

The Archaeological Heritage of Oman

# LANDMARKS OF IDENTITY

*Bronze Age Towers of the Oman Peninsula*

STEPHANIE DÖPPER



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان  
**وزارة التراث والسياحة**  
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD  
Summertown Pavilion  
18-24 Middle Way  
Summertown  
Oxford OX2 7LG  
www.archaeopress.com

© Stephanie Döpfer 2024

Landmarks of Identity: Bronze Age Towers of the Oman Peninsula  
(Includes bibliographical references and index).

1. Arabia. 2. Oman 3. Bronze Age. 4. Towers 5. Antiquities.

This edition is published by Archaeopress Publishing Ltd in association with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman.

ISBN: 978-1-80327-819-3  
ISBN: 978-1-80327-820-9 (e-pdf)

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism  
Sultanate of Oman, Muscat  
P.O. Box 200, Postal Code 115  
Thaqafah Street  
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Cover: Al-Rojoom tower, Bat, Sultanate of Oman (photograph courtesy Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of Oman).

Back cover: Photograph of Stephanie Döpfer, courtesy Universität Heidelberg, Kommunikation & Marketing.



This work is licensed under CC BY 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website [www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

# Contents

<i>List of illustrations and tables</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
<i>Introduction</i>	xvii
<b>1 Bronze Age Towers: Catalogue</b>	1
<b>2 Bronze Age Towers: Chronology</b>	182
<b>3 Bronze Age Towers: Function</b>	191
<b>4 Conclusions</b>	198
<i>Plates</i>	200
<i>Bibliography</i>	209
<i>Index</i>	210



## List of illustrations and tables

### FIGURES

1.1.	Known sites with towers on the Oman Peninsula.	1
1.2.	Heatmap of tower distribution on the Oman Peninsula.	2
1.3.	Excavations at Tell Abraç (Ziolkowski 2020: fig. 72, used with kind permission).	4
1.4.	Fulayya (photograph by Derek Kennet, used with kind permission).	5
1.5.	Rul Dhadnah, showing the low mound with Islamic burials and mosque on top (Ziolkowski 2020: fig. 37, used with kind permission).	7
1.6.	Bidya 2 during excavation (image by GCC 2012 Archaeological Exhibition).	9
1.7.	Bidya 4 (Ziolkowski 2020: fig. 59, used with kind permission).	10
1.8.	Kalba 4 (Ziolkowski 2020: fig. 11, used with kind permission).	11
1.9.	Wadi Al-Hilo before excavation (Kutterer 2013: fig. 5.57/Sharjah Archaeology Authority, SAA, used with kind permission).	13
1.10.	Wadi Al-Hilo after excavation (Kutterer 2013: fig. 5.58/Sharjah Archaeology Authority, SAA, used with kind permission).	13
1.11.	Overview map of towers at Hili.	14
1.12.	Mudbrick compartments within Hili 1 tower (Frifelt 1975: fig. 52).	15
1.13.	Ditch surrounding Hili 1 tower (Frifelt 1975: fig. 55).	16
1.14.	Hili 8 (after Méry 2013: fig. 3 with labels by the authors).	18
1.15.	Plan of Arja 1 (Hastings <i>et al.</i> 1975: 21 fig. 7 right).	23
1.16.	Aerial view of Arja 1 (Goettler <i>et al.</i> 1976: pl. 2)	24
1.17.	Corner of the terrace wall of Arja 1 (Hastings <i>et al.</i> 1975: pl. 6A)	24
1.18.	Aerial view of Arja 2 (Goettler <i>et al.</i> 1976: pl. 6).	25
1.19.	The tower at Ajran, looking northeast into the wadi.	26
1.20.	A view of the exterior ringwall of Ajran, looking north.	28
1.21.	Overview map of towers at Al-Qumayra.	29
1.22.	Al-Qumayra 1 from above. The eastern two-thirds of the tower, facing out to the wadi (at the top of the image) has been completely obliterated by erosion, but the stepped or niched exterior walling is visible in plan.	29
1.23.	Close-up of the exterior wall elevation showing the "stepped" construction technique.	30
1.24.	Detail of the interior of Al-Qumayra 1, exposed to the wadi. Flat stones are visible in sections of the profile. It maybe be that these are the foundations of interior (mudbrick?) walls.	30
1.25.	Al-Qumayra 2 in 1996 (photograph by Hélène David-Cuny, used with kind permission).	31
1.26.	Massive boulders of the ringwall of Al-Qumayra 2.	32

