

The Archaeological Heritage of Oman

# DHOFAR THROUGH THE AGES

*An Ecological, Archaeological and Historical Landscape*

LYNNE S. NEWTON & JURIS ZARINS



Sultanate of Oman  
Ministry of Heritage and Culture



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD  
Summertown Pavilion  
18-24 Middle Way  
Summertown  
Oxford OX2 7LG  
[www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

© Lynne S. Newton & Juris Zarins 2019

Dhofar through the ages: An ecological, archaeological and historical landscape  
(Includes bibliographical references and index).

1. Arabia. 2. Oman 3. Dhofar. 4. Archaeology 5. Antiquities.

Cover image: Al-Baleed congregational mosque . Photograph by Roman Garba

First published in 2017 by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Sultanate of Oman, Muscat.  
This edition is published by Archaeopress Publishing Ltd in association with the Ministry of  
Heritage and Culture, Sultanate of Oman.

ISBN 978-1-78969-160-3  
ISBN 978-1-78969-161-0 (e-Pdf)

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of  
relevant collective agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture, Sultanate of Oman.

Ministry of Heritage and Culture  
Sultanate of Oman, Muscat

P.O. Box 668 P.C. 100  
Khuwair, Muscat  
Phone: +968 24 64 13 00  
Fax: +968 24 64 13 31  
Email: [info@mhc.gov.om](mailto:info@mhc.gov.om)  
Web Site: [www.mhc.gov.om](http://www.mhc.gov.om)

# Contents

<i>List of illustrations and tables</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
<i>A note on terminology</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
<b>1 The geomorphology and ecology of Dhofar and its larger ecological environs</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Prehistoric archaeological chronology in Dhofar prior to the Islamic period</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3 Late Antiquity and Early Islamic trade in the Red Sea, Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>4 The Medieval city of Zafar. Periods II-IV</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>5 Archaeology of Zafar, Periods II-V (950-1700 AD)</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>6 Al-Baleed ceramic typology</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>7 Al-Baleed and the international Indian Ocean trade</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>8 The inland trade to the Hadhramaut and East Arabia</b>	<b>109</b>
<i>The historical chronology of Al-Baleed/Zafar</i>	117
<i>Suggested readings</i>	121
<i>Index</i>	123



## List of illustrations and tables

### FIGURES

i.	Map of the Sultanate of Oman with indication of the area covered by Figure ii.	xiv
ii.	Map of Dhofar with the major sites quoted in the Volume.	xv
1.1.	The coastal plain of Dhofar near Wadi Darbat.	2
1.2.	View from Jebel Samhan towards the coast.	3
1.3.	View of the Dhofar hills looking towards the coast.	3
1.4.	View from the Qatn towards the Nejd.	4
1.5.	The Nejd.	5
1.6.	View of the Rub Al-Khali from Jebel Samhan towards the coast.	5
1.7.	The northernmost extent of the Intertropical Convergence Zone at present (upper) and in the Neolithic period 6,000 BC (lower)	7
1.8.	Frankincense tree.	8
1.9.	<i>Boswellia sacra</i> in flower.	8
1.10.	Wadi Darbat above the waterfall during the monsoon.	10
1.11.	A second travertine waterfall farther up Wadi Darbat during the monsoon season.	10
2.1.	Palaeolithic Sites: 1) DS-08-127 Ar-Rahat; 2) DS-09-281 Mudayy; 3-4) DS-09-262 Tudho; 5-18) DS-09-310 Hanun; Palaeolithic tools: 1-4) Lower Palaeolithic choppers and bifaces; 5) Middle Palaeolithic Levallois; 6-18) Upper Palaeolithic blades, burins and flakes.	12
2.2.	Acheulean handaxe from DS-09-190.	13
2.3.	DS-09-281 near Mudhai. Site with Palaeolithic tool and debitage scatter on lower terrace, where Levallois cores were collected, later identified as Nubian.	15
2.4.	Distribution of Neolithic sites in Dhofar, note location of TA-93-72 Hailat Araka.	16
2.5.	Neolithic sites: 1-16) DS-09-88 Wadi Dhahabun; 17-26) DS-09-253 Harun village; Neolithic tools: 1-10) Trihedral rods and bifaces; 11-16) flakes, burins and blades; 17-26) Bifaces, scrapers and piercers.	17
2.6.	DS-09-254 Neolithic village at Harun.	18
2.7.	DS-08-42 Rock shelter with associated Rock Art.	19
2.8.	DS-09-149 Hodor. Tabular flint scraper and blades.	20
2.9.	Bronze Age tomb at DS-09-149 Hodor.	21
2.10.	DS-09-282 Bronze Age “Tombs with Tails” near Mudhai.	23
2.11.	Taqqa 60. Bronze and Iron Age houses.	24
2.12.	Taqqa 60. Bronze Age house.	25

