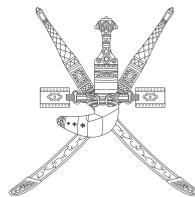


THE TANGIBLE & INTANGIBLE
CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF
WADI BANI KHARUS

Investigations in the Sultanate of Oman

MOAWIYAH M. IBRAHIM & LAURA M. STRACHAN



Ministry of Heritage and Tourism
Sultanate of Oman



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Investigations in the Sultanate of Oman

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When we began Phase 2 of our project, it was under the auspices of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (MHC). Since this time, there have been many changes to the Ministry including a new directive and name in 2020, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (MHT), in addition to the retirement and well-deserved promotions of many of our original Ministry contacts.

We would like to begin by extending our sincerest gratitude to Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said who before his ascension to the throne in 2020 was the Minister of Heritage and Culture. We are especially grateful to H.E. Salim bin Mohammed Almahruqi, the current Minister of Heritage and Tourism, H.E. Hassan bin Mohammed Al-Lawati, formerly the Adviser to the Minister of Heritage and Culture and the Director General of Archaeology and Museums, Mr. Sultan bin Saif Al-Bakri, current Director General of Archaeology, Ms. Sumaya Al-Busaidi and other Ministry staff for their help and first-class hospitality over the years.

Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) contributed to the project's success during its formative years. Special recognition is extended to the Dean of Research, the Department of Archaeology, the Department of History and to esteemed scholars Dr. Isam Rowas, Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Nasser Al-Hinai, surveying and drafting, Yaqoub Al-Rahbi, photography, and Badar Al-Alawi. And to Dr. Jutta Haeser and Uergen Schreiber of the Omani German Project on "Omani Oases Settlements" who helped in the identification of pottery shards, many thanks.

To our 2012 and 2014 research partners, Ali Dhihli, William A. J. Strachan and William A. Strachan, our sincerest gratitude for your indefatigable dedication and contributions to the success of this project. Ali, our Ministry of Heritage and Tourism partner, archaeologist and translator, thanks for helping the team navigate the Omani terrain. To William A. J., our Canadian research assistant, videographer and driver, our sincerest gratitude and appreciation. And to William Sr., thank you for your time, effort and beautiful photographs.

To Abu Qusai, Mirvat and the other staff at Al-Shumoukh Rest House, we are extremely grateful for your kindness and hospitality while staying in Ar-Rustaq during the 2012 season. To Mariam Omar, a very special thank-you for your technical assistance post-fieldwork. And to Mohammad Al-Sarimi, without you this project would never have come to light. Thank you for your tremendous insight.

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The publication of our research would not have been possible without the dedication and professionalism of three exceptional individuals. A special thank you is extended to Ms. Biubwa bint Ali Al-Sabri, former Director of the Department of Excavations and Archaeological Studies, for her draft recommendations early on in the process. We would like to thank Dr. Dennys Frenez, Technical Adviser for Archaeology and Publications, for bringing our draft to life. And to Ms. Ibtisam Al-Mamari, Head of the National Tentative List Section, we are forever grateful for her unwavering support, persistence, and dedication over the years. Thank you for being our “bridge.”

And lastly, we are especially appreciative to the inhabitants of Wadi Bani Kharus and the Al-Awabi district in general. Many individuals offered assistance during the team’s numerous visits. Special appreciation is extended to Abu Sultan from the Wilayat Al-Awabi for his approval of our research in his constituency. Thanks to the numerous inhabitants who helped locate petroglyphs, tombstone inscriptions and other archaeological features.

A special thank you to Mr. Salem Al-Khoziri and to the Al-Awabi resident who shared his computer-generated images of WBK petroglyphs. To Abdul-Aziz bin Hilal Al-Kharusi, Zakaria Al-Kharusi and Dr. Zaher Al-Kharusi of Sital Village who shared so much more than their knowledge of local sites and personal documents, we are extremely grateful for your guidance, hospitality and deep interest in our work. To all of the individuals who opened their homes to an ever-inquisitive team, answered the never-ending questions and whose hospitality was unmatched, we are forever indebted.

It was our great pleasure to work with all of you.

Thank you for your contributions. You were invaluable partners!

Moawiyah & Laura

FOREWORD

This is an exciting moment for the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism,* Moawiyah, Laura and their team. *The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus* marks a turning point in heritage and cultural investigations in the Sultanate of Oman. By combining traditional archaeological methodologies with anthropology, a uniquely broad perspective on social change, human evolution and material culture has emerged.

Dr. Moawiyah M. Ibrahim is one of the founding fathers of Arabian archaeology. He has carried out excavations and other research projects in Palestine, Jordan, Germany, Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen, and Oman. Dr. Laura M. Strachan is a socio-cultural anthropologist and environmental scientist who has done extensive ethnographic research in Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and southern Jordan with multiple Bedouin tribes. She has also participated in archaeological excavations in Jordan and Oman. Together they have created something unique and exciting that will serve as a model for future explorations.

Building upon ethno-archaeological methodologies, their distinctive positioning on contemporary society to understand material culture from former societies greatly influenced how they interpreted the archaeological evidence. This investigative lens allowed the team to understand the extensive artefact assemblage of Wadi Bani Kharus as part of a continuum rather than selected moments in time and space. It helped to expose how the past continues to impact the present.

It is their hope that *The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus* sparks interest in other scholars. Laura and Moawiyah have opened the door to a rich and dynamic Omani landscape that is ripe for future exploration. They encourage other archaeologists and anthropologists to expand upon their preliminary findings.

* The authors affiliation with the Ministry of Heritage and Culture began in 2011. In 2020, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism was established by Royal Decree as a result of merging the Ministry of Heritage and Culture with the Ministry of Tourism. *The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus* was written prior to the marrying of the two ministries. It is recognized by the authors that the Ministry of Heritage and Culture and the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism are, for their purposes, the same Ministry as noted in this document.

PREFACE

It is hard to believe when one looks at the magnificence of today's Sultanate of Oman that a little over forty years ago it only had a few paved roads and a handful of schools. The transformation from an underdeveloped nation into an Arabian leader is a monumental task and the result of great leadership, vision and foresight.

The people interviewed for the purpose of this investigation extolled the virtues of their leader, Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said. The elders, in particular, lived through the country's transformation and expressed their appreciation and respect for the changes that occurred during their lifetime. Many described their country under the governance of Sultan Qaboos' father, Said bin Taimur, as an impoverished nation unable to support its citizenry. They explained that Omani men, similar to many of the East Asian expatriates working in Oman today, had to leave their homes and communities to find employment outside of the Sultanate's borders. It was not long after Sultan Qaboos' ascension to the throne that the situation began to shift to what it is today.