1.27.	Al-Qumayra 3.	32
1.28.	Al-Qumayra 4 (photograph by H��l��ne David-Cuny, used with kind permission).	33
1.29.	Location of Al-Qumayra 4 after its destruction in 1996 (photograph and labels by H��l��ne David-Cuny, used with kind permission).	34
1.30.	Wadi Hareem tower with modern irrigation channel (photograph by ArWHO, used with kind permission).	35
1.31.	The tower at Al-Shukur, looking northeast.	36
1.32.	The unevenly shaped boulders that make up the foundation of Terrace 3. Here, the spaces between the boulders are large, and the piles of sandy silt around them suggest that they were once topped or embedded in packed mud or possibly mudbrick.	36
1.33.	The tower Abu Suwaih A with modern electricity line post (photograph by ArWHO, used with kind permission).	38
1.34.	The tower Abu Suwaih B overlooking the wadi (photograph by ArWHO, used with kind permission).	38
1.35.	Overview map of towers at Al-Safri.	39
1.36.	Al-Safri 1 with annex in the northwest.	40
1.37.	Plan map of Al-Safri 1 (Harrower <i>et al.</i> 2014: fig. 2).	40
1.38.	Al-Safri 2 looking to the southeast in 2009.	41
1.39.	Today, Al-Safri 2 (in the centre of the image) is safely surrounded by green fields.	42
1.40.	Al-Safri 3 tower in the lower right of this image is only a few hundred meters from Al-Safri 2, visible in the upper left down amid the fields.	43
1.41.	Note the circular well slightly off-centre and the rectangular structure constructed over the top of the tower wall (bottom centre).	44
1.42.	Al-Joghnah tower (photograph by ArWHO, used with kind permission).	44
1.43.	Looking north towards Khadil 1, with the stone platform sitting on upright banded radiolarite bedrock in the foreground. Note the stone rubble obscuring the slopes.	46
1.44.	Khadil 1 in plan, showing the platform to the ESE (right) and the banded red radiolarite bedrock beneath and inside the tower.	46
1.45.	Khadil 2 is situated on a bedrock outcrop in the date palm fields. The faint lines of Islamic or modern mudbrick walls are still visible on the surface.	47
1.46.	Incorporation of the bedrock into the construction of Khadil 2 (photograph by ArWHO, used with kind permission).	48
1.47.	Tower Khadil 3 (photograph by ArWHO, used with kind permission).	48
1.48.	Overview map of towers at Al-Aridh.	49
1.49.	Al-Aridh 1 looking south. To the left and right are the two encircling walls that do not meet. On the left of the tower ringwall it is possible to see a short, apparently rectilinear Umm an-Nar wall, while faint lines inside the tower indicate that the tower structure is supported by rectilinear walls.	50
1.50.	Al-Aridh 1 from above. The wall running along the southeast side of the tower (lower right) appears unconnected to the ringwall.	50
1.51.	Al-Aridh 2 from above. Note the ringwall delimiting the raised 29 m-diameter tower with the irregular mound surrounding it. In this image the ringwall ‘‘bump’’ in the southeast quadrant of the tower wall is pointing to the top.	52

