

Project “Transformation processes in oasis settlement of Oman”  
**Archaeological survey at Izki, the Jebel Akhdar and Nizwa.**  
A preliminary report of the autumn campaign 2004.

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### **Introduction**

The interdisciplinary German-Omani co-operation project “Transformation processes in oasis settlement in Oman” was established in 1999. Participants are the Sultan Qaboos University (Department of Archaeology and Department of Agriculture), the University of Tübingen (Oriental Institute), the University of Stuttgart (Institute for Urban Planning), the University of Kassel (Institute of Crop Sciences) and the German Institute of Archaeology in Berlin (Orient Department); head of the cooperation project is Prof. Dr. Heinz Gaube from the University of Tübingen. As a new participant the Department of Antiquities, Muscat, joined the project in 2004.

In the initial phase of this project, which lasted from 1999 to 2001, archaeological surveys were carried out in the al-Hamra region and the Wadi Bani Awf (Häser 2000, 2003). The second phase of the project saw archaeological investigations at the coastal site of Tiwi and its hinterland in 2002 (Häser & Schreiber 2003; Schreiber & Häser 2004; Korn et. al. in press) and at Ibra in the interior in 2003 (Schreiber in press a). This second phase was financed by the German Research Foundation, the Sultan Qaboos University and the German Institute of Archaeology.

In December 2003 this project was extended for another two years by generously financial grants of the institutions mentioned above. In this third phase it is planned to conduct survey in Izki, the Jebel Akhdar, Nizwa and Bahla.

In spring 2004 work started in Izki and the Jebel Akhdar (Schreiber 2004, in press b) and was continued in the autumn campaign, which lasted from October 5<sup>th</sup> to December 15<sup>th</sup>. Participants of this campaign were: Juergen Schreiber MA, field director (05.10. – 15.12.), Frank Voigt, assistant (05.10. – 04.11.), Dr. Jutta Haeser, general director (18.10. – 03.11), Nikola Schreiber MA, draftswoman (04.11. – 15.12.) and Simon von Barloewen, draftsman (04.11. – 15.12.).

Four weeks were spent in the field, doing surveys in Izki, Nizwa and the Jebel Akhdar. The remaining time was used to work on the pottery, the small-finds and the documentation of this years campaigns.

## Survey in Izki

Work in Izki continued from October 7<sup>th</sup> to October 14<sup>th</sup>, including three days of work on the documentation. This time we started our survey at the eastern area of the oasis, an area which was heavily disturbed by pipelines built in the 1980's and the new Muscat - Nizwa highway. But even without this disturbances the archaeological record in this area was very thin. Just two sites, found already by Jutta Häser and the present author in 2002 and labelled Maghiouth 1 and 2, are located in the eastern area of the oasis. Mag1 is a very disturbed pre-historic tomb, while Mag2 is a small Early Iron Age (in the following EIA) settlement, consisting of some low house-mounds located between the modern houses of al-Maghiouth. Both sites were visited to integrate them in our numerical system (Mag1 = Iz0746, Mag2 = Iz0747).

After this, we turned to the centre of the oasis, consisting of the quarters of al-Nizar to the south and al-Yaman to the north. Both quarters sit on a rocky outcrop above Wadi Halfayn and are separated by a neutral zone, where in the 19<sup>th</sup> cent. AD a now decayed mud-brick fort (Iz0002) was built. At a bulldozed area between this fort and the modern road, we found Late Iron Age (in the following LIA) pottery. Immediately northwest of the walled quarter of al-Yaman is a small Islamic cemetery (Iz0001)<sup>1</sup> with at least some Middle Islamic graves. On the surface we found some EIA potsherds, which may have come to light during the digging of the Islamic graves. Except of these two sites just a few prehistoric tombs were found outside of al-Yaman, located between the modern houses. As they were very disturbed and no pottery was found, we were not able to date them.

Since the architecture of al-Yaman and al-Nizar was already recorded by the architects and urban planners of our project, we concentrated our work on collecting pottery in these quarters. Pottery was scarce and as far as we can tell, is relatively young and may not be older than Late Islamic. We made an interesting finding outside of al-Nizar, at the southern most tip of the rocky wadi-bank. Here is also a small cemetery, which probably dates to the Middle Islamic period and some remains of ruined towers may also belong to this period. At the south-western edge of this area we found remains of walls build of large unworked boulders. Unfortunately this area was bulldozed sometime, so just a few of the boulders were still in situ, but some of them seem to belong to buildings. These remains resemble the architectural features at site Iz0005, where a large circular Umm an-Nar building and an adjacent settlement can be found directly on the opposite wadi bank at the western edge of the oasis. So it may be assumed, that on this tip a second Umm an-Nar settlement was located – but unfortunately no potsherds of this period were found.