2.13.	Taqa 60. Iron Age shell beads.	25
2.14.	Map of DS-09-203 Trilith Site.	26
2.15.	DS-09-203 Trilith Site.	27
2.16.	Trilith Site distribution along with MSAL Group distribution.	30
2.17.	Sumhuram, Khor Rori and the Taqa and Mirbat Jebels.	31
2.18.	The Italian Mission to Oman (IMTO) archaeological map of the Sumhuram area.	32
2.19.	Andhur.	33
2.20.	Annotated Ptolemy map (note the squared off area is Dhofar).	34
3.1.	The Classical period (300 BC-300 AD) Indian Ocean.	37
3.2.	Local Iron Age Ceramics: 1) TA-95-60, level 2, BA-83797 2340±100 BP; 2-29) DS-08-67 Al-Hawta. All examples are grit buffware, handmade with incised and impressed decoration. Numbers 3, 4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 17 and 21 are examples of rice ware.	39
3.3.	Excavations under small mosque at Al-Baleed. The photo shows what lies below the stone floor some 3 meters. Notice the deep walls are oriented in another direction.	41
3.4.	DS-08-008 Jebel Nashib.	44
3.5.	DS-08-008 Jebel Nashib.	44
3.6.	Juweina island. Note the structures visible on the top of the island, most likely dated to Abbasid-Medieval Islamic period.	45
3.7.	TA-08-101 Hinu.	46
3.8.	TA-95-121 Ras Jinjali.	47
3.9.	DS-08-03 Hasik.	49
3.10.	The fort complex at Ain Humran dated to the Iron Age-Medieval Islamic periods.	50
3.11.	Boat Graves at base of Ain Humran fort.	53
3.12.	Boat Graves at base of Ain Humran fort.	54
4.1.	Ibn Mujawir's map of Zafar (Al-Baleed) (after Löfgren).	57
4.2.	Ibn Battuta's itineraries in Southern Arabia.	63
4.3.	Chinese Map of Frankincense Trade (after Wheatley 1959).	65
5.1.	Landsat image of Al-Baleed on the coast of Salalah.	68
5.2.	South side of the <i>husn</i> looking north.	70
5.3.	Al-Baleed/Zafar congregational mosque (ZCM).	73
5.4.	Landsat image of Al-Baleed, note the city wall and 18 towers.	78
5.5.	Al-Baleed Southwest Gate.	79
5.6.	Jetty near the Southeast Gate, note the large blocks that once held a dock in place.	83
6.1.	Amphorae: 1) Qana, 1 <sup>st</sup> century BC-3 <sup>rd</sup> century AD (Sedov 1996: 15, fig. 3); 2-3) Masirah, 5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> century AD (Shanfari 1987: pl. 7/3 Site 64); 4) Mahawt; 5) Alto Bay (East of Mirbat), found at a depth of 11 m.	91
6.2.	Complete Celadon bowl from Al-Baleed.	95
6.3.	Complete glass vessel from Al-Baleed.	92
6.4.	Complete glass vessels from Al-Baleed.	93

