

Project “Transformation Processes in Oasis Settlements in Oman”  
Report on the survey campaign autumn 2003 in Ibrā’ and al-Hamrā’

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Archaeological fieldwork on the fourth campaign of the second phase in the interdisciplinary cooperation project “Transformation Processes in Oasis Settlements in Oman” started on October 9<sup>th</sup> and was finished on November 12<sup>th</sup>. Participants were Jürgen Schreiber, M.A. as archaeologist, Dipl. Kom-Designer Wolfgang Hirth as draughtsman and Dr. Jutta Häser as archaeologist and field director from the German Institute of Archaeology, who stayed from October the 9<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup>.

The first target of investigations was the late Iron Age settlement at Ibrā’ (site I0052) on October 10<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Andreas Bürkert, agriculturalist of our research group, and the archaeological team made images of the site from a helium filled balloon to give an overview of the extension of the site and the details of the settlement remains.

On October 13<sup>th</sup> we made a description of the site by hands of these air photographs. Before we started collecting the surface pottery, the settlement was divided in four areas according to its natural topography. As the site was covered with an enormous amount of potsherds, we decided to concentrate on just very specific and/or new types. Despite of this, we still collected more than 200 sherds from these four areas.

The second target was to investigate the falaj system at al-Hamrā’. Two Iron Age II settlements were discovered there in 2000. The question was, if the aflaj which are very close to these settlements were already built in the Iron Age. We found out, that all aflaj in al-Hamrā’ get their water out of the wadi sediments.

The falaj close to the Iron Age settlement (site 102) comes from the wadi east of the settlement and leads to Bilad Sait. The old falaj was built in a cut-and-cover-technique. The falaj is 3 to 1 m deep. The relatively shallowness and the building technique makes it possible, that it was already built in the Iron Age. However, there is no proof for this assumption.

The second case is more difficult, since the modern oasis covers the hole area at the foot of the hill with the Iron Age settlement (site 86/29). The aflaj that supply the modern oasis are

built in the well technique with deep holes. One of these aflaj is dry. They appear relatively young and probably do not belong to the Iron Age settlement. However, the natural conditions are given, that it is possible to built a falaj in the cut-and-cover-technique also here.

In summary, the richness in water of the water sediments and its relatively easy accessibility makes it plausible to built Iron Age settlements in this region.

However, the main objective of this campaign was the processing of the small finds and pottery of the survey in Ibrā', Maqta and Jaylah last spring. More than 2000 potsherds from the third millennium B.C. to the Islamic periods were categorized, about 900 distinctive (mostly prehistoric) sherds were drawn and photographed. The small finds, such as flint-tools, soft-stone and other stone-objects, iron and bronze objects as well as beads were also drawn and photographed.

Besides the afore mentioned activities in the frame of our project, other activities comprised a short visit to al-Batīn, installation of protection signs at Ibrā` and study of pottery from Sīb at the Department of Antiquities:

From Ibrā`, we made a short visit to al-Batīn on October 13<sup>th</sup>, located some 15 km northeast of Ibrā`. There we visited three prehistoric sites, which were shown to Jürgen Schreiber by Prof. Weisgerber in 1995. All three sites, which seemed to be endangered in 1995 by bulldozing are still in relatively good condition:

- Wadi Suq cemetery (N 22° 46.367', E 058° 41.019', H. 450 +/- 10 m)
- Umm an-Nar slag heap (N 22° 46.394', E 058° 40.997', H. 444 +/- 7,7 m)
- Umm an-Nar remains at "iron hat" (N 22° 46.663', E 058° 40.237', H. 434 +/- 9,5 m)

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of October, a team from the Department of Antiquities (Ali, Khamis and a driver) and Jürgen Schreiber went to Ibrā, to install some signs for the "protection of archaeological sites" at the vast cemetery of more than 200 graves of late 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, we had discovered in the spring of 2003 near ath-Thābtī. As there were some white painted stones to mark the run of a future gravel track or tarmac road directly through the cemetery, the installation of these signs came just in time to protect the site from further destruction. All in all five large areas of tombs were marked. The first sign was posted at an area with eight Umm an-Nar tombs (N 25 14 854 m; E 40 65 8833 m), the following four were installed to the north of the first site almost in sighting distance to each other.

In the frame of Jürgen Schreiber's Ph.D.-thesis about Early Iron Age Pottery in Oman, Mrs. Biubwa al-Sabri was so kind to allow him to study the Iron Age pottery from the tell at Sīb. This site and its pottery has been mentioned in different articles (for example by the Harvard Archaeological Survey in the early 1970's or in Paul Yule's Habilitation) but has neither been drawn nor studied yet.

The material was kept for many years in three cardboard boxes and a plastic bag. According to a note inside of one of the cardboard boxes, the pottery was brought to the Department of Antiquities by an unknown person from Sīb. The pottery came to light during building activities, when foundations for houses were dug at the Tell at Sīb. All in all the boxes contained 16 complete or almost complete vessels (small painted and unpainted bowls, beakers and jars, a four-lugged spouted jar, spouted jars as well as spouted bowls) and 125 potsherds, most of them undiagnostic and relatively eroded body-sherds – all dating to the Early Iron Age. Besides these Iron Age potsherds a complete cooking-pot as well as a handful of potsherds dating to Islamic times were also included. They might be of relatively late date and not be older than maybe 100 – 200 years. A single shell was also included.

The material from the plastic bag was collected by Prof. Weisgerber at the surface of the Tell, but unfortunately no date for the collecting is given on the note inside the bag. The bag contained a grinding plate, an iron object (part of a pommel?), a copper fish-hook, two glass-sherds, a ovoid or rhomb-shaped copper coin as well as a handful of potsherds. At least one of these sherds (rim fragment of a hole-mouth jar) is of Iron Age date, two sherds of large storage jars should be dated to the Middle Islamic period and the five or six other potsherds belong also to the Islamic periods.

On October 29<sup>th</sup> and from November 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> all complete (except the Late Islamic one) and almost complete vessels as well as about thirty potsherds were drawn and photographed, all sherds were categorized and DA-Numbers (DA 13642 – 13662) were given to all the finds.