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<sup>1</sup> Like the sites at Maghiouth these sites were already found by Jutta Häser and the present author during a short visit in 2002.

Since the eastern part as well as the traditional quarters turned out to be relatively unproductive from an archaeological point of view, we decided to examine the hilly area between the southern edges of the main-oasis and the new Muscat – Nizwa highway. Here we recorded some 30 structures. Most of them are disturbed Hafit-tombs and all of them were re-used for EIA burials. We also re-visited the plateau west of the old Izki – Nizwa road, where we had recorded some 60 tombs during the spring campaign. This visit proved our assumption, that some of these tombs may be of Umm an-Nar type to be incorrect. All of them are Hafit-tombs, but some of them were modified in the EIA, so that some features give the impression of looking like Umm an-Nar tombs.

Before we finished our work at Izki, we decided to examine two cemeteries (Iz0406 and Iz0900), which we had visited just sporadically during our spring campaign, in detail.

The cemetery Iz0406 is located near the village of Seddi on the western bank above Wadi Halfayn and some of the tombs are cut by the wadi edge. The surface of the cemetery is scattered with LIA- and Middle Islamic pottery, but just a few diagnostic sherds were found. The two periods defined by the surface pottery give also the chronological frame for the two types of graves. The rectangular Islamic graves are all oriented in north-south direction with a vertical set headstone. The tombs of the second type are of the so-called “Izki-type”, which can also be found on several other sites at Izki (cf. below). They are rectangular, measuring between 2,00 – 3,00 x 4,00 – 5,00 m and are all oriented in east-west direction. All in all we recorded 40 tombs of this type. Some of them were preserved up to three stone layers, while some of them were cut by the wadi. The LIA-pottery, as well as the two camel-figurines we found during a visit in the spring campaign is probably connected with this tombs. The oldest structure are the remains of a large Hafit-tomb, located at the southern edge of the area, and there are also remains of some walls running across the area, which are clearly no funerary features.

Then we turned to the main cemetery of Izki (Iz0900) with its 10.000 of graves, located on the eastern wadi-bank of Wadi Halfayn and just opposite of al-Nizar, to record the prehistoric tombs there. We started our work immediately north of the cemetery at a levelled area, which is divided from the main cemetery by a small gravel road. Here some scanty remains of stone-set walls were visible and the relatively large amount of Middle Islamic pottery suggests a settlement and fields of this period. The very desolate tower ruin (Iz0829) at the edge of the large cemetery may also belong to this settlement.

Located on the other side of the gravel road is a cluster of prehistoric tombs. In 1988 one of these tombs was drawn by a team from the German Mining-Museum, Bochum and all

together 27 of them were mapped – they were called “Izki-tomb” (Yule 1994, 2001) as this type is not known from any other site in south-eastern Arabia until now. As it turned out, there were much more. In the wider surrounding we counted 69 tombs and a second group, some hundred meters to the south-west consists of 40 more Izki-tombs.

The densest scatter of LIA-pottery can be found in the north-western area of the cemetery, where most of this Izki-tombs are located. Despite the large amount of pottery, just a few diagnostic potsherds were found. It is interesting to note, that the pottery is relatively crude and coarse and we had the impression, that most of the potsherds belong to settlement pottery rather than to funerary pottery. This might coincident with the observation, that wall-remains are visible at the surface and some small mounds are scattered to the east of the Izki-tombs. Maybe a LIA settlement was located in this area.

Near to the Izki-tombs was a small area, where we collected EIA pottery. Even if there were no grave-structures preserved, according to the pottery ensemble (small painted carinated bowls, three bridge-spouted vessels etc.) can be no doubt, that there were also EIA tombs at this cemetery.

The afore mentioned second group of Izki-tombs is located some hundred meter to the south-west, immediately at the wadi-edge. Their number must originally have been higher as a modern gravel road was cut through these tombs. They seem to be a little bit smaller and more irregular (they seem to be more oval than rectangular) – so maybe these are the predecessors of the more elaborate tombs to the north. Between these tombs, but especially further to the south at the tip of the wadi-bank, we recorded numerous remains of structures, we were not always able to identify. But we assume that they are the remains of Hafit-tombs.

