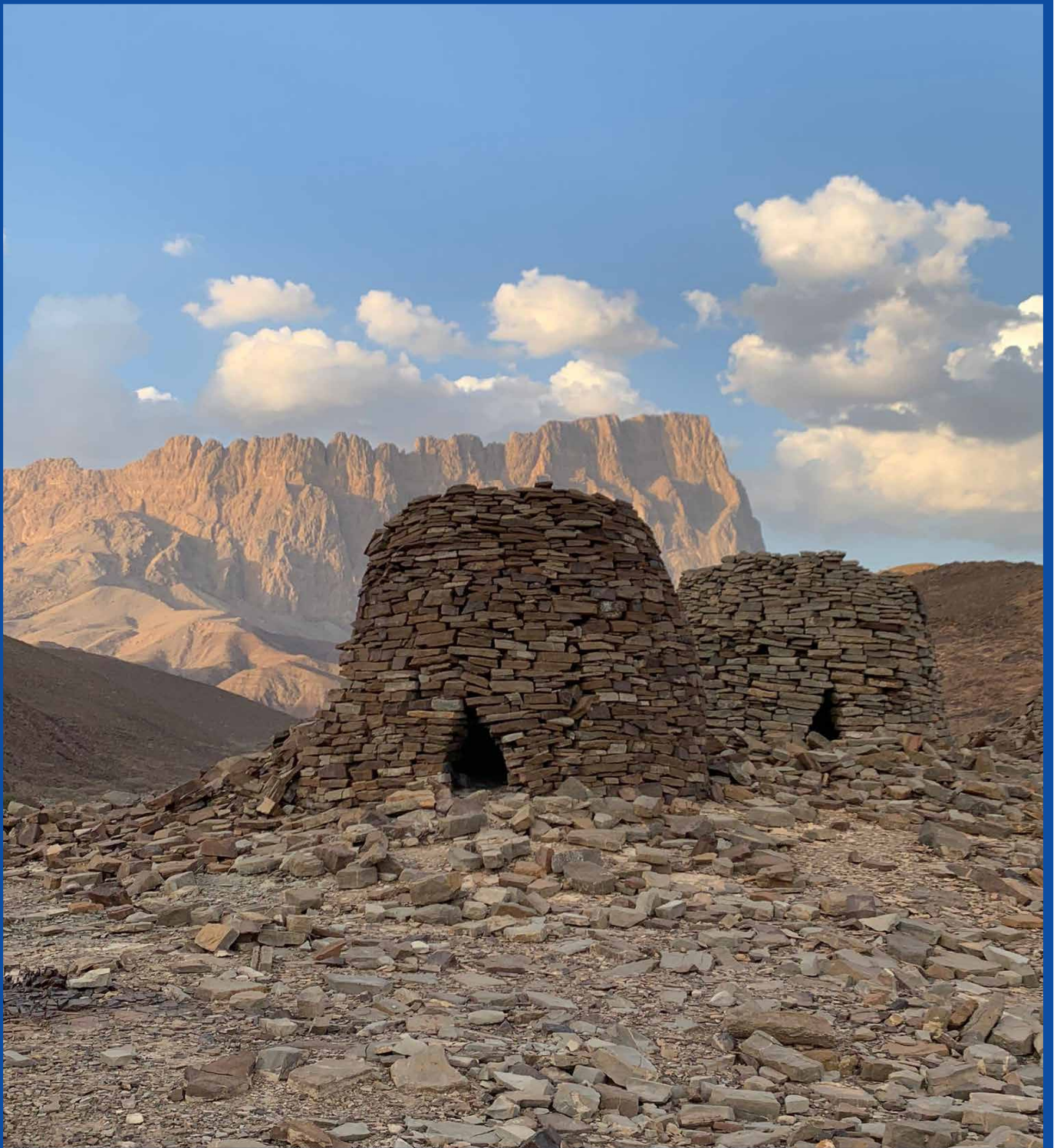


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Further investigations at al-Khutm Bronze Age monumental tower Al-Dhahirah region, Oman by Enzo Cocca (CNR National Research Council, Italy), Maurizio Cattani (University of Bologna, Italy) and Francesca Barchiesi (University of Bologna, Italy)