Alongside his leadership came a national pride that swept through the country empowering both its male and female citizens. The country as a whole embarked on a new Oman while respecting its rich heritage. Cities were developed and ministries were established. Education became a principle mechanism for this advancement. Both genders were prioritized. Boys and girls began their formal education in the new schools that started to dot the landscape. The role of women began to change and now extends beyond the household and pastures moving into the business world. Sheikah Al-Rasby stands as an example of this change. Originally from a small Bedouin community located in the southeastern corner of the Sultanate, her education helped her to become an influential member of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture.

The research participants also commented on other ways Sultan Qaboos empowered his people. The team heard countless stories about their leader's generosity with regards to housing and land ownership. A common response pertained to families who could not afford to build a house on their own. In these cases, the government gifted the family a building lot. In fact, land is afforded to every Omani citizen, male and female alike. This generous offering has enabled poorer families to prosper. In some cases, the team discovered elderly, male residents living in remote areas. These men explained that they had respectfully declined the government's benevolent offer of a house and land. They said that they wanted to continue living their lives in the area of their birth following the traditions of their ancestors. Most often this meant living in a simple, stone structure in the mountains close to their goats and sheep. This is what made them happy.

It did not take long for the protection of the Sultanate's historical record to become an Omani priority. The Ministry of Heritage and Culture was established in 1976 to focus on safeguarding historical and archaeological sites while highlighting their cultural value. According to Ministry documents, for approximately forty years it has focused on the scientific preservation of its heritage. Its primary objectives are research, exploration, repair, restoration and spreading awareness regarding Oman's cultural heritage.

It is also responsible for the scientifically supervised restoration of heritage and cultural locations. It has successfully restored 748 historical sites including 2,660 forts, castles, towers and old houses and 25,943 historical pieces. In 2020, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism was established by Royal Decree by joining the Ministry of Heritage and Culture with the Ministry of Tourism.

Omani ministries collaborate in the shared goal of developing the country. The team witnessed this first hand during their investigation when the Ministry of Highways was upgrading Wadi Bani Kharus' main road into a four-lane thoroughfare. It is the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's responsibility to ensure that the country's archaeological record is respected and preserved at all costs. In a number of Wadi Bani Kharus' locations, this proved to be a challenging endeavour. The designated location for the new roadway outside of Sital was through the ancient village site of As-Slut. The Ministry did everything possible to find an alternative solution, but unfortunately there were no other options due to the narrowing of the *wadi* and the close proximity of the surrounding mountains. In lieu of preservation, an exhaustive study was executed to document site particulars and collect artefacts before the construction began. Recommendations were provided to the Ministry of Transport and Communications resulting in a mutually beneficial outcome.

The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus: Investigations in the Sultanate of Oman was a Ministry of Heritage and Tourism sponsored project. The research includes an extensive archaeological-anthropological survey, ethnographic research, transcriptions and transliterations of tombstone and rock inscriptions, photographs, videos, tape recordings, drawings and tracings.

We are honoured to have contributed to the preservation of Wadi Bani Kharus' heritage while supporting the Ministry's mission to highlight the cultural value of an important Omani site. It is our hope that future archaeologists and anthropologists will follow our example. We encourage scientists from other disciplines to build upon our findings while enjoying the splendour that is Wadi Bani Kharus.

With much appreciation and respect,

Moawiyah & Laura

INTRODUCTION

The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus showcases the findings from an innovative research project conducted in one of the Sultanate of Oman's most noteworthy valleys - Wadi Bani Kharus. The objective for the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism sponsored study was to gain greater understanding of the area's past and present through its tangible and intangible cultural heritage. An extensive investigation was executed over three seasons to collect a diverse array of evidence from past lifeways, contemporary life and the melding of the two.

Since the time of René Descartes, scientists have dissected objects of investigation into parts in an attempt to understand their internal workings. In this sense, analyses were partial and the information garnered only fractional representations of the whole. *The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus* purposefully sought to move beyond this convention by offering a broader context from which to investigate this important *wadi*. Traditional archaeological research was bridged with anthropological methodologies to create a wider lens for exploration and analysis. The findings revealed an adaptive, thriving environment that has survived over 5,000 years of human habitation.

This integrated methodology was also used in the formatting of the book. The findings from the research project were originally slated to be an archaeological report. Traditionally, archaeological investigations emphasize a scientific approach that situates the site and its artefact assemblage in both time and space. Measurements, GPS coordinates and details explaining the original context in which artefacts were discovered are the basis of this methodology. This approach requires a standardized presentation style that is accepted and understood by archaeologists and other scholars.

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of this project, the quantity of diverse findings and the expansiveness of the archaeological sites including those with touristic value, the authors soon realized that their research would be of interest to a much wider audience. *The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus* was written to facilitate the interests of both academic and non-academics alike. Its scientific contributions have not been compromised in the pursuit of a more eclectic readership.

Background

In 2003, Mohammad Al-Sarimi, a student studying at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat in the Sultanate of Oman, approached his archaeology professor, Dr. Moawiyah Ibrahim, with details about numerous archaeological sites located in the *wadi* of his birth. He described ancient tombstone inscriptions, fortresses and early water distribution systems. Intrigued, Dr. Ibrahim investigated further and discovered that there was a diverse scholarly and historical record supporting Mohammad's claims. He learned that Wadi Bani Kharus had not only played an important role in the development of what is now recognized as the Sultanate of Oman for millennia, but was the home for many important historical and religious figures. He discovered that numerous Omani scholars and Imams had written about the *wadi*.

Among those were Sarhan bin Said Al-Uzkawi who wrote “Kashf Al-Ghimmah”, Mohammad bin Ruzayq penned “As Sahifah Al-Qahtaniyyah”, Nour Ad-Din As-Salimi’s “Tuhfat Al-Ayan” and Khalifah bin Ahmad As-Sarimi who authored “Tarikh Wilayat Al-Awabi” (unpublished). He was also introduced to a unique piece of literature written by a group of local men in 1997. “A Brief History of Al-Awabi through the Ages” offers a local perspective of Wadi Bani Kharus from the neighbouring community of Al-Awabi.

Dr. Ibrahim also came to learn that several Western scholars and travelers had written about this important area. One of the earliest accounts dated back to 1876 when Colonel Miles visited Al-Awabi and Wadi Bani Kharus. He recorded local conditions including some of the tribes living in the area at that time. He made special notation of the Bani Kharusi, Al-Abriyyeen and the Harrasi tribes. He also commented on the tribal fighting associated with the Hinais tribe. Almost a century later, Christopher Clark and Rudi Jackli conducted a preliminary survey of rock drawings in the valley. Paolo Costa and T. J. Wilkinson later explored regional agriculture and water systems of San’a, an important historical site located in the upper *wadi*. Philip Ward’s research followed in the footsteps of Miles over 110 years later. In 2001, Birgit Mershen conducted an ethno-archaeological investigation of the famous San’a Estate.