7.1.	“Abu Zayd and Al-Harith sailing” in <i>Al-Maqamat</i> of al Harīrī Al-Basrī, Folio 119 Verso, ca. 1237 AD (Bibliothèque Nationale de France).	105
8.1.	Shisr/Ubar.	113
8.2.	The chess pieces from Shisr dating to the 10 <sup>th</sup> century AD.	113

## TABLES

7.1.	Textile types defined by geographical designation in the <i>Mulakhkhas Al-Fitan</i> .	97
7.2.	Port tax revenues at Aden (in gold dinars) during the Rasulid period (1229-1451 AD).	97
7.3.	Rasulid tax revenue generated from ports in 1411.	99
7.4.	Sailing schedule for Zafar from the almanac <i>al-Tabsira fi ilm al-nujum</i> of Al-Malik Al-Ashraf.	108





## Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank first the Ministry of Heritage and Culture of the Sultanate of Oman for having generously invited them to contribute in the Series *The Archaeological Heritage of Oman*. In particular, we thank H.H. Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, Minister of Heritage and Culture, H.E. Salim bin Mohammed Al-Mahruqi, Undersecretary for Heritage, and the Director General for Archaeology, Sultan bin Saif Al-Bakri and his staff, especially the late Prof. Maurizio Tosi, Adviser to H.H. the Minister.

The work described here was made possible with the dedicated support of the Advisor to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs, H.E. Abdulaziz bin Mohammed Al-Rowas. The authors thank His staff who provided every kindness and necessary support for the ongoing work in the Dhofar Governorate, especially Ghanem Al-Shanfari, Ali Al-Kathiri, Hussein Al-Shanfari, Ashraf Abdun, Mohammed Tabuk, Said Al-Mashani, Ahmed Al-Awaid, Mohammed Al-Rowas, and Mohammed Al-Jahfali. In HE's Office in Muscat we particularly thank Said Al-Salmi, Hassan Al-Jabberi, Ahmed Al-Farsi and Salim Al-Siyabi.

The work in Dhofar also requires the acknowledgment of Bill Isenberger of Digital Mapping and Graphics (Springfield, MO, USA), who produced all graphic images and maps, the Late George Hedges who had the vision to initially begin archaeological survey in Dhofar and Nick Clapp, the creator of the film realized by WGBH Boston, *The Atlantis of the Sands*. Professor Alessandra Avanzini provided assistance and edited the pioneering *Profumi d'Arabia* (1997). Professor Mauro Sassu facilitated the project of stabilizing, conserving and reconstructing the fantastic and monumental architecture recently revealed at Al-Baleed. In addition, we would like to thank all of the volunteers and students from Missouri State University, Manchester University, and the University of Pisa.



## A note on terminology

The region of Dhofar takes its name from the medieval town *Zafar*, which is currently known as Al-Baleed. To distinguish *Zafar* in southern Oman from a similarly named city in the highlands of Yemen, the medieval Arab historians and geographers used the term *Zafar Al-Habudhi*, which presumably included Al-Baleed, Al-Robat and the wider vicinity of the medieval city. Substantial ruins of a portion of the medieval city enclosed by a formal wall and located by the seashore are today called *Al-Baleed/Balid*. Mathews noted that in MSAL geographical terms could use the term *ba'l* meaning “lord/owner of ... located by ...” with a feminine *balit*. Thus, the term *Al-Balid* may be a corruption of an early name for the town *Balit* and not related to Arabic *Bilad/Balid*. The rise of the quarter (*hafa*) town called Salalah (not mentioned in medieval texts) is complex. The term applied originally to three areas lying north of the modern *husn* quarter. The term *Salalah* has been interpreted as a MSAL word meaning “the shining or gleaming one” due to the appearance of tall, white houses. The current Shahri term for *Al-Baleed* itself is Harekom, perhaps reflected in one of the city gates described by Ibn Mujawir in 1220.