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

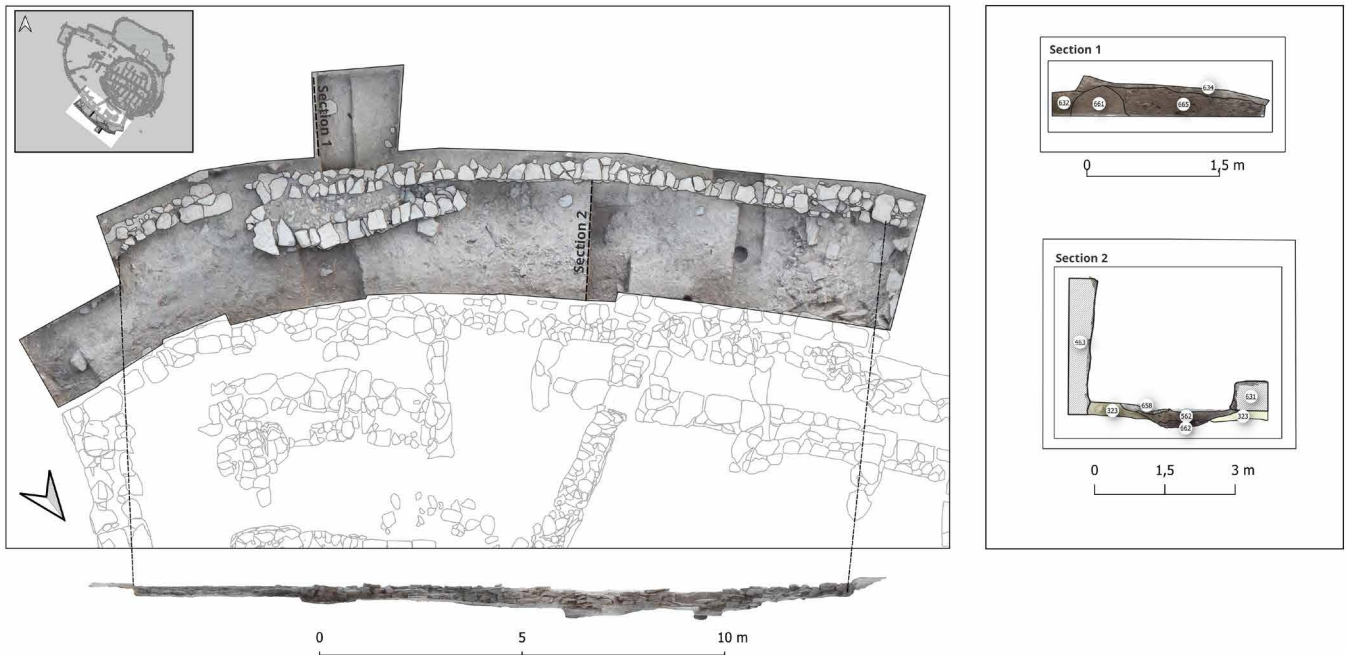


Figure 2. Al-Khutm. Map of the excavated area in 2022 campaign with sections (Elaboration: Enzo Cocca)

dating to the 2nd millennium BCE (above the collapse SU 479), while the lowest layer, containing Umm an-Nar pottery, allowed the team to confirm the construction of the tower at the end of 3rd millennium BCE (Fig. 3).

The activities will continue with the study of the buffer zone up to the building associated with the aforementioned entrance on the north-western side of the tower, in order to complete the footpath for visitors and to improve the visibility of the monument.



Figure 3. Al-Khutm. Selection of finds from 2022 campaign. 3.1: Soft-stone vessel with dot-in-circle decoration from the collapse SU 479. 3.2: Pottery with an incised mark on the rim from SU 636. 3.3: Painted pottery with an applied wavy ridge on the shoulder from SU 636. 3.4: Painted pottery from SU 485. (Photos: Francesca Barchiesi)

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QATAR

Human Populations and Demographics in Qatar from the Neolithic to the late Iron Age by Ferhan Sakal and Sara Tomei

The project “Human Populations and