After Dr. Ibrahim’s preliminary review, he visited Wadi Bani Kharus with Mohammad, Nasser Al-Hinai and Yaqoub Al-Rahbi, both from Sultan Qaboos University’s Department of Archaeology. Once at the site, contact was made with Mahmoud Al-Mamari, the Deputy Governor, or *wali* as it is known in Arabic, of the Al-Awabi district. Mr. Al-Mamari, a former SQU archaeology student, helped the team locate a number of local tribesmen he felt would be willing to assist Dr. Ibrahim. Abdul-Aziz bin Hilal Al-Kharusi from Sital Village was one of those knowledgeable individuals. He guided the team to numerous archaeological sites including locations rich in rock inscriptions and petroglyphs in addition to some of Sital’s tombstone inscriptions. Dr. Badar Al-Alawi from the Department of History joined the team at a later date.

These early visits in combination with the scholarly accounts provided substantial evidence of a long and well-established human presence in Wadi Bani Kharus. This intrigued Dr. Ibrahim, but he felt that more needed to be known about the historical and contemporary connections between today’s populace, the archaeological sites, ancient systems and the environment. He was compelled to execute a more systematic, comprehensive analytical survey that looked at the integration of all of these elements to understand the *wadi* as a whole. This realization was the catalyst for another investigative season.

The next phase of the research was designed from the outset to be different from the first. A few years had passed and the focus had shifted to a multidisciplinary approach. In February 2012, Laura Strachan, a socio-cultural anthropologist, William Strachan and Ali Dhihli joined Dr. Ibrahim to identify and study the plethora of archaeological evidence, to learn more about how the past and the present meet in addition to how today’s inhabitants embrace historical technologies within their contemporary lives and modern comforts. By combining archaeological and anthropological methods with local knowledge and experiences a clearer picture of the area’s evolution emerged.

Following the fruitful 2012 investigation, Dr. Strachan moved to Oman with her husband William Strachan Sr. While there the pair returned to Wadi Bani Kharus to update many of the photographs taken during Dr. Ibrahim’s first tour of the area. Over the next four months, they were able to explore new sites in addition to revisiting many of the earlier locations to expand upon their findings.

The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus is the result of these many phases. It highlights the findings from all of the stages of investigation with a focus on the assimilation of archaeological evidence with ethnographic data.

While in the Field

Examining the ancient and the historical with the new and the modern necessitated a unique analytical strategy. Each phase benefited from an interdisciplinary approach with expertise in archaeology, social and cultural anthropology, ethnography, geography, environmental protection, business administration, marketing and tourism development. The integrated approach during all of the investigations was collaborative.

The brunt of the investigation occurred during Phases 2 and 3. Each team member contributed in various ways based on their area of expertise. Moawiyah was in charge of the archaeological research during Phases 1 and 2. Laura, William and Ali assisted Moawiyah in various capacities. William was primarily responsible for the photography and videotaping of both the tangible and intangible evidence. Laura was the lead socio-cultural anthropologist. Laura and William conducted interviews with random residents from all of the *wadi's* twenty-nine communities. Ali was the principle interpreter while facilitating the project on behalf of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture. Local inhabitants assisted the team by identifying ancient sites and assisting in the transcription of tombstones and rock drawings. In 2014, William Sr. was the principle photographer for Phase 3. Participant observation was encouraged during all of the visits and at every opportunity. It was the keystone to the project's success.

Phase 2 was executed over an intense four-week period beginning in February 2012. The first week focused on establishing permission through the Sultanate of Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Culture and the Wilayat Al-Awabi or the district of Al-Awabi in which Wadi Bani Kharus belongs. Having received official consent, Ali, William and Laura began to collect preliminary data using key-informant interviews from randomly selected individuals.



Figure 0.3. Moawiyah (second left), William (third from right) and Ali (second from right) collecting information from young males in Wadi Al-Hijayr.



Figure 0.4. William (left), Moawiyah (right) and a local resident (rear left) transcribing a tomb inscription.

Week 2 consisted of gaining familiarity with the area and the archaeological sites studied by Moawiyah during Phase 1. Time was spent building upon the findings from Sital and As-Sleihi cemeteries. Four Iron Age fortresses located in As-Slut near Misfah Al-Hatatlah were explored. The team also surveyed many of the ancient sites located in Wadi Al-Hijayr and Al-Hijayr Al-Qadeemah more specifically.

During the third week the team focused primarily on the acquisition of local knowledge from the area's inhabitants. This was done by systematically establishing contact with every community or area of human habitation beginning with the first village after Hisn Al-Awabi or Al-Awabi Fort, Wadi Safwon. Extensive interview sessions were conducted with randomly selected villagers who agreed to be interviewed for the purpose of gaining greater knowledge of Wadi Bani Kharus and their area in particular. Informants were both male and female and ranged in age from teenagers to the elderly.

Research conducted during the fourth week focused on the accumulation of data from both archaeological sites and interview sessions in communities not yet contacted. It was imperative to speak to someone from every community even if that meant interviewing a single family or a lone individual. By focussing on areas not previously visited or surveyed, the investigation expanded accordingly providing the team with a broader and more extensive context from which to conduct their analyses.

Ali, William, Moawiyah and Laura often worked together at a site or in a family home. At other times, particularly during weeks two and four, it was important for the team to separate into pairs to expedite data collection. In these cases, Moawiyah and Ali worked together documenting and surveying the tangible archaeological data while William and Laura concentrated their efforts on acquiring local knowledge and experiences from as many individuals and groups as possible.



Figure 0.5. William videotaping the team scrambling over large boulders near Al-Alya.



Figure 0.6. William Sr. photographing in Wadi Al-Hijayr.



Figure 0.7. Laura and Ali learning about Wadi Bani Kharus life from Mohammed.

In the spring of 2014, Laura returned to Wadi Bani Kharus with her husband William. The pair explored Wadi Al-Hijayr extensively including Hisn Al-Furs and the upper *wadi* region. They surveyed four distinct phases of human habitation in addition to new petroglyphs and inscriptions. They also visited Sital and Misfah Al-Hatatlah to photograph the tangible evidence discovered at the ancient site of As-Sleihi and the surrounding area. Later, the old village of Al-Hijayr was investigated including the terraced gardens located behind the village.

