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# Ongoing Research at Al Baleed and the Dhofar Region: New Data from the 2025 Field Season

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The 2025 field season of the Italian Archaeological Mission of the University of Naples L'Orientale at Al Baleed and in the Dhofar region (IAMOB) was conducted between 30 November and 28 December, in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman. The project continues a long-term research programme focused on the site of the ancient port city of Zafar, today Al Baleed, and its wider territorial context, integrating excavation, survey, and documentation activities, alongside initiatives dedicated to training and public engagement.

At the site of Al Baleed, fieldwork focused on mound BA017, an area under investigation since 2024, located in the north-western sector of the town, close to major buildings, including the citadel and the Grand Mosque (Giunta et al. 2025). A total of sixteen rooms and open areas were investigated, revealing a dense concentration of installations, including sixteen clay ovens (tannurs), hearths,

refuse pits, and dumping areas. The evidence points to a productive complex primarily devoted to food preparation and cooking. These activities are attested throughout the stratigraphic sequence, with no substantial functional change between the main phases identified. Rather than indicating different uses of the space, the phases reflect successive reconfigurations of the same functional area, shaped by the repeated installation, dismantling, and rebuilding of cooking facilities. The archaeological materials can be broadly dated between the 16th and 18th centuries, as indicated by diagnostic ceramics associated with the latest occupation of the city, with parallels also attested at the citadel (Pavan et al. 2020).

Particularly significant is the presence of well-stratified dumping deposits, which could provide valuable insights into dietary practices through the analysis of food remains. Variations in the composition of faunal remains, especially fish and



● **Fig. 1** Al Baleed, aerial view of the excavated area at the end of the campaign (©IAMOB, 2025)



● **Fig. 2** Al Baleed, cooking and processing installations in Room A5 (©IAMOB, 2025)

shell assemblages, point to changes in resource exploitation over time. The study of malacofauna has been initiated in collaboration with the University of Milan, while archaeobotanical samples have been systematically collected for analysis, opening new perspectives on plant use and environmental interaction, both on a seasonal basis and over longer-term trajectories.

The materials recovered during the 2025 campaign have further expanded the interpretative framework of the area, supporting its identification as a multifunctional space where food preparation, consumption, and possibly distribution took place. The assemblage, in fact, includes not only vessels related to cooking and food preparation, but also containers associated with serving and pouring, as well as a large number of incense burners, which may have been produced or assembled in this part of the site. Additional evidence of everyday practices is provided by finds such as small containers associated with betel chewing and objects possibly linked to leisure activities.

The mission also continued its survey activities in the Dhofar region, with particular attention to the coastal area of Hasik, already investigated during previous campaigns (Pavan 2024), integrating desk-based remote sensing conducted in Italy with field verification. Several sites of archaeological interest were identified, including shell middens, circular stone structures, and architectural remains. The evidence points to a long-term and multi-phase

occupation of the coastal landscape, extending into the Late Islamic period, and highlights the role of this area within broader patterns of mobility and resource exploitation. The reuse of several structures by fishermen who still frequent this stretch of coastline further suggests a continuity of use and practices over time.

Additional work was carried out at the Al Ribat cemetery, where preliminary mapping and documentation activities were undertaken (Antonelli 2025). This area represents a key component of the research strategy of the mission, offering the opportunity to investigate funerary practices and their relationship with the settlement dynamics of occupation at Al Baleed.

From a methodological perspective, the project continues to develop an integrated approach to documentation. The combined use of total station, GNSS, and drone-based photogrammetry, also implemented through a new collaboration with Dhofar University in Salalah, has enabled the production of high-resolution spatial data, supporting both fieldwork and post-excavation analysis. These datasets form the basis for ongoing interpretative work and for future digital applications, which are planned to be developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

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