1.52.	Al-Aridh 2, looking northwest.	53
1.53.	Al-Aridh 3 from above (vehicle for scale). Dark lines indicate the remains of mudbrick walls arranged around a circular core, outlining the Islamic period circular structure that formed the core of the fortified settlement/compound (the corners of which are visible as green areas at the top and bottom of the image).	54
1.54.	Top view of Al-Aridh 3.	55
1.55.	A view looking northwest over the top of Al-Aridh 4. Though the tower has collapsed, the southwestern edge of the platform upon which it was built is visible here on the left, as is the western edge of the tower. Settlement remains in the form of rectilinear buildings and walls are located near the base of the ridge on both sides.	56
1.56.	Al-Aridh 4 looking southwest. The northern, oval end of the tower ringwall sits on a rectilinear platform. A lower, parallel wall is just visible at the bottom of the image.	56
1.57.	Al-Aridh 5 from above, showing the northwestern line of the tower ringwall above the ridge spine. In the upper right of the image is one of two areas with visible Umm an-Nar settlement. Also note the fine water-borne sediments on the right, indicating a water catchment area at the base of the ridge. The Wadi Al-Kabir is to the left (east).	58
1.58.	A section of wall, half-way up the hill, made from tabular schist. blocks.	58
1.59.	This overhead image of Al-Aridh 6 shows two concentric tiers forming a low mound ca. 50 m in diameter. The line running on the left side of the image is a modern ditch.	59
1.60.	Remains of the circular tower Al-Dariz South 1, looking eastward over the flood plain.	61
1.61.	Top view of Al-Dariz South 1.	61
1.62.	The rectangular tower at Al-Dariz South 2 showing the rectilinear architecture along the interior of its ringwall as well as outside on the low mound of the site. The new wall partially cuts the easternmost edge of the site.	62
1.63.	Al-Dariz South 2.	63
1.64.	Sketch plan of Araqi North (de Cardi <i>et al.</i> 1976: fig. 41).	64
1.65.	View of Al-Araqi tower.	64
1.66.	Aerial view of Al-Araqi 1.	65
1.67.	3D-model of Al-Qarri castle with three parallel walls on its southern side.	66
1.68.	Possible terracing walls of Al-Qarri castle.	67
1.69.	Northern “corner” of Al-Wahrah tower showing the large, evenly sized Bronze Age foundation sones beneath the more irregular reconstruction/reuse.	68
1.70.	Al-Khutm tower from above at the close of excavations in 2018 (image by Ministry of Heritage and Tourism Oman, used with kind permission).	69
1.71.	Overview map of towers at Bat.	71
1.72.	Plan of Al-Rojoom tower after excavation (Frifelt 1976: 64 fig. 3).	72
1.73.	Al-Rojoom tower looking north, showing the internal stone walls and central well surrounded by a niched ringwall. In the image foreground the exterior walls (including the possible ramp and platform) are visible.	73
1.74.	Top view of Al-Rojoom tower.	74
1.75.	Al-Khafaji tower from above, 2019. Note the square well just off-centre inside the tower, and the thick stone ringwall that forms its exterior.	76
1.76.	Al-Khafaji tower plan with excavated area around the tower.	77

1.77.	A view of Matariya looking to the north at the end of the 2010 excavations. Note the mudbrick structures (foreground and inside the tower), the stone well podium in the centre, and the retaining wall in the lower right-hand corner of the image.	79
1.78.	A view of Al-Sleme tower from the northeast, looking over the platform (foreground) towards the best-preserved section of ringwall.	81
1.79.	Tower 1156 at the end of excavations in 2013. Note the tombs obscuring the northeast quadrant of the tower wall (upper right), and the rectilinear walls visible in the lower right.	82
1.80.	Excavation plan of Tower 1156 (Mortimer and Thornton 2018: fig. 3).	83
1.81.	Al-Ahliya tower from the northeast, looking towards Bat oasis. Though in ruins, the line of stones forming the tower's ringwall is visible here to the left and centre of the image.	84
1.82.	A view of Al-Wardi castle and mudbrick ruins in Bat to the southeast. The stone foundation of the tower in the foreground shows a marked change in plan where its original Bronze Age foundation was split open, like segments of an orange, to expand the size of the original structure.	85
1.83.	Aerial image of Building II at Bat after excavation	86
1.84.	Ditches surrounding Building II at Bat.	86
1.85.	Ring-wall of Building II at Bat.	87
1.86.	Matariya, showing the Enclosure (1167, left) and Tower 1147 (also called Matariya, right). Note the faint, parallel rectilinear lines radiating out from the centre of 1167.	89
1.87.	Sketch plan of Frifelt's excavations at Tower 1147 and Enclosure 1167 in 1989 (Frifelt 2002: fig. 3).	89
1.88.	The tower at Amlah. Visible as rubble on the left side of the tower (to the southeast) is the remains of some structure, while rectilinear walling is visible to its southwest (upper right of the image).	90
1.89.	Sketch plan of Amlah (left, de Cardi <i>et al.</i> 1976: fig. 10; right, Doe 1983: fig. 24).	91
1.90.	The tower near Al-Maidan, overlooking Wadi Sidaq and the road to Sini village.	92
1.91.	The Yiqā tower complex is perched on a cliff overlooking date palm gardens in the oasis below. The remains of the adjacent settlement are visible to the north (top).	93
1.92.	Pecked divots, organized in loose, rows, on the upright face of a fallen stone inside the Yiqā fortification.	94
1.93.	Northwestern corner of the Yiqā tower platform.	94
1.94.	Overview map of towers at Al-Rustaq.	95
1.95.	Tower Al-Tikha 1 (photograph by Rustaq Batinah Archaeological Survey, used with kind permission)	96
1.96.	Views of the ringwall of Al-Tikha 1 (photographs by Rustaq Batinah Archaeological Survey, used with kind permission).	97
1.97.	Tower Al-Tikha 2 (photograph by Rustaq Batinah Archaeological Survey, used with kind permission).	98
1.98.	Tower Al-Tikha 3 (photograph by Rustaq Batinah Archaeological Survey, used with kind permission).	99