During every phase of the project, photographs and videotaping were carried out to capture the dynamic elements of the *wadi*. As previously noted, William Jr. was in charge of this facet of the investigation during Phase 2. Laura and Moawiyah also photographed according to their research specialities and personal interests. William Sr. was responsible for the majority of the photography during Phase 3.

The team did not break ground to conduct their archaeological examinations. Rather, they surveyed and studied the expansive archaeological assemblage discovered in-situ, including surface finds and standing structures. Details were extracted from these artefacts and when combined with the ethnographic data and other scholarly research provided a more expansive overview from which to analyze the valley's diverse periods of occupation, cause and effect relationships and any transformations that may have occurred. This is an area of research that may be of interest to future scientists.

Ethnographic research methods were used to gain information about the intangible aspects of today and yesterday. Key-informant interviews were conducted in each of the twenty-nine communities situated along the *wadi's* length. People proudly shared their recollections and knowledge about their ancestors including oral histories, customs, traditions and the changes they have witnessed in their lifetime.

Every household treated the team with great kindness and respect even providing fresh fruit, delicious dates and Omani tea and coffee to their guests. The team was often invited to stay for dinner.

At the end of Phase 2 the team presented their findings to the representatives of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture. Moawiyah discussed the tangible evidence found from one end of the *wadi* to the other. Laura spoke about the intangible data based on the interview sessions. William Jr. examined the contemporary context outlining a number of recommendations for future development of the area as a tourism site. He also presented a video he had prepared highlighting the team's investigative approach, collaboration and the spectacle of Wadi Bani Kharus in general. Moawiyah, William and Laura spent the following fifteen months organizing and analyzing the data, and writing reports. Laura and Moawiyah co-authored the first draft for this publication. Laura later updated the draft with the newly acquired data she had collected with William Sr. during Phase 3.

The Physical Landscape

Wadi Bani Kharus is a spectacular valley located in the Wilayat Al-Awabi. It is part of the Western Al-Hajar Al-Gharbi mountain range in the Al-Batinah region. The English translation of Al-Hajar is stone mountains. The valley is twenty-six km long with a southwestern orientation. At its end is Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar or Green Mountain, one of the highest summits in Oman at 9,834 feet or 2,980 m. From its unique geology and geomorphology to its plentiful floral and faunal species, it is an inimitable landscape that has provided refuge, protection and sustenance to its inhabitants for thousands of years.



Figure 0.8. Boulder showing ancient fish remains from the land formation processes.



Figures 0.9 to 0.11. Evidence of land formation processes in the lower-wadi.

Of great interest to the team was the diversity that existed from one end of the *wadi* to the other. Some natural elements that were in great abundance near Wadi Safwon were found to be in limited supply near Al-Alya at the other end. This stemmed in part to the geological processes that helped to shape what is now recognized as the Sultanate of Oman and the Arabian Peninsula in general. Although the team did not focus on regional geomorphology, it was important for them to understand how land formation processes contributed to the unique physical features and the natural resources that the area's inhabitants have exploited since first arriving in Wadi Bani Kharus.

Upon entering the lower *wadi* at Al-Awabi Fort, the physical effects of Oman's mountain building processes are obvious to even an untrained eye. The area underwent tremendous pressure from the colliding of the Arabian and the Eurasian tectonic plates millions of years ago as is evident in the upheaval of the local terrain. The treeless mountains bordering both sides of the *wadi* bear witness to the intensive uplifting, folding, denudation and other types of formation and weathering processes that shaped the area long before humans occupied the lands (Figures 0.7 to 0.9). These processes are still active today and continue to influence the landscape and the local people.

Mountain shaping and valley formation were evident in other ways. One example was discovered at the San'a Estate in the upper-*wadi*. While the team was investigating the footings of a large aqueduct (Chapter 9), they hiked to the lower level of an offshoot *wadi*. While scrambling over large boulders located at the base of the ravine they noticed that many had grey and white markings. These colourations stood out from the others.

When the team returned to their hotel in Ar-Rustaq later that day, they shared their photographs with two German geologists who were studying the surrounding valleys including Wadi Bani Kharus. The men identified the white markings on the boulders as belonging to a species of fish that had once thrived in large numbers in local waters before becoming part of the landscape. Their presence many kilometers away from the Omani Sea is a testament to the dramatic transformations that have occurred over the millennia.

Water is life and it is water that has contributed to the area's floral and faunal diversity. Geological processes are responsible for the life's elixir that to this day percolates underground and emerges as springs in many *wadi* locations. The local inhabitants stated that the natural springs are scarce in the lower-*wadi* where many of the smaller villages are located. Vegetation in these areas is noticeably sparse in comparison to the lush hillsides and terraced agricultural lands found in mid and upper-*wadi* locations. This is a critical observation when understanding resource extraction, settlement patterns, livelihood strategies and agriculture, all of which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

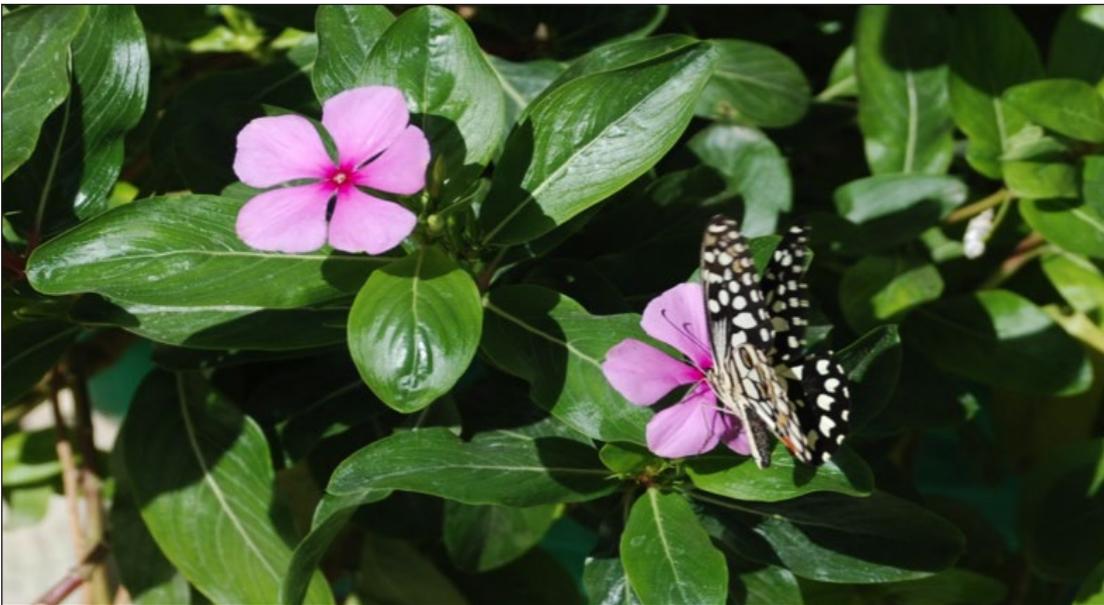
The recognizable differences in vegetation are also due to the efforts of the early settlers who manipulated spring water for their personal usage. Adaptive strategies such as the creation of a mechanism for resource extraction and distribution enabled ancient visitors to stay for longer periods of time in one location. Controlling the flow of the mountain springs was instrumental to this evolution and to their survival. By tapping into water located at higher elevations or below the *wadi* floor and channeling it to populated areas, the visitors were able to implement adaptive strategies to sustain their presence thereby transforming them from nomads to residents. Today's iconic terraced gardens and orchards that flourish primarily in mid and upper-*wadi* locations are tangible evidence of this ingenuity and adaptability. It was discovered that many of the methods used by the ancestors have not been abandoned, but have been ingeniously integrated, renovated or have taken on new, adaptive forms that will be discussed in greater detail.



