



Type: Journal Article

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## Possible Ancient Historical Connections in Dhofar

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Source: *IASA Bulletin* No. 30 (Spring 2023)

Published: International Association for the Study of Arabia

Pages: 21–22

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**Abstract:** A short article on the recent study of two "enigmatic structures on the isolated Qamar coast", one at al Hauta and the other at Khor Kharfot and a potential link between the two.

The 2023 excavations were sponsored by the Beatrice de Cardi Award and Leiden University. We are grateful for the support of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism staff of the Sultanate of Oman. The excavations will continue in 2024.

#### References:

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### Possible Ancient Historical Connections in Dhofar

by Warren P. Aston.

Two enigmatic structures on the isolated Qamar coast, west of Salalah, have mostly avoided scholarly scrutiny until recently. In a new effort, long-time Oman researcher, Warren Aston, is exploring the origins and purpose of a structure near the settlement of al Hauta, and its possible link to another at Khor Kharfot, both sites situated on the Qamar coast near the border with Yemen.

Historians have long noted the emergence of a group of unclear origin, usually referred to as the Minjui, or simply Minju. By some historical accounts they became the last dynasty to rule over ancient Merbat [Mirbat] at the eastern end of the Salalah bay, now represented by several prominent structures of dry wall construction, and some tombs, before moving westwards to Zafar, the precursor capital to al Baleed by ca.AD 1000. There are emerging indications that they continued moving, or perhaps expanding, further west.



Figure 1. The tower at al Hauta, below the higher terrain inland, taken facing northwards (image: Warren P. Aston).

A study of shrines in Dhofar published in 2010 briefly reported the presence of a stone tower (kūt) overlooking a tiny coastal community east of Rakhyut, and noted stories from local informants that it was built by the “Minjuwi” as the base of a pulley system bringing goods down from the plateau above. The squared tower stands over 6 meters tall with raised rectangular panels on each side.

The same claim by locals about a pulley built by the “Menjuin” had been recorded in 2010 by Aston for a large collapsed stone structure sitting below the high plateau on the eastern side of the bay at Khor Kharfot, west of Rakhyut. The mouth of Wadi Sayq, the Qamar mountains largest drainage system, Khor Kharfot is presently uninhabited but has multiple human structures indicating long, intermittent, habitation.



Figure 2. The collapsed tower, believed to also be squared originally, at Khor Kharfot, with the plateau visible directly behind it (image: Warren P. Aston)

The Ministry of Heritage and Culture in Salalah was advised about the al Hauta structure following its initial examination in December 2021, and it is now registered as a protected archaeological site with them.

Although the study of both towers is ongoing, with further field work planned for February 2023, there are early indications that a link may exist between the two towers, one standing and one collapsed, potentially bringing new appreciation to the roles of this particular group in our understanding of Dhofar’s past. The full preliminary report can be accessed [here](#).

## References:

Newton, Lynne S. 2010. "Shrines in Dhofar" in *Death and Burial in Arabia and Beyond: Multidisciplinary perspectives*. BAR International Series 2107, Oxford: Archaeopress, 338-339, esp. note v.

**Further investigations at al-Khutm Bronze Age monumental tower Al-Dhahirah region, Oman** by Enzo Cocca (CNR National Research Council, Italy), Maurizio Cattani (University of Bologna, Italy) and Francesca Barchiesi (University of Bologna, Italy)

Al-Khutm tower is a well-preserved monument dating to the end of 3rd and the first half of 2nd millennium BCE. Since 1988 the site is registered in the UNESCO world Heritage list together with other monuments of Bat and the tombs of Al Ayn, representing a unique portrayal of the landscape in the 3rd millennium BCE (Thornton, Schmidt 2015). Thanks to the high state of preservation and monumentality, the tower of al-Khutm is currently undergoing a project of valorisation that will enhance the main features of the building and surrounding area.



*Figure 1. Al-Khutm. Frontal view of the perimeter wall with the excavated area in 2022 campaign (Photo: Maurizio Cattani)*

Identified in the early 80's as one of the towers of Bat, al-Khutm was covered by a deposit of collapsed stones several metres deep and remained only partially visible until 2015, when a project – funded by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture of Oman – started excavations for the complete investigation and following restoration of the monument (Cocca et al. 2019).

The results of these first years of excavations carried out by an Italian team (2016-2018), directed

by Dr. Enzo Cocca and supervised by Prof. Maurizio Cattani of the University of Bologna, were impressive: the tower with a circular plan has a diameter of 20-22 m and a total height from the surrounding plain of 8 m. The inner area is unique among all the known towers, presenting a central corridor with floors and doors leading to lateral rooms. Common to other monuments is the well, located approximately in the middle of the central corridor (Thornton, Cable, Possehl 2016).

The investigations allowed identification of a complex system of structures annexed to the tower along the western perimeter and on the north-eastern side. A monumental wall, built on the western and south-western sides, enlarges the lower area connected to the tower, while other walls and a monumental staircase located on the northern side define a later construction dating to the 2nd millennium BCE.

Even though the earliest main entrance to the tower was not clearly identified, a complex path running along a monumental ramp was supposed on the north-western side thanks to the presence of corridors with doors marked by thresholds and pivots (Cocca et al. 2016).

Along with the restoration activities of the monuments, a further phase of excavation started in the last months of 2022 carried out by the University of Bologna. The aim was to continue investigations of the external perimeter wall to establish the stratigraphic dating of the monumental structure and to present the full view of the site to visitors.

This last campaign was fully satisfactory: among the main results of the investigation is the full layout of the perimeter wall, built with the same technique of the tower, assuming an original height of at least 4 m. Dimensions and technical characters support the idea of a purposeful monumentality in the design of the building, and the interpretation of defensive function of the structure.

Outside the perimeter wall, a concentric space 2.50 m large was recognized as buffer zone, delimited by a dry-stone wall, possibly built to support the external terraced plain (although this interpretation is still to be clarified) (Fig. 1 & 2). Several traces of activities were recognized in the stratification