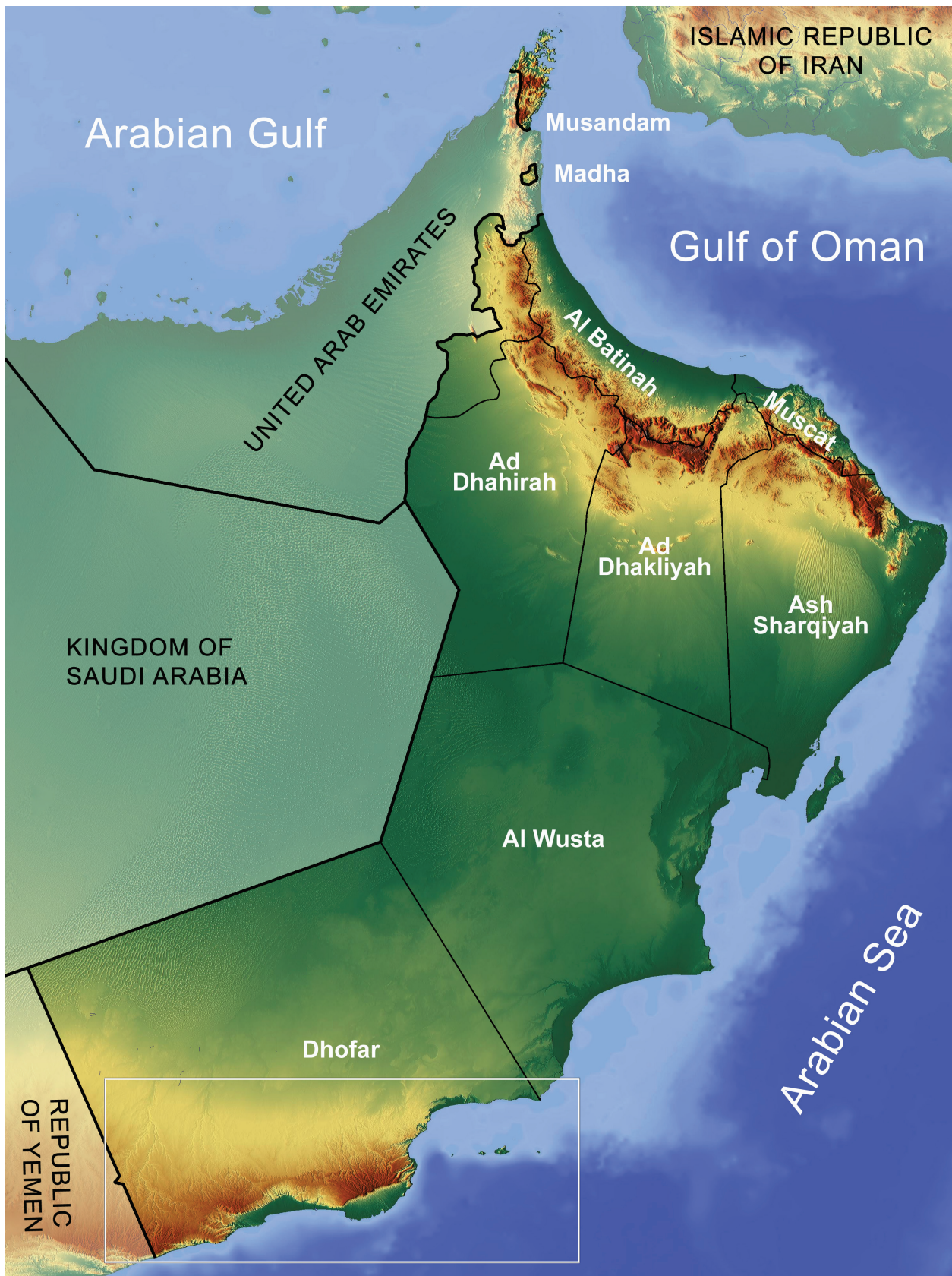


Figure i. Map of the Sultanate of Oman with indication of the area covered by Figure ii.