Figure 0.12. Sparse vegetation in the lower-wadi due to the lack of soil and water.



Figure 0.13. A view of the fertile upper-wadi close to Al-Alya village.



Figures 0.14 to 0.17. Examples of Wadi Bani Kharus' floral and faunal species.



Figure 0.18. A rock panel with rock drawings and an inscription discovered mid-wadi.

The *wadi* is biologically rich and has great diversity in the organisms that thrive in its mountains, valleys, villages and water systems. From lizards and snakes to hummingbirds and frogs, numerous vertebrate and invertebrate species depend upon reliable water and vegetative sources for their survival. Local knowledge stated that large carnivores such as wolves and wild cats continue to roam the mountains although not in the abundance that they once had. Fish and tadpoles were discovered in community water systems demonstrating the purity and cleanliness of the spring water today.

The tangible evidence of Wadi Bani Kharus' past and present was prolific. The team discovered an extensive array of artefacts from various phases of the area's human development. Dating as far back as the late Bronze Age to the Iron Age into the Islamic Period and finally to present day, cemeteries, fortresses, houses and abandoned villages revealed important details about yesterday's inhabitants and their ways of life. The various investigations exposed that the former residents of the area and migrating tribes capitalized on the *wadi's* strategic location, natural resources and diverse landscape features for over 5,000 years.

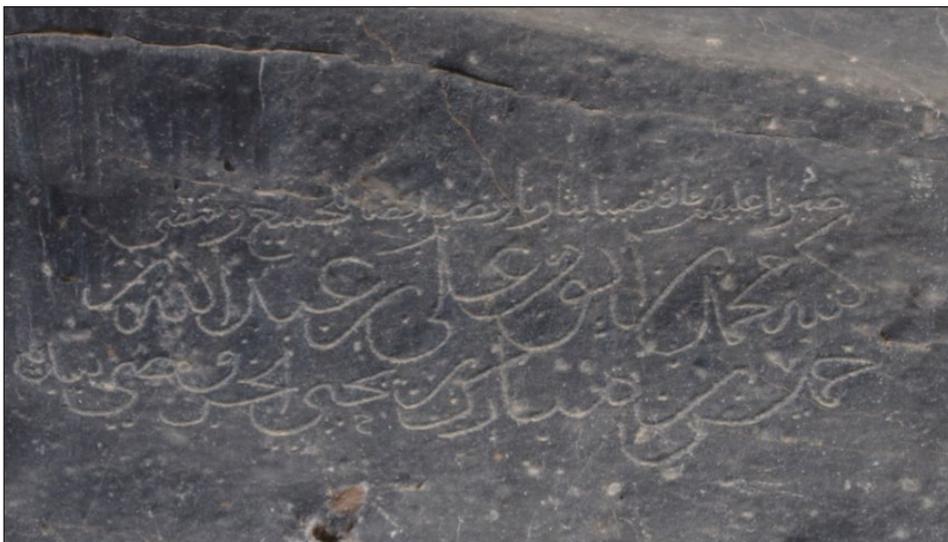


Figure 0.19. An example of a beautiful rock inscription.

A prime example of the extensive archaeological assemblage was the collection of petroglyphs or rock drawings discovered throughout the *wadi*. Incised illustrations on rock faces, boulders and smaller rock outcrops dotted the landscape depicting scenes and representations of people and animals from prehistoric and historic times. These images portrayed individuals and groups that either visited or lived in the area. Diverse methods of transportation were also popular drawings.

Human figures were illustrated riding camels and horses sometimes holding weapons in combative stances. Some of the drawings portrayed feral and domesticated animals. Mountain goats, horses and camels were common representations. Many of the drawings have succumbed to hundreds or even thousands of years of weathering leaving them faded and indecipherable. Fortunately, many were scientifically recorded during the 1970s.

A large number of Arabic inscriptions were also discovered incised on rock faces and boulders close to important water distribution systems. Several panels were dated between the 9-14th centuries AH or 15-20th centuries CE.

The team investigated and surveyed numerous ancient burial sites located throughout the valley. Each one showcased funerary practices belonging to a particular group of inhabitants and/or visitors during a specific period of occupation. In some cases, associated religious beliefs were identified. An important find was a Hafit-type tomb from As-Sleihi Cemetery, mid-*wadi*. It identified local burial practices as far back as the fourth millennium BCE. Many Early Islamic cemeteries were explored at great length. Individual burials and family plots revealed much about the past and the *wadi*'s inhabitants.

Many of the burials had incised tombstones. In total over seventy inscriptions were surveyed and later transcribed then translated from Arabic into English by Moawiyah and his team. Each deceased individual was identified according to an epitaph in addition to information about tribal relations, settlement patterns and former traditions (see Chapter 4). These artefacts are not only a rare occurrence in Wadi Bani Kharus, but in the Sultanate of Oman in general providing the team with yet another unique lens for analysis.

Tombstone inscriptions were also an efficient method for dating. In most cases, the author or scribe chiseled the date of the deceased's passing using the Islamic calendar. This was also a means for identifying the religion of the person. In some cases, the day, month and year were noted.

The team also surveyed numerous standing structures located in many of the cemeteries. Moawiyah identified them as "little mosques" (Figure 0.20). Their purpose will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

One of the most important revelations to be gleaned from the artefacts and the interviews was the *wadi*'s rich geopolitical history. Evidence revealed that Wadi Bani Kharus served as an important trade and communication route for thousands of years. It connected local residents to other areas in the Al-Batinah, Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar and locations in the Ad-Dhahirah of western Oman (Figure 0.21).