1.99.	Aerial view of Falaj Al-Shurah (photograph by Mohamad Hesein, used with kind permission).	100
1.100.	Al-Banah tower (Doe 1983: pl. 13c).	101
1.101.	Map of Al-Ghubra tower (de Cardi <i>et al.</i> 1976: 163 fig. 35).	102
1.102.	Aerial image of Al-Ghubra tower.	103
1.103.	Ring-wall of Al-Ghubra tower.	103
1.104.	Results of the magnetometer prospection of the Al-Hajar Project (Orchard and Stanger 1994: 82 fig. 12).	104
1.105.	Aerial image of Sufayha tower.	105
1.106.	Detail of external ring-wall.	105
1.107.	Overview map of towers at Bisya.	106
1.108.	Ground plans of Building 1 by the Harvard Archaeological Survey (left) and de Cardi (right) (Hastings <i>et al.</i> 1975: 21 fig. 7 left; de Cardi <i>et al.</i> 1976: 163 fig. 36).	107
1.109.	Aerial photograph of Building 1.	108
1.110.	External ring-wall of the tower with protrusion in the southwest.	108
1.111.	Ground plans of Building 3 by de Cardi (de Cardi <i>et al.</i> 1976: 164 fig. 37).	110
1.112.	Aerial photo of Building 3 with annex and stone-lined ditch on the left-hand side.	110
1.113.	Detail of the stone-lined ditch.	111
1.114.	Building 4 after excavation (photograph by FAMCO, used with kind permission).	112
1.115.	Ground plans of ST1 at the end of the excavations (Degli Esposti 2016: 668 fig. 3, used with kind permission).	113
1.116.	ST1 after excavation and restoration (photograph by S. Bizzarri/IMTO, used with kind permission).	114
1.117.	The ditch system surrounding ST1 (photograph by M. Degli Esposti/IMTO, used with kind permission).	114
1.118.	Ground plan of Jebel Juhelat (Orchard and Orchard 2007: 162 pl. 10).	115
1.119.	Reconstruction of Jebel Juhelat (Orchard and Orchard 2002: 232 fig. 2).	116
1.120.	Stretches of wall at Jebel Juhelat.	116
1.121.	Ground plan of Qarn Qantarat Nizwa (Orchard and Stanger 1994: 76 fig. 7).	117
1.122.	Aerial photograph of Qarn Qantarat Nizwa.	118
1.123.	External ring-wall of Qarn Qantarat Nizwa.	118
1.124.	Ground plans of Qarn Qarhat La-Hwid and surroundings (left, Hasting <i>et al.</i> 1975: 21 fig. 8; right, Orchard and Orchard 2007: pl. 13).	121
1.125.	Aerial image of Qarn Qarhat La-Hwid.	122
1.126.	Reconstruction of Qarn Qarhat La-Hwid (Orchard and Orchard 2002: fig. 3).	123
1.127.	Detail of external ring-walls of Qarn Qarhat La-Hwid.	123
1.128.	Map of Jebel Suleiman Ali (b) with Umm an-Nar tomb (B) (Orchard and Stanger 1994: 66 fig. 2).	124