As far as it is possible to say, the development of this cemetery may be as follows:

The oldest use of this site is attested by Hafit-tombs. They were built in the southern and south-western part of the cemetery along the ridge of the wadi-bank. While the second half of the third and the whole second millennium BC seem to be missing, the EIA is attested by re-use of the southern Hafit-tombs as well as a small area at the north-western part. During the LIA a settlement may have existed at the north-eastern part of the site and even the Izki-tombs may have been erected during this period a little bit away from the settlement. In the Middle Islamic period the whole area was used as a burial ground and the settlement shifted to the area immediately north of the cemetery. A use of the cemetery younger than Middle Islamic can not be proven, but recent burials can be found in two small areas at the southern most part of the cemetery. An interesting feature is the foundation of a wall with projections and/or even a gate. Preserved up to 0.30 m, this wall runs across the area from south-east to north-

west, where it ends at a ruined tower, immediately at the wadi-edge unfortunately we were not able to date this wall.

According to local tradition, an idol called Jurnan, was worshipped in pre-Islamic times in a cave (Wilkinson 1977). During our work at Izki we met several people, who told us about a cave, where once a golden calf was adored. While not all of them were able to give us the location of the cave, some of them located the cave in the slope beneath al-Nizar. This fits strikingly well with the description of a cave given by two geologists from the Sultan Qaboos University (Hanna & al-Belushi 1996). According to their description we found the cave situated half way up the slope below al-Nizar. Unfortunately the cave is blocked by stones and sediments and as the entrance is used as a waste dump, it was not possible to come into the cave.

On October 14<sup>th</sup> we finished our work at Izki, after we had recorded 1039 archaeological sites/features.

### **Work at the Jebel Akhdar**

As during the spring campaign (Schreiber 2004, in press b), we spent again two days at the Jebel Akhdar (21. – 22.10.). We again visited the deserted settlement in Wadi Bani Habib, but were again not able to find older Islamic or even prehistoric sites there.

When we walked from al-Ain to al-Fayyadhiya, we found a few EIA-sherds half way between the two villages, at the same place, where we had already found two EIA potsherds in spring. As it turned out the potsherds came down the slope from a rocky outcrop above the way. As we climbed up the slope, we found some stone-structures and terraces built amongst the natural rocks. According to the pottery the structures of the settlement (or camp) may be dated to the Middle Islamic period, while numerous EIA-sherds suggest a use of this site already in this earlier period. After the spring-campaign we assumed, that the prehistoric settlements were situated at the same places as the modern villages, but the discovery of this site suggests, that this was not the case, but that the existing villages were just settled in Late Islamic times.

A visit to the village of Masirah showed the same picture as all other settlements at the Jebel Akhdar. No prehistoric or older Islamic sites were found there. Just outside the village, situated on a low hill at the edge of a wadi we found a relatively well preserved Hafit-tomb near a small Islamic cemetery. On a second hill we found the remains of a stone-house (probably Late Islamic) and some Middle Islamic potsherds.

At the Saiq-plateau we recorded some more Hafit-tombs and then left for Nizwa.

## **Work at Nizwa**

All in all, we spent nine days in the field at Nizwa (17.–19.10., 23.10., 25.–27.10. and 29.–30.10.) and four days were used for work on the documentation.

We started our survey in a large valley, located east of the main road between Firq and Sa´al. While most of the valley is not accessible because of military facilities, we were just able to record a few Hafit-tombs at the southern part of this area. North of the military area we found a vast area of deserted fields, which stretch into the modern village of Sa´al. These fields are scattered with numerous potsherds, most of them date to the Middle Islamic period (Sgraffiato, Celadon etc.), but also intermingled with EIA-sherds. Between the fields are scattered mounds, covered with small gravel and EIA-sherds – so they are not mud-heaps but house mounds. This becomes also clear by the remains of structures (walls etc.), situated on these mounds. The whole area was already used in the EIA with single houses and farmsteads between the fields, while a larger EIA settlement site is located at the eastern part of the valley. This site consists of a chain of flat and low hills, which are all covered with a dense scatter of EIA pottery. According to the pottery, the whole area was re-used in Middle Islamic times. Besides the mentioned sites several Islamic cemeteries, ruined mosques, wells, field terraces and a pottery workshop (marked by pottery waste, pottery slag, overfired pots and broken nozzles). The most interesting small-find from this area is the fragment of a glazed horseman-figurine.

Following up the Wadi Kalbu, at a small strip between the mountains and the wadi, we recorded again several mosques, wells and cemeteries, until we reached another valley. There were also some mosques (one of them with a beautiful decorated mihrab (N0063)) and cemeteries. The valley is overlooked by an hill-fort (N0061), located near the famous Nizwa warrior-tomb (al-Shanfari & Weisgerber 1989). The fort consists of a squared rampart with towers. Located inside the rampart are remains of houses as well as a cistern. All this features were built in the Middle Islamic period, while the site was already used in the EIA (Schreiber 1998).