Remnants of numerous fortresses suggest that they were built during different occupational phases. The team surveyed an extensive fortification system located mid-*wadi* that was built to guard and monitor the area's traffic in addition to protecting the local water systems. One system dated to the 3rd and 2nd millennia BCE suggesting that it could have been built during Wadi Bani Kharus' earliest period of occupation.



Figure 0.20. William (left), Moawiyah (center) and Ali (right) investigating a family tomb in Sital.



Figure 0.21. One of the many tomb inscriptions transcribed by the team.



Figure 0.22. "Little Mosque" in Sital.

The blending of the old with the new was a theme that was experienced from one end of the *wadi* to the other. This was especially the case in the majority of the villages when newer construction was viewed next to older and at times ancient structures. Rather than tear down the harbingers of yesterday to rebuild modern structures in their place, the descendants of the original homeowners expanded their villages in other directions leaving the ancestral homes in-situ making for today's museum-like atmosphere. A prime example of this ideology was revealed in Misfah Al-Hatatlah. Today's villagers live in cinderblock homes that are in close proximity to one of the oldest cemeteries discovered in the *wadi*, three ancestral mosques and an extensive fortification system.

With so many standing structures to investigate, clues to ancient architectural designs, building materials and methods were revealed. Structures from different periods enabled the team to examine changing styles in relation to shifting ideologies. The majority of the buildings were in various stages of decay allowing the team to look beyond the facade to study the internal organization.

Tangible and intangible evidence also supports the existence of an early approach to sustainable resource management. The data indicates that natural water sources or springs have been tapped into for hundreds of years or even longer. Remnants of these antiquated systems were still in use at the time of the investigation.

The ancient *falaj* system as it is known in Arabic continues to irrigate the terraced gardens located in many of the *wadi* communities and in other locations throughout the Sultanate of Oman. This unique, sustainable system will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

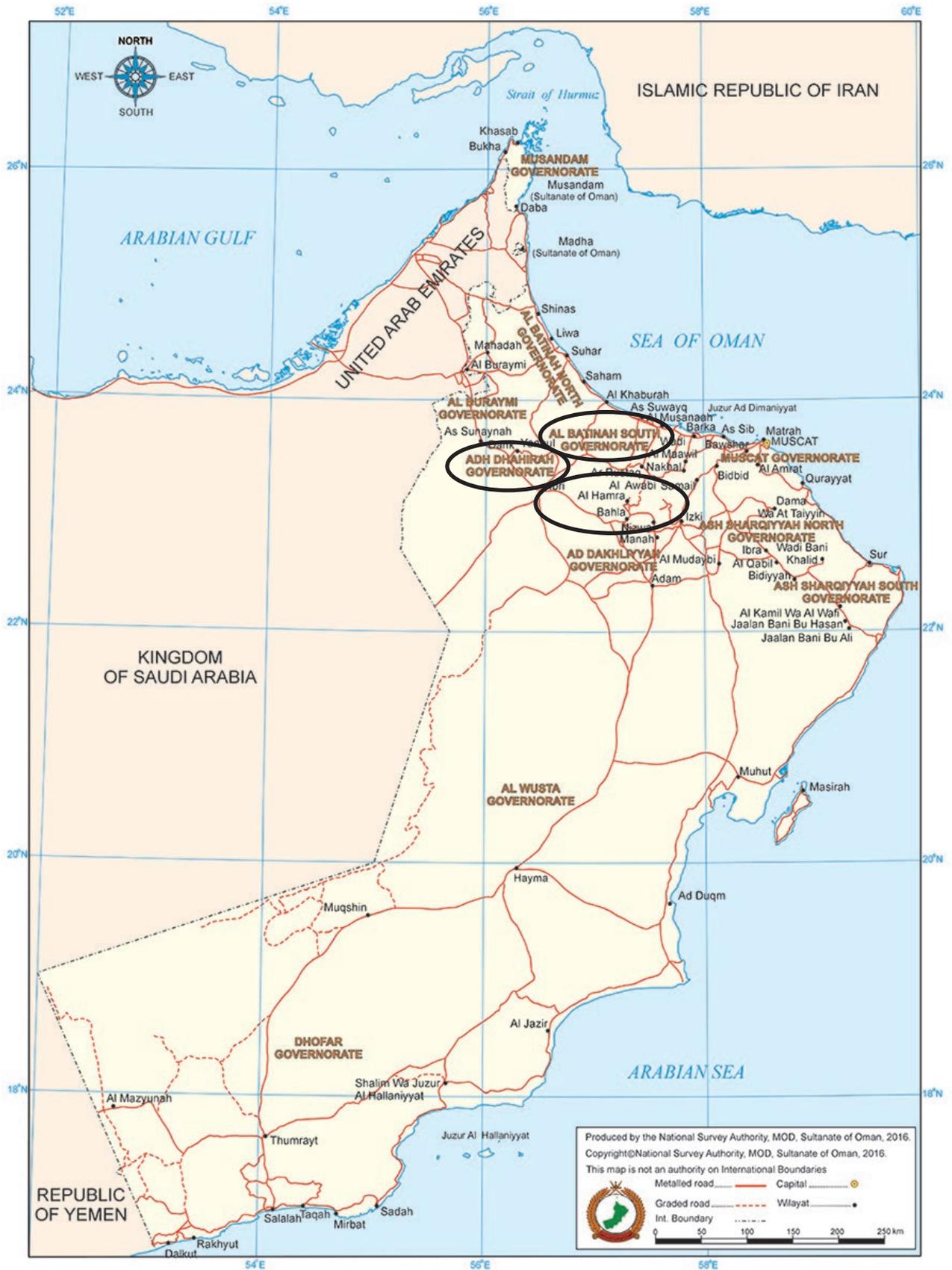


Figure 0.23. Ad-Dhahira, Al-Batinah and Al-Awabi.



*Figure 0.24.
Al-Awabi Fort
at the entrance
to the wadi.*



*Figure 0.25.
Misfah Al-Hatatlah
from the ancient
village of As-Sleghi.*



*Figure 0.26.
New Al-Hijjar
structures built
around the old
settlement.*



*Figure 0.27.
Ancestral buildings in
Al-Hijayr Al-Qadeemah.*



*Figure 0.28.
The old fortress in
Misfah Ash Shirayqiyyin.*



*Figure 0.29.
An aqueduct
still in use today.*

The Intangible Cultural Heritage

At the heart of the discipline of anthropology is the quest to understand the human species. Customs, religious beliefs, politics, livelihood strategies, familial relations and structures, relationships, technologies and even what people eat and wear are some of the areas anthropologists explore to gain a greater understanding of people both past and present. The mission for *The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Heritage of Wadi Bani Kharus* was to learn more about both the former and present-day inhabitants and how their material culture and ideologies have influenced the lives of today's 10,000 residents. Learning about these connections was fundamental to understanding the area's development over the years.