1.129.	Aerial image of Jebel Suleiman Ali (b).	125
1.130.	Annex in the east of Jebel Suleiman Ali (b).	125
1.131.	Fell tower (photograph by Guillaume Gernez/FAMCO, used with kind permission).	127
1.132.	Wezza tower (photograph by Guillaume Gernez/FAMCO, used with kind permission).	127
1.133.	External ringwall of Wezza tower (photograph by Guillaume Gernez/FAMCO, used with kind permission).	128
1.134.	Aerial photo of Tanuf Site 28 with annex in the east.	129
1.135.	Detail of the annex wall of Tanuf Site 28.	130
1.136.	Two cavities in the rock surrounding Tanuf Site 28.	130
1.137.	Plan of Tanuf Site 29 (de Cardi <i>et al.</i> 1976: 161 fig. 34).	131
1.138.	Aerial photo of Tanuf Site 29.	132
1.139.	External wall of Tanuf Site 29.	132
1.140.	Overview map of towers at Firq.	133
1.141.	Aerial image of Firq tower.	134
1.142.	Ring-wall and remains of possible second ring-wall of Firq tower.	134
1.143.	Map of Firq 25 (de Cardi <i>et al.</i> 1976: 160 fig. 33).	135
1.144.	Aerial image of Firq 25 that indicated the missing of stones from the ring-wall in the north.	136
1.145.	Ring-wall of Firq 25 with core raising up to 7 m above ground level.	136
1.146.	Aerial image of Firq tower.	137
1.147.	Ring-wall of Firq tower.	137
1.148.	Aerial image of Izki tower.	139
1.149.	Detail of ring-wall.	139
1.150.	Map of GH.S1 (Al-Jahwari <i>et al.</i> 2020: fig. 5b, used with kind permission).	141
1.151.	Aerial image of GH.S1 after excavation with post-3 <sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE burial on top (photograph by Khaled Douglas, used with kind permission).	142
1.152.	Detail of ring-wall of GH.S1 (photograph by Khaled Douglas, used with kind permission).	142
1.153.	Tower MASPAG-3 (photograph by MASPAG, used with kind permission).	143
1.154.	Close-up of ringwall of tower MASPAG-3 (photograph by MASPAG, used with kind permission).	143
1.155.	Location of tower Maysar-25 with two garbarband identified by the Harvard Archaeological Survey (Hastings <i>et al.</i> 1975: 18 fig. 4).	144
1.156.	Remains of the eastern garbarband.	145
1.157.	Map and reconstruction of tower Maysar-25 (Weisgerber 1981: 199 Abb. 27).	146
1.158.	Kite image of tower Maysar-25 after excavation (photograph by German Mining Museum, used with kind permission).	146
1.159.	Detail of external ring-wall of the tower.	147