## Introduction

Dhofar, the southernmost Governate of the Sultanate of Oman, is ecologically unique in Arabia and has a particular history and archaeology. Archaeological work in this province until recently remained a somewhat *terra incognita* until the general survey of the province undertaken by the authors first between 1989-1995 as part of the Trans Arabia Expedition and later between 2005 and 2011 for the Office of the Advisor to His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs. In addition, specific archaeological work at places of interest in Dhofar such as Al-Baleed and Khor Rori date back to the examinations of early English explorers such as H.J. Carter (1837), S.B. Miles (1880), and T. and M. Bent (1890-1900), as well as the later explorations by W. Phillips of the American Foundation of the Study of Man, AFSM (1955-64), P. Costa (1977-79) and M. Jansen of the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule of Aachen, RWTH (1996-2004).

However, these explorations were mainly on the coast as none penetrated either the Dhofar hills to any extent or the interior of Dhofar until the work of the Trans Arabia Expedition at Shisr began to examine the Nejd and Rub Al-Khali areas of the province. This work was followed by the limited surveys of the Italian Mission to Oman (IMTO) of the University of Pisa centered on the Khor Rori environs between 1996-2005. The full-scale survey between 2008-2009 opened up new vistas of the richness of Dhofar's past and is now complemented by different projects directed by J. Rose, J. McCorriston, and V. Charpentier.

Periodization as used by archaeologists allows us to describe and present large periods of Dhofar's history and archaeology locally, regionally, and the wider Arabian Peninsula. The four main sites in Dhofar are Khor Rori (ancient Sumhuram/Mocha), Al-Baleed (Zafar), Shisr (Ubar/Wabaritae) and Mughsayl. Finally, current investigations into the Late Palaeolithic and Early Neolithic archaeology of Dhofar together with ongoing research into the Mitochondrial DNA (MtDNA) relationships and the antiquity of the present-day Modern South Arabic Language (MSAL) groups living in Dhofar will also be contextualized. In short, Dhofar has a unique and rich archaeological, botanical and historical past stretching back to at least one million years (Figures i and ii).

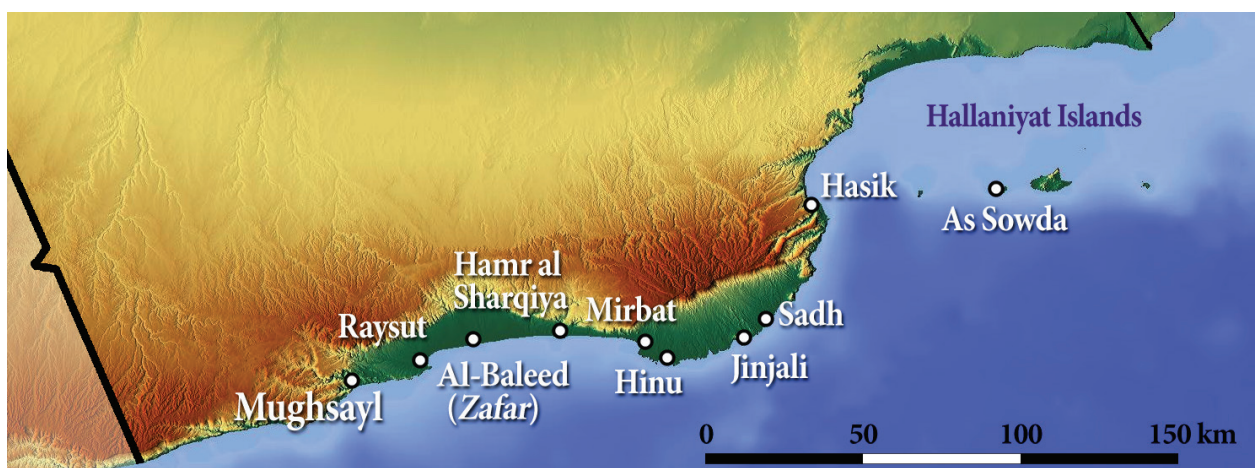


Figure ii. Map of Dhofar with the major sites quoted in the Volume.