

# BRONZE AGE NECROPOLIS AT AL AYN

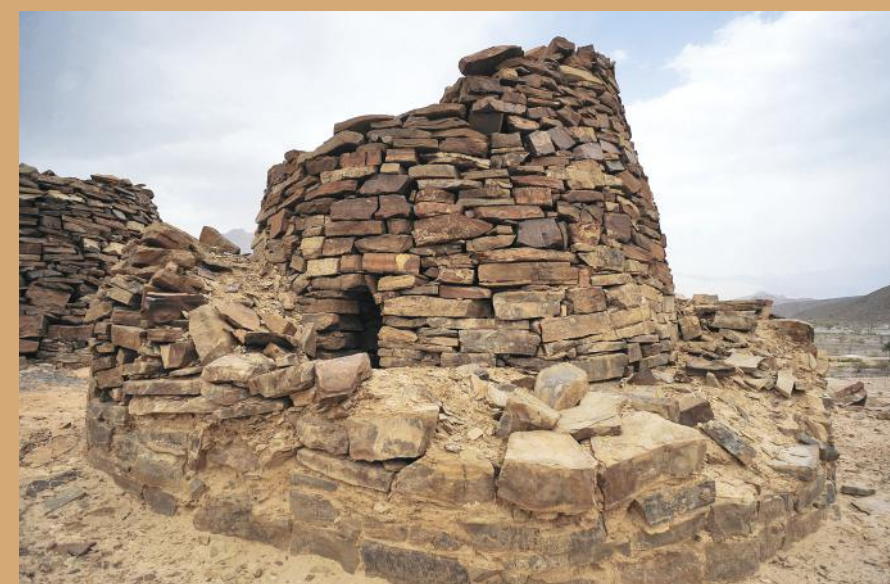
Thoughts & Photography | Jerzy Wierzbicki

Middle East raised the first advanced cultures and other political formations; without any doubt, Middle East is the cradle of human civilisation and probably the place where history of humans began. In southern Mesopotamia (present Iraq), in the Middle East, the Sumerians had invented the first writing system, which quickly developed the human culture in this region. The real prosperity period in the Middle East was the Bronze Age in the third millennium BC; this was a golden time for human culture in the Middle East. During this time in Mesopotamia there were several independent city-states and their major economical activity was trade.

According to authors Marc Van De Mieroop and Daniel Potts, the last archaeological research confirmed that Bronze Age city-states had been connected with many faraway cultural centres in the central Asia, North Africa, Indus valley and Arabian Peninsula. These trade activities spread not only merchandises, but cultural inventions as well. The end of the third millennium brought about the next big civilisation change in the ancient Middle East culture - the Akkadian King Sargon the Great had conquered most of the city-states in Mesopotamia and formed the first big empire in the region. The Akkadian period began and the Akkadian culture was the most influential for

the next few centuries in the biggest part of the Middle East. The language of the new empire came from the same Semitic language groups like modern Arabic and Hebrew. Even now, a few numbers of Akkadian words still exist in Iraq; we can still find people with Akkadian personal and tribal names, especially local Christians.

Even during the war, the cultural contacts between cities in the Middle East and Africa were very strong. Two cities, specialised in trade with ancient cultures were living at that time in the modern GCC countries. Archaeological excavations confirmed that the ancient city Ur and Suza had a lot of contact with two ancient states like Dilmun (modern Bahrain) and Magan (currently the Sultanate of Oman). Magan had produced a lot of copper, which was exported later via Bahrain to Sumer, located in the modern southern part of Iraq.





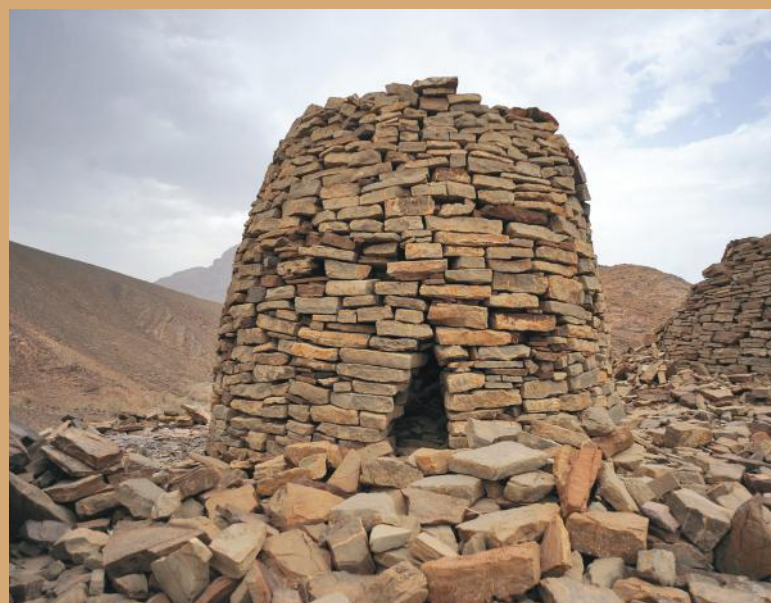
Here, in Oman, we have a lot of archaeological sites where scientists have found several cultural artefacts and architectural remains from all past periods. Importance of Magan country began in the early third millennium in the copper period called Hafit, according to the name of the archaeological site where the remains of this period was first found - the Copper age was between 3000 to 2600 BC. Pottery and other artefacts from this time confirm that contacts with Mesopotamian cultures were very intensive.