1.160.	Structure 3 after excavations in 1980 (detail from Weisgerber 1980: Abb. 32, German Mining Museum, used with kind permission).	149
1.161.	Overview map of towers at Al-Khashbah.	150
1.162.	Building I on the left bank of the Wadi Samad with small hillock with Buildings VIII and IX in the background.	151
1.163.	Results of the magnetometer survey conducted by Jason Herrmann of Building I. At least three ditches are clearly visible.	152
1.164.	Map of Building I after excavation.	152
1.165.	Mudbrick and stone architecture in the north-east of Building I.	153
1.166.	Building II on top of a small hill next to the Wadi Samad.	154
1.167.	Map of Building II.	154
1.168.	Aerial image of Building II.	155
1.169.	Detail of external ring-wall of Building II.	155
1.170.	Aerial image of Building IV at Al-Khashbah.	156
1.171.	Map of Building IV at Al-Khashbah.	157
1.172.	Reconstruction of Building IV as massive platform (Al-Jahwari and Kennet 2010: 204 fig. 4).	158
1.173.	Detail of external wall.	158
1.174.	Detail of projection.	159
1.175.	Aerial image of Building V at Al-Khashbah.	160
1.176.	Map of Building V at Al-Khashbah.	161
1.177.	External stone ring-wall of Building V at Al-Khashbah.	162
1.178.	Mudbrick wall of compartment in the interior of Building V Al-Khashbah.	162
1.179.	Aerial image of 1981 from the National Survey Authority Oman of Building VI before destruction.	164
1.180.	Building VI before destruction (photograph by Gerd Weisgerber).	164
1.181.	Aerial image of Building VII at Al-Khashbah.	165
1.182.	Map of Building VII at Al-Khashbah.	166
1.183.	Building VII at Al-Khashbah.	167
1.184.	Aerial image of Building VIII at Al-Khashbah.	168
1.185.	Map of Building VIII and Building IX at Al-Khashbah.	169
1.186.	Wall section of Building VIII at Al-Khashbah.	169
1.187.	Aerial image Building IX at Al-Khashbah.	170
1.188.	Wall section of Building IX at Al-Khashbah.	170
1.189.	Aerial image of Building XI at Al-Khashbah.	171
1.190.	Results of the magnetometer survey conducted by Jörg Faßbinder and Marion Scheiblecker with Building XI in the north and Building I in the south-west.	172
1.191.	Aerial images of Building XII. Bright spot marks Umm an-Nar period tomb.	173

1.192.	Potential Umm an-Nar tower at Al-Qabrayn.	174
1.193.	Aerial image of potential Umm an-Nar tower at Al-Qabrayn with 2022 excavations of stonewall and mudbrick structure at its eastern side.	174
1.194.	Stonewall and mudbrick structure at Al-Qabrayn. A stone heap is cut in the upper part of the section.	175
1.195.	Aerial image of Al-Fatah tower.	176
1.196.	Ring-wall of Al-Fatah tower.	176
1.197.	Possible tower at Shariq.	178
1.198.	Remains of the external ringwall of the Shariq tower.	178
1.199.	Aerial image of possible tower at Ibra.	179
1.200.	Possible tower at Ibra.	180
1.201.	Possible Wadi Suq monumental structure near Al-Mudhairib (top) and pottery found on its surface (bottom).	181
2.1.	Hili 8 (after Méry 2013: fig. 3).	183
2.2.	South and east sections of Trench A at Al-Khafaji tower showing the complex sequence of events from the Hafit walls at the bottom to the interior tower walls at the top (from Thornton 2016a: 40-41, fig. 3.17).	183
2.3.	Building V at Al-Khashbah.	184
2.4.	Al-Khutm tower after restoration.	185
3.1.	Medieval fort at Nizwa, Al-Dakhiliyah Governorate (image by A. Farach).	191
3.2.	Map and reconstruction of tower M-25 at Al-Moyassar (Weisgerber 1981: 199 Abb. 27).	192
3.3.	Hypothetical reconstruction by Jocelyn and Jeffery Orchard of a tower with stairs access (Orchard and Orchard 2015: fig. 7).	193
3.4.	Ditches and remains of stone-foundation bridge at tower ST1 in Salut (photograph by M. Degli Esposti).	195
3.5.	Hypothetical reconstruction by Jocelyn and Jeffery Orchard of a tiered platform (Orchard and Orchard 2015: fig. 8).	196
3.6.	Crucible and furnace fragments with slag adhesion from Building V at Al-Khashbah.	197

## TABLES

1.1.	Concordance chart of phases and stages at Hili 8 (after Cleuziou 2002: tab. 1).	18
1.2.	List of radiocarbon dates from excavated towers. Recalibrated with OxCal IntCal20.	187

## Acknowledgments

This book was commissioned and supported by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman. I am deeply grateful to the Minister of Heritage and Tourism, His Excellency Salim Mohammed Almahruqi; the Undersecretary for Heritage Affairs, His Excellency Eng. Ibrahim Said Al-Kharusi; Advisor of Research and Studies to the Minister, Mr. Sultan Saif Al-Bakri; the Acting Director General of Archaeology, Dr Amina Al-Balushi; the Director General of Archaeology, Eng. Yousra Al-Subhi; the Director of the Department of Excavations and Archaeological Studies, Mr. Ali Al-Mahrooqi, and all staff members for their valuable and ongoing help.