Following up the Wadi Kalbu again, we found several Islamic cemeteries located at the foot of the mountains. Their graves were badly eroded, so that skeletons or bones were visible at the surface. In the profile of channels, cut deep by water and erosion, several layers of graves were visible.

In the next valley, located immediately south of the small village of Siba´a are several small Islamic cemeteries situated on a flat terrace between wadi and mountains. The surface of this

terrace is strewn with EIA settlement pottery – so the graves were built on a EIA settlement area. A few wall remains or foundations are still visible between the Islamic graves.

When we again followed up the Wadi Kalbu for several kilometres we could not find any more archaeological site. Just when we reached nearly the northern end of the Oasis and we thought, there would not be any more sites, we discovered some relatively well preserved Hafit-tombs, stretching up half way the mountain slopes. These mountains enclose another valley on its eastern side. The whole plain of this valley was levelled and turned into fields. Despite most of them were not used any more, probably most archaeological sites were destroyed. Scattered over this plain are several “exotics” and rocky outcrops. A closer examination showed, that several of them were used for settlement and/or fortification purposes. Two of the lower outcrops were fortified with large squared stones, incorporating the natural rock. Building technique as well as the surface pottery suggest a date in the third millennium BC or Umm an-Nar-period.

At the foot of a third, higher outcrop we found the remains of several stone-structures, while the top of the outcrop was free from buildings. Again we collected Umm an-Nar-pottery here, and some Middle Islamic-sherds prove a re-use of the site in this period.

A hundred meters east of this outcrop, an area with a darker surface was visible. A closer look showed, that it was an Islamic cemetery and therefore this area was not levelled like all its surrounding. As some wall foundations were visible and Umm an-Nar-pottery was strewn on the surface, the graves of this cemetery were obviously dug into an Umm an-Nar-settlement. A few meters to the south we found the scanty remains of an Umm an-Nar-tomb.

Some hundred meters to the north of these sites, we discovered another outcrop, some 10 or 15 m high, which offered a spectacular view: The whole rock was fortified by large squared stones. So is its west-flank fortified by a more than 4 m high, very massive wall and also its east-flank is fortified in this way. The building technique resembles that of the other sites and also Umm an-Nar-pottery was found here. According to the pottery the fortification was re-used during the EIA as well as in the Middle Islamic-period.

Further west, near Wadi Samit and close to the Nizwa – Bahla road we recorded further Hafit-tombs and we also found another small Umm an-Nar fortification there. Again a small outcrop was bordered by large squared stones and, integrating the natural rock, forming a circular fortification with a diameter of 13 m. A line of about 20 tombs were recorded in the plain south of this fortification. All of them are very disturbed, so just flat heaps with a diameter between 5 and 8 m survived.

After surveying the eastern and northern side of the oasis, we changed to the west side of Wadi Kalbu, starting at the south near Firq. The western side was not very rich in archaeological sites. We recorded some Middle Islamic settlement remains at Hay al-Ain and some cemeteries of different date and size. We also recorded the main cemetery of Nizwa, that was examined more detailed already by M. Ibrahim (2001). Further north just a few marginal sites were found.

To conclude the results of this first campaign in Nizwa, we still have major gaps in settlement chronology. As at many other sites the early third millennium BC is attested by Hafit-tombs. The following Umm an-Nar-period can be found in the south at Firq, where at least three circular-buildings exist (Orchard & Stanger 1999) as well as 17 km wadi upwards, at the northern part of the oasis, where several small fortifications and Umm an-Nar-graves were found. The second millennium is largely missing, but its last quarter is at least attested by the so called warrior-tomb. During the EIA settlement activity increased: At least two major settlement sites, an extended agricultural area and a hill-fort prove that. Unfortunately no cemetery of this period was recovered until now. LIA- as well as Early Islamic occupation is also still missing, while the Middle Islamic-period is well attested.

Aim of the next campaigns will be a closer examination of the core of the oasis - maybe this will help us, to close these gaps.

### **Work on the finds and the documentation**

The time from November 5<sup>th</sup> to December 15<sup>th</sup> was used to work on the pottery, the small finds and on the documentation of Izki.

More than 4200 potsherds were examined and entered into our database. About 1500 potsherds, as well as all small finds were photographed, the pictures were numbered and also entered into the database. Most small finds and more than 1000 potsherds were drawn, several hundreds were already inked.

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