After the Hafit period, the early Bronze Age called Umm an Nar period (2500-1800BC) began. Copper production in the Magan land increased during that time; this is one of the first periods of prosperity of this country.

From Early Bronze age we have several well known archaeological sites in Oman like Umm an Nar and Bat or 'the hero of the article', Al Ayn. Archaeologists have found more evidence of the cultural and technological advances of the early Bronze Age people living in Magan - good examples could be the wheel-turned painted pottery from this period; it's more precision made than periods before. This period is well known through the huge necropolis, which is the most impressive remains of the Bronze Age culture in Al Dhahirah region in Oman.

The necropolis contains hundreds of 'beehive' shaped tombs spread on many hills. Most of these tombs are dated to the third Millennium BC. There are a few places where concentration of the tombs is more like in Bat, Al Khutm and Al Ayn. The necropolis was excavated in early 70s and since that time archaeologists have collected a lot of information about the Bronze Age culture of Magan.

One of the towers has been entirely excavated and it has been determined that it was built between 2595 BC and 2465 BC (according to UNESCO). The tombs are characterised by a circular shape like the remains of beehives, with a small entrance. All tombs are built from stone blocks put together with the local dark brown rocks. Some of them, especially near Bat, are located on the top of the hills - mostly alone. In Al Ayn, which is located around 25kms to east from Bat, you can see a group of tombs located in the small hill next to the wadi.



## NECROPOLIS AT AL AYN



Prosperity, as well as social and technological advances of the people in that time led to intensive copper mining and trade contact with far away Mesopotamian cultures. This unique funeral practice demonstrates clearly the complexity of spiritual and cultural bonds, which would have been impossible to achieve without long-term economical prosperity and social stability.

Now, after thousands of years, all tombs in Al Dhahirah region are on the UNESCO heritage list and are the most important evidences of the long human history in Oman. I visited the Bat necropolis for the first time almost two years ago. I went to a town called Bat, several kilometres behind Ibri, in the early morning during the sunrise and found a lot of burial sites; stony and circular shaped tombs ruined and reconstructed - I'd featured this location in Y issue 136.

After a long time I felt like visiting this ancient place once again, but I chose a different archaeological site. I went to Al Ayn where most well known group of tombs are located, a week ago. The weather on this day was a bit different. The air was very hot, but dry! What made the trip pleasant was the clouds that covered the sun, reducing the temperature a bit. The clouds were very dark and the rain was just a matter of time. I reached Al Ayn village early afternoon. The first thing I did was try to drive on the stony wadi just before the footpath, leading forward to the hill with tombs. After several meters, I wrenched off the exhaust pipe in my car and continued my trip on feet.

The Tombs are located just a hundred metres from the asphalted road on the small hill. Equipped with one

camera, with two fixed lenses, I started capturing the tombs; the atmosphere of the place was great! Dark stony tombs and the grey cloudy sky and massive rocks of Jabal Misht on the second plane created good conditions for photography. Suddenly, it started raining and in the viewer of my camera I saw the drops of the water on the lens. I was satisfied. Most of the photographs from this place were taken in the sunny light conditions. I had a chance to experience this location in completely different situation.

I really recommend all fans of historical places to visit Al Dhahirah, especially Bat or Ayn. It's not difficult to find the tombs; near Bat, many of them are scattered on the hills surrounding the village. In Ayn the group of tombs are located on the left hand site, next to the village. Between the road and the tombs is a stony wadi and a few date trees.

All these archaeological objects are on the UNESCO Heritage List so collecting any archaeological artefacts, like stony elements of the tombs, pottery is forbidden - the tombs are protected by a Royal Decree.

### HOW TO GET THERE:

Go on the highway to Nizwa and drive straight forward to Bahla. From Bahla go to Ibri; before Ibri is a junction with road sign leading to Wadi Dam. After around 25kms you will reach the village called Al Ayn. 4x4 is not compulsory; there is good condition asphalted road. Please keep these places clean and undamaged.

**GPS location of The Tombs in Al Ayn N23°12'58" E56°57'45"**