The German Research Foundation (DFG) has provided me with the necessary financial resources to carry out the research in Oman over the past years that has led to this publication. I am also indebted to my students Katharina Koch and Tamara Schneider, who contributed to the completion of the plates. I would like to thank Dennys Frenez for the professional formatting and typesetting of this book, as well as Azza bint Abdul Aziz Al-Hinai, Translator of the Department of the Journal of Omani Studies, and Sultan bin Saif Al-Bakri, Advisor of Research and Studies, for their thorough review of the manuscript.

This book project began as a collaboration between Charlotte Cable and myself, but Charlotte eventually had to withdraw from the project to concentrate on other endeavours. Nevertheless, the book relies heavily on Charlotte's ideas and input. She laid the foundations for this publication and deserves my heartfelt thanks. Many other colleagues have generously shared their knowledge on published and unpublished towers, and provided unpublished reports, images, and maps. I express my sincere gratitude to all of them. Their willingness to share their data was instrumental in bringing this work to fruition. Without them, this book would have been much shorter.

Heidelberg, June 2024.

Stephanie Döpfer



# Introduction

## Research History

The Oman Peninsula is one of the most visually stunning regions in the world. Bounded by deserts and oceans, divided by mountains and plains, its landscape provides an otherworldly backdrop for the richness of the peoples who once lived within and on it. Bronze Age monumental buildings, so-called towers, were evidence of a time of staggering development and change that nevertheless managed to go virtually unnoticed by modern-day (Western) archaeologists until well into the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were first identified in the 1970s as “circular walled enclosures”, generally 20–30 m in diameter, that were usually made of either large stone boulders or square stone blocks (de Cardi *et al.* 1976; Hastings *et al.* 1975). Beatrice de Cardi made the first attempt at a typology of these structures using features such as the presence or absence of an adjoining rectilinear platform as distinguishing characteristics (de Cardi 1975: 109–110; see also de Cardi *et al.* 1976: 149). However, without excavating any of the towers, de Cardi’s typology relied upon extant remains and surface finds for both classification and dating.

The first of these “walled enclosures” to be excavated was at the site of Hili near Buraimi in the United Arab Emirates, where a 24 m in diameter circular building made of mudbrick was uncovered (Frifelt 1971: 376; 1975: 368–370). Inside this structure researchers found a stone-lined well amongst a complex of internal mudbrick walls that formed “compartments”. These compartments were not rooms *per se*, but were filled with compact rubble and sand. The excavator of this structure, Karen Frifelt, referred to the building as a “circular watchtower” (Frifelt 1971: 376), even though only “half a metre’s height of wall remain[s] above the surface” (Frifelt 1975: 369). This is the first known usage of the “tower” moniker to describe these structures. In discussing the second tower she excavated—Tower 1145 at Bat—Karen Frifelt provides clues as to the source of this nomenclature. She writes of Tower 1145: “It is tempting to call it a fortification, a watch tower perhaps. [...] The same principle is known from much later towers, still preserved in Oman, most famous perhaps the round tower in Nizwa” (Frifelt 1976: 59). The association of these “walled enclosures” with medieval towers has since stuck—although we would argue that this has become a gloss of convenience rather than a helpful guide to understanding these monuments as individual structures. In fact, we would prefer to return to the term first used by the American survey team—i.e., “raised circular platform” (Humphries 1974: 50)—but it seems likely that the established term “tower” will remain in the literature for many years to come.

