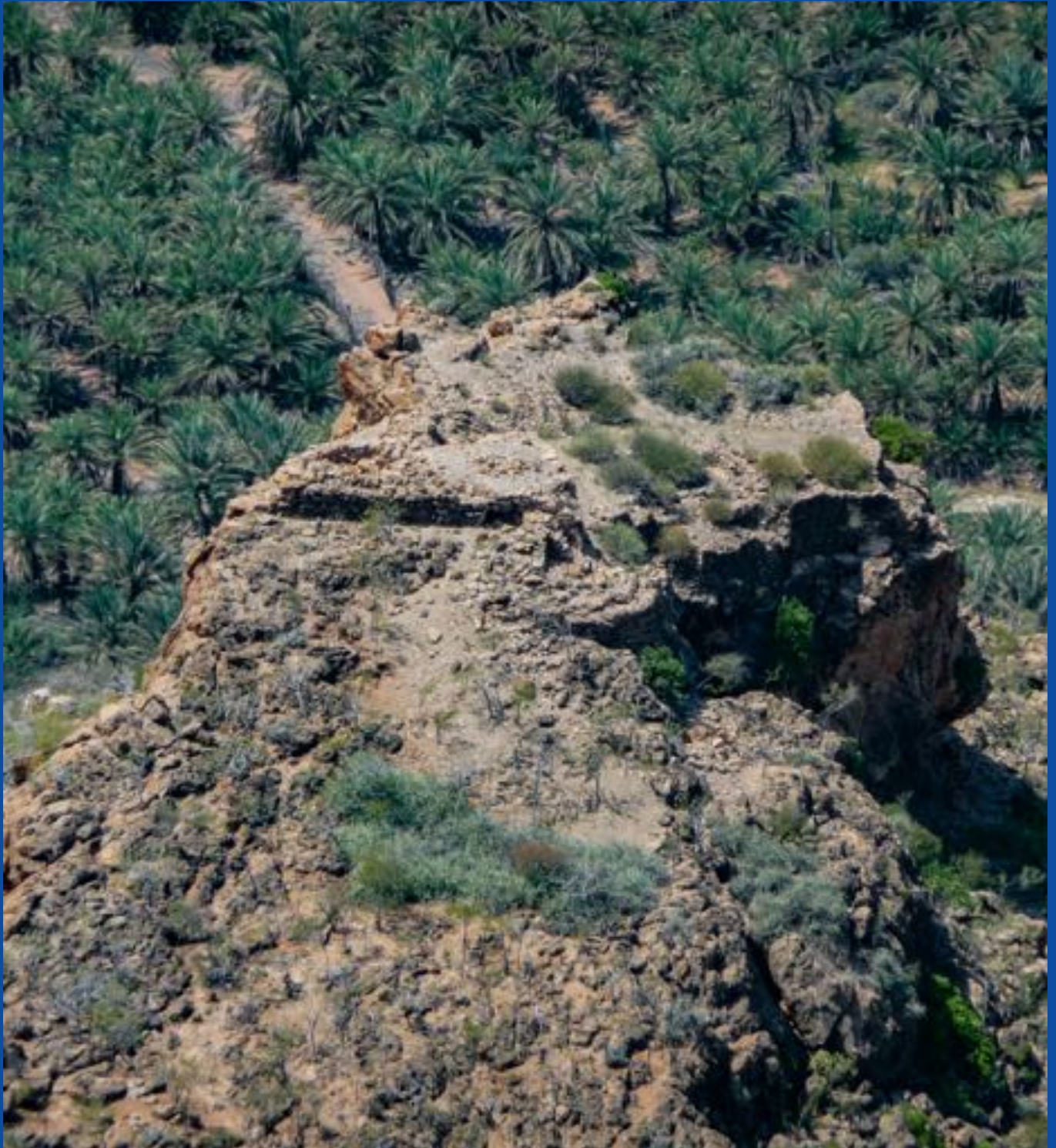


Number 28

2022 Spring Edition

THE IASA BULLETIN



The Latest News and Research in the Arabian Peninsula



IASA
International Association
for the Study of Arabia
الرابطة الدولية لدراسة الجزيرة العربية

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ISSN: 2632-4954

Reg. Charity No. 1003272



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New activities at the archaeological site of al-Balīd (December 2021–January 2022)

A. D'Andrea, R. Giunta, A. Pavan, R. Valentini

In December 2021 the archaeological investigations at the medieval city port of al-Balīd, Governorate of Dhofar, were resumed, after a prolonged stall due to the pandemic. The activities were carried out within the frame of a new collaboration between the University of Naples "L'Orientale" and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Muscat, with the constant and active support of the Ministry's branch located in Salalah. The field work was focused in an area located immediately west of the central north-south road axis of the town where P. M. Costa (1982) documented a building with two monolithic stone columns over three metres high, bearing interesting decorative motifs on the base and on the capital (Figure 1). On the top of a mound, at an elevation of approximately 5.5 m asl, sporadic outcrops of an east-west oriented structure were emerging. The location of the building, which stands in the central area of the site, and its orientation towards Mecca suggested the presence of a mosque worthy of interest that has never been the subject of an archaeological excavation.



Figure 1. Aerial view of the western part of al-Balīd with the location of the two investigated mosques (image: Google Earth)

The first trench, about 1.5 m wide, brought to light a wall 14.5 m long with a maximum preserved height of about 1.7 m, which defined the southern perimeter of the building. A second trench was opened to identify the presence of the western wall of the building in which the mihrab niche (qibli wall) must have been placed (Figure 2). A semi-elliptical niche was indeed discovered, originally flanked by two columns (base 20 × 20 cm). In the area facing the mihrab was found a floor consisting of a thick layer of white plaster, re-arranged in the area north of the niche through the adding of a second floor, greyish in colour. A further trench investigated 2 m north of the southern wall allowed the field team to find possible evidence of the housing of columns.