The inhabitants of Wadi Bani Kharus could not have been more supportive in providing detailed answers to the team's never-ending questions about local lives, relatives and ancestors. The discussions did not focus on the past or the present as separate entities. Rather, the encounters with the local inhabitants were about the melding of the past and the present to understand yesterday and today. Learning directly from the inhabitants offered strong evidence that each community was and continues to be part of a larger social, economic, political and religious network that extended beyond the *wadi* reaching into surrounding areas both inside and outside of Oman. Traditions and adaptations helped to elucidate what the tangible artefacts could not disclose.

Local knowledge exposed diverse cultural traditions and habits shared by many of the inhabitants. The interviews revealed many similarities in hospitality, religious practices, family size, tribal affiliations, housing styles and old village and *falaj* usage. Interviews also identified emerging differences associated with locality, livelihood choices and educational pursuits. It was apparent that as elsewhere in the world lives are changing and people are adapting to new and alternative ways while holding onto chosen local traditions and customs. This is something that stood out time and again during the team's many interview sessions.



Figure 0.30. Al-Alya's terraced gardens and orchards that are fed by the local falaj.

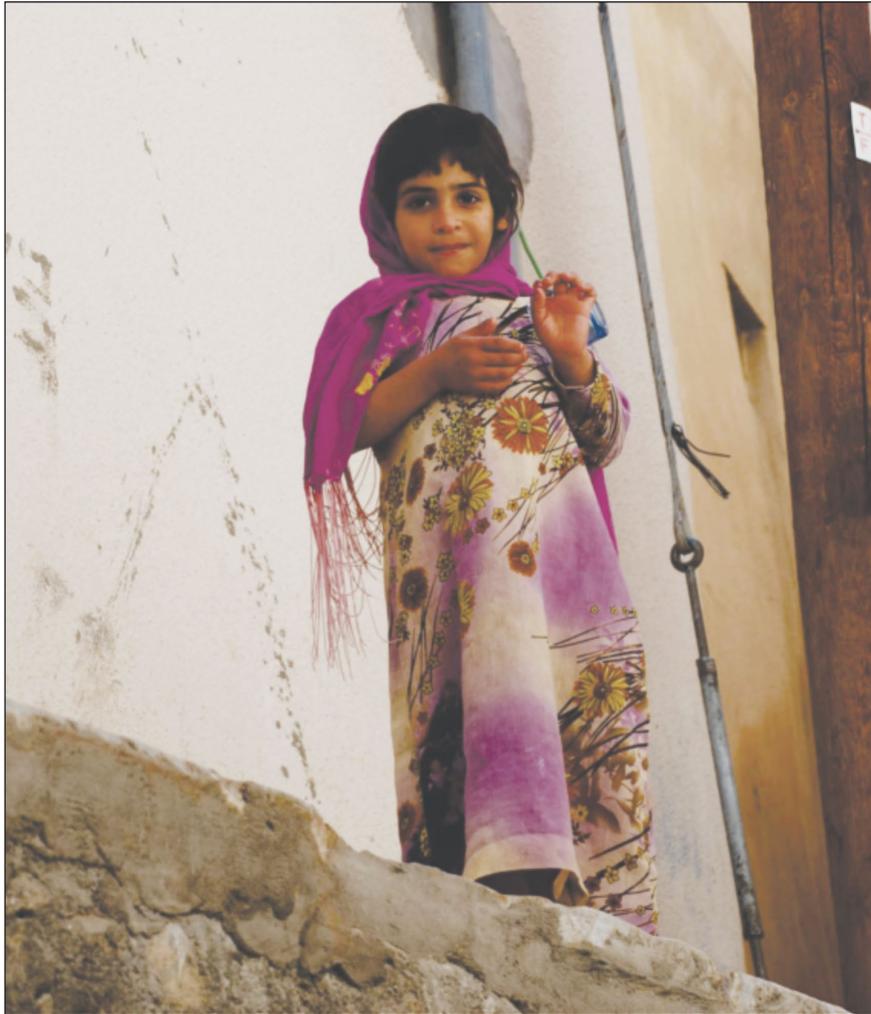


Figure 0.31. A warm *Al-Alya* greeting.

The investigation revealed a consistent integration of tangible and intangible aspects of the cultural landscape. It became evident that old or former knowledge was foundational to many of the working systems used presently with adjustments made to facilitate contemporary circumstances. The ancient *falaj's* communal maintenance practices were deemed to have contributed to a village's social, political and economic cohesion and viability just as they are today. Ancient sundials and star watching practices continue to govern the distribution of the *falaj* water. Spatial distribution patterns appear to follow older models often building next to the ruins of ancient villages with historical and familial connections.

Change and adaptation are integral to Wadi Bani Kharus' evolution. With the recent completion of a new roadway, ease of travel out of the *wadi* has facilitated increased educational pursuits along with employment opportunities in areas of the Sultanate that were previously out of reach for the villagers. Conversely, the new road now provides ease of access into the *wadi* and is the basis for an emerging tourism industry. It is because of these and other findings that *The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Heritage of Wadi Bani Kharus* serves as a baseline survey for developing Wadi Bani Kharus' tourism industry. This will be discussed in the final chapter.



Figure 0.32. Ali, third from the left, and William, second from the right, interviewing a family from Al-Alya Village.



Figure 0.33. An antiquated water system or falaj that is still in use today.

Book Organization

The Tangible & Intangible Cultural Landscape of Wadi Bani Kharus offers a rare opportunity to witness the blending of the ancient and the historical with the new and the modern through the lenses of archaeology and anthropology. It has been organized to provide a virtual tour of sorts. The book has been divided into ten sections including an introduction, eight chapters focussed on specific areas of the research and a concluding chapter that highlights possibilities for the next phase in the *wadi's* development. This method of presentation emphasizes the nuanced and innovative methods used in the field and provided by the inhabitants.

Chapter 1 offers a general overview of tangible evidence from Wadi Bani Kharus' earliest periods of human occupation. Petroglyphs provide various depictions of people and animals from prehistoric to more contemporary times. Rock inscriptions reveal details about former inhabitants, local events, dates, religion and relationships.

Deserted fortresses are reviewed in Chapter 2. Ruins from various valley locations are investigated to expose numerous defensive networks built by early residents. These systems helped to protect the people and their *afraj* while controlling the *wadi's* traffic.