As is often the case with monuments, many of the towers were used and reused even up through the recent past. Al-Wardi castle, which sits in the centre of the modern village of Bat, was the community’s fortress, and in use as the local jail as recently as the 1980s (Young 2019: 80). While this shows the centrality of these towers throughout time it has complicated their study; as each generation used the tower, they modified it to suit their own needs, often sweeping away evidence of previous generations in the process and leaving archaeologists to the painstaking task of untangling 5000 years of remodelling. The elements of the towers that have endured best—that is, their solid stone and mud foundations—are also the parts of the tower that tell us the least about their uses, their ages, and their makers. Counterintuitively, even finding these monuments has proved difficult. For those towers located in wadi valleys or at the foot of mountains the effects of alluviation have sometimes been significant—so much so that they have been entirely covered (as is the case at Salut). Those

towers located in wadis run the opposite risk—of eroding away against the 5000-year onslaught of flooding (as in the case of Al-Qumayra)—while those located on hilltops and precipices have often fallen victim to gravity. The Oman Peninsula has only recently entered the consciousness of archaeologists of the ancient world, and (as is the case in many countries) much of region has yet to be surveyed systematically. Thus, finding and then identifying these monumental structures is often a combination of skill, persistence, and luck. Towers are still being discovered today. When Charlotte Cable and Christopher Thornton conducted a survey in 2009, they collected evidence of 62 Bronze Age towers; now, a decade later, there are close to 100. In 2009 only a handful of publications were dedicated to research on one or more of the towers. Since that time, several whole volumes have been published (e.g., Thornton *et al.* 2016), as well as a number of theses and dissertations (e.g., Botan 2012; Cable 2012; Barker 2018; Kluge 2021; Abar in prep.). The time is ripe for a comprehensive study on tower research on the Oman Peninsula.

The purpose of this volume is thus three-fold. In the first place and for the first time, *Landmarks of Identity* catalogues all the known towers on the Oman Peninsula to-date, thus creating a record for researchers and visitors alike. Secondly, this volume will update discussions of both the antiquities and purposes of these towers, which have varied considerably based on the data sets available. Here, we bring together those data sets along with evaluations of the proposed functions to provide both chronological and functional depth. The final goal of *Landmarks of Identity* is to highlight these Bronze Age monuments for visitors, community members, government representatives, and archaeologists alike. This book seeks to facilitate a scalar shift in understanding from individual research programs and disparate data sets to a broader knowledge of 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE cultural traditions.

## **The Bronze Age on the Oman Peninsula**

The Early Bronze Age on the Oman Peninsula is one of the richest periods in its history. It is associated with the beginning of large-scale copper processing (Giardino 2017; Döpfer and Schmidt 2019; Schmidt and Döpfer 2020), long-distance trade along the Arabian Gulf and the Sea of Oman (Potts 1986; Méry and Schneider 1996; Schmidt and Döpfer 2020) and monumental architecture in the region. Scholars working in Oman have divided this period into an earlier and later part—the Hafit (3100–2700 BCE) and Umm an-Nar (2700–2000 BCE)—both named after type-sites in the United Arab Emirates. Here, the typical tombs of these two phases have been described for the first time. Besides the monumental towers, stone-built tombs form the bulk of the archaeological remains of this time. Hafit period tombs are circular or almost circular above ground dry-stone structures with external diameters between 4 and 8 m. Their inner burial chamber is much smaller with a diameter of only 1 to 2.5 m. Inhumation in Hafit period graves were few, normally ranging between one and four individuals. Later Umm an-Nar period tombs differ from their earlier counterparts by their larger diameters, their internal divisions into several chambers and the large number of people buried within them. They can reach up to 400 individuals of both sexes and all ages (Cleuziou and Tosi 2018: 220; Méry 2010: 33). The façade of the tombs is built of carefully dressed stones. Domestic architecture, while extremely rare during the Hafit period, becomes a little more common during the Umm an-Nar. Therefore, it is generally assumed that people in the Hafit period mainly pursued a mobile lifestyle, while a more sedentary, agriculturally based lifestyle, at least for parts of the population, is discussed for the Umm an-Nar (Al-Jahwari 2008: 323–324; Magee 2014: 103–107; Charbonnier 2017). Nevertheless, even in the Umm an-Nar period there are fewer domestic sites known than monumental towers (Döpfer 2018b). Thus, monumental towers, the focus of this volume, form one of the largest components of the material heritage of the Early Bronze Age on the Oman Peninsula.