Within the frame of a study focused on the religious buildings of the town, the survey of a further mosque, located about 140 m northeast of the citadel, was carried out.



Figure 2. Mihrab of Mosque 1 during the excavations (image: A. D'Andrea)

The building, documented by photogrammetry, was chosen because it was delimited by walls in a good state of preservation, and three circular columns were still standing in the interior (Figure 3). Subsequently, a survey of all the site's buildings was carried out to identify columns and/or column elements still visible and preserved in situ or ex-situ. At the end of the work more than fifty elements were recorded.



Figure 3. Preliminary 3D model of Mosque 2 (elaboration: R. Valentini)

In parallel with the on-field investigations, some activities have been conducted in the exhibition halls of the Museum of the Frankincense Land, Salalah, and concerned five portions of columns on display, three of which originally belonged to the mosque excavated during the last campaign. From a preliminary analysis of the ornaments it is possible to propose a dating of the columns between the last part of the 11th century and the first half of the 13th century, which allows us to date the phase of the mosque brought to light. Finally, the activity focused on digitizing a selection of

significant artefacts discovered at al-Balīd and displayed in Oman's different museums or stored in Salalah has been implemented through updating over 500 finds (ceramic, metal, bone, glass, wood, stone). The selection includes different imported and noteworthy artefacts witnessing the relevance of the site in globalized Indian Ocean trade during the medieval period.

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Ichthyophagoi: their Culture and Economy. Landscape and People during the Iron Age in Coastal Oman

Romolo Loreto, Lucio A. Corrado, M. Cozzolino, B. Musella (Università degli studi di Napoli "L'Orientale"), Ibrahim al-Qysar (Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman)

Introduction

This note introduces the season 2021 of the joint Omani-Italian archaeological project at Wādī Banī Ḥālīd (northern Šarqiyah governorate, eastern al-Ḥaḡar), where a dense Iron Age and ancient Islamic occupation was detected. The aim of the project was to define the Iron Age settlement patterns along the eastern al-Ḥaḡar landscape and their relationship both with the coastal areas and the al-Ḥaḡar inner piedmont sites of central Oman. This project follows previous studies of the coastal environment between Muscat and Ra's al-Ḥadd (2014–2018), where several seasonal fishing villages were investigated (in particular Bamah), and their connections with inner permanent sites, such as Lizq, recognized during the Early Iron Age (1300–600 BCE) (Corrado 2020; Loreto 2018, 2020).



Figure 1. The synclinal valley of Wādī Banī Ḥālīd. WBK1 stands on a *talus* along the left slope of the wadi (to the right) dominating an alluvial bend (©UNO)

Such a scientific approach is well suited to the recent Omani ministerial context, with the birth of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the intention of finding a strategy focused not only on scientific research but also on the conservation

and promotion/enhancement of sites relative to the areas between Wādī Banī Ḥālīd and the coast (Bamah).

The project is funded by Ministry of Foreign Affairs and by International Cooperation (Italy), the University of Napoli "L'Orientale" (UNO), and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (Oman).

Season 2021

The Mission 2021, although brief in length because of the Covid-19 pandemic, took place from 14 to 27 December 2021, and focused on the excavation of the Late Iron Age fortified site of Wādī Banī Ḥālīd (WBK1) and on the study of the ophiolitic resources (metals and chlorite) supplying areas, both remotely and on the field (Fig. 1).

Activities in 2021 were focused on the opening of three new trenches (3-5) along the eastern part of the perimetral wall of WBK1 (Fig. 2), defining a new dwelling building (House C/A), investigating the Tower T5 and the wall sector between towers T3-T4. In trench 3 there emerged, indeed, a dwelling building with a rectangular plan extending to about 12m by 8m, of which three rooms (inside the trench perimeter) have been completely excavated, one of them characterized by a fireplace and a huge quantity of tableware dated to the Late Iron Age phase, in particular with decorative patterns related to Samad al-Šān and datable between I-II sec CE. In trench 4, inside the tower, an extensive level of collapse has preserved a remarkable quantity of pottery relating to storage purposes, once again datable to between I-II sec CE.; The sounding in trench 5, in proximity of the perimetral wall, has been opened to better define the foundation phase of the fortifications.

Remote analysis: paleo-environmental maps for the definition of the mineral and ophiolitic resources

Between the research and training programs of the Italian Archaeological Mission of the "L'Orientale"

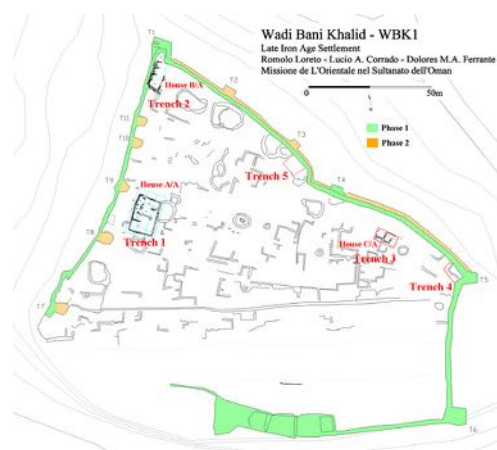


Figure 2. Topographic plan of WBK1 after seasons 2019 (Houses A/A and B/A) and 2021 (Trenches 3 to 5) (©UNO)

in Oman, attention is particularly directed to the study of the paleo-environment and the resources, following a geomorphological approach. The project has, among its objectives, the aim to produce a geo-archaeological map of the whole extension of Wādī Banī Ḥālīd, collecting in a