Chapter 3 showcases some of the ancient abandoned settlements located throughout the *wadi*. The discussion reveals a long history of human occupation dating back to the Early Bronze Age, Iron Age and early Islamic periods. Architectural styles, building materials, locations and defensive strategies are some of the highlights.



Figure 0.34. Ali (blue hat) and William (black shirt) talking to local Al-Alya residents.

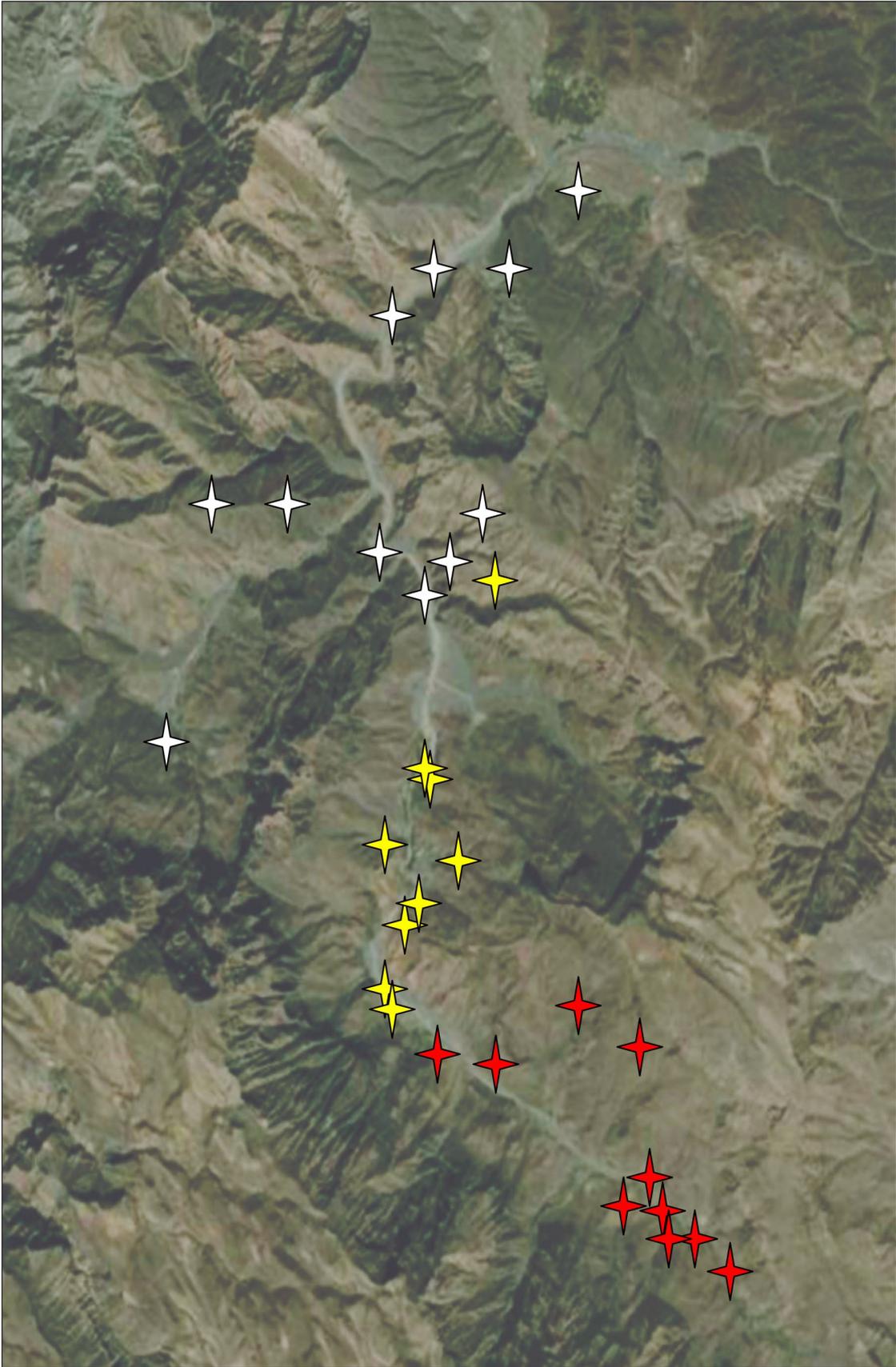


Figure 0.35. Research Zones: White-Lower-wadi; Yellow-Mid-wadi; Red-Upper-wadi.

The focus for Chapter 4 is a review of the area's early cemeteries. It includes an in-depth overview of Sital and As-Sleghi graveyards. It highlights a large number of tombstone inscriptions and what they reveal about the area's former inhabitants and burial practices.

The ancient *falaj* irrigation system is the focus for Chapter 5. A thorough review of the system's mechanics including social nuances is highlighted. Agriculture and the ancient sundial and star watching systems are profiled as compliments to this ingenious system that continues to be used today.

Chapter 6 is an ethnographic compilation of the inhabitants' oral histories and contemporary lives. It details informants' responses to their livelihood strategies, gardening techniques, food and architecture, among other cultural features. It includes changes the participants have personally witnessed and those for the Sultanate of Oman as a whole.

Chapters 7-10 provide insight into the twenty-nine *wadi* communities. Each residential area is reviewed with attention given to the major archaeological finds located at these sites in combination with a contemporary review of the inhabitants and their surroundings. For ease in comprehension, the *wadi* has been divided into three zones - lower, middle and upper - to facilitate greater understanding of the communities, inhabitants and their landscapes (Figure 0.33).

The lower-*wadi* is the focus for Chapter 7. Communities from Al-Awabi Fort to Aradeideh including those located along Wadi Al-Hijayr reveal details about the inhabitants' lives and the archaeological sites that exist in these lower communities.

The villages and residents living in the mid-*wadi* zone are highlighted in Chapter 8. From Man'a to Misfah Ash Shirayqiyyin, local knowledge and experiences are shared regarding each community's special attributes. Differences between the zones begin to emerge especially with regards to availability of natural resources, livelihood strategies, education and female roles.

Chapter 9 focuses on the upper-*wadi* communities. This area is examined from Hadas to Al-Alya Village including gardens and the various water systems. Unique architecture, an iconic structure, an historic estate and extensive agricultural lands are highlighted.

The concluding chapter confirms that the *wadi* that once served as an important communication route, a nexus for religion, education and innovation continues to serve all of these important cultural elements today. It also highlights recent changes and some of the challenges facing today's inhabitants with recommendations for the future. The creation of a successful tourism industry is highlighted. Suggestions based on the research support its implementation as a compliment to the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism's efforts to protect and promote the region's tangible and intangible cultural landscape.