

# Graves, distribution and social memory: towards a new definition of funerary landscape in Oman

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## ABSTRACT

From 2014 Italian team, directed by Sabatino Laurenza, worked in the Sultanate of Oman for rescue archaeological excavations for roads construction. The excavations on the Batinah Expressway alignment in Sohar area touched three graveyards with different typologies of graves and with materials of different periods (from Bronze age to Sasanian and early Islamic). The results pushed us to apply a new approach to the “funerary landscape” study of the region.

In this paper we present the “funerary landscape” as a specific type of archaeological landscape, focusing on a “mapscape” of the funerary sites and a detailed account of graves typologies and funerary finds (*burialscape*) and the relations between burials, disposal of the graves in the environment (*funeraryscape*) and the social memory of the group participating in the remembrance of the burial, through a series of standardized uses (i.e. graves organized in large groups over wide area, the repeated disposal of the dead in the same place, etc.). Those and other aspects let the area to become a place of remembrance of persons in a community’s social memory, reflecting the subscription of several communities to a similar set of guiding principles for creating and maintaining social memory.

## KEYWORDS

Oman, rescue archaeology, funerary landscape, burialscape, spatial analysis, graves disposal, social memory

## 1. Introduction

This paper presents the results of the rescue excavations<sup>1</sup> carried out between May 2014 and June 2015 in the Sultanate of Oman along the Package 5<sup>2</sup> of the Batinah Expressway route, a multilane highway which will run across the Batinah region from Muscat to the UAE border. Our work started as a typical fieldwork technical rescue archaeological excavation but at the end, pushed by the huge archaeological record and information collected, we developed a new theoretical and methodological approach to the final interpretation of funerary landscape in this region.

The basic concept of our approach is that acts and rituals can be more important in iterating memory than simply the production of monuments and objects. Therefore, from an archaeological point of view, studies and analyses on the field must necessarily swing between the physicality of monuments and objects of funerary equipment (material practices) and the representation and traces of so-called ritual practices and technological know-how in the construction of the funerary monuments (immaterial practices) that place the subjects in a new time/space understanding. Thus, the material and immaterial practices act as cultural indicators, as the containers of a past that contribute to the creation of a “cultural memory”. Moreover, communities with a well-defined cultural memory tend to shape the landscape according to certain characteristics designed to create a memory of the places to be preserved in the future. In this way, cultural memory combined with the

memory of places leads to the fabrication of a social memory (fig. 1).

## 2. Geographical background and historical studies of the region

The Batinah region is a coastal gravel plain lying between the Hajar mountains to the south-west and the coast to the north-east. The area close to the sea is densely covered with modern cultivations and settlements, instead the route of the Batinah Expressway runs more inland, where cultivable areas exist only around the wadi beds. The topography is characterized by low hills and gravel plains dissected by wadiān valleys, that generally runs from south-west to north-east. The majority of the excavated graves are located on the ridges or on the slopes of the hills overlooking the wadiān valleys. The first archaeological investigation in the region began in the 70s, when a Danish team carried out a survey locating several prehistoric sites, the most important of which was the second millennium graveyard of Wadi Suq.<sup>3</sup> In the same years De Cardi surveyed the regions of Zahirah, Dakhiliyyah and Sharqiyah, touching just the south-eastern of the Batinah<sup>4</sup> and it began the first surveys focused on the exploitation of the copper ores of the region,<sup>5</sup> with the discovery of some mines used in ancient times.<sup>6</sup> The exploration on the copper mining continued later with the accurate fieldworks of the Deutsches Bergbau-Museum.<sup>7</sup> Anyway, the most important work for the Batinah region remains the survey on the hinterland of Sohar aimed to the understanding of the agricultural system during the Islamic period.<sup>8</sup> During the 90s a survey conducted by Yule and Weisgerber<sup>9</sup> identified some other sites, touching marginally the Batinah region.

<sup>1</sup> The excavation operations were carried out by an Italian Team composed by all professionals freelance archaeologists, anthropologists and surveyors directed on the field by Dr. Sabatino Laurenza, under the scientific direction of the Department of Excavations and Archaeological Studies of Ministry of Heritage and Culture, sponsored and supported by the Ministry of Transport and Communication of the Sultanate of Oman.

<sup>2</sup> The Batinah Express highway is a 265 km length road (41 km is the length of Package 5); the project was divided in 6 packages with different consultants and contractors for each package. The archaeological works involved different teams of different nationalities, under the Supervision of the Director of Dept. of Excavations and Archaeological Studies, Dr. Sultan Al Bakri.

<sup>3</sup> FRIFELT 1975.

<sup>4</sup> DE CARDI ET AL. 1976; DE CARDI ET AL. 1977; DOE 1977.

<sup>5</sup> GOETTLER ET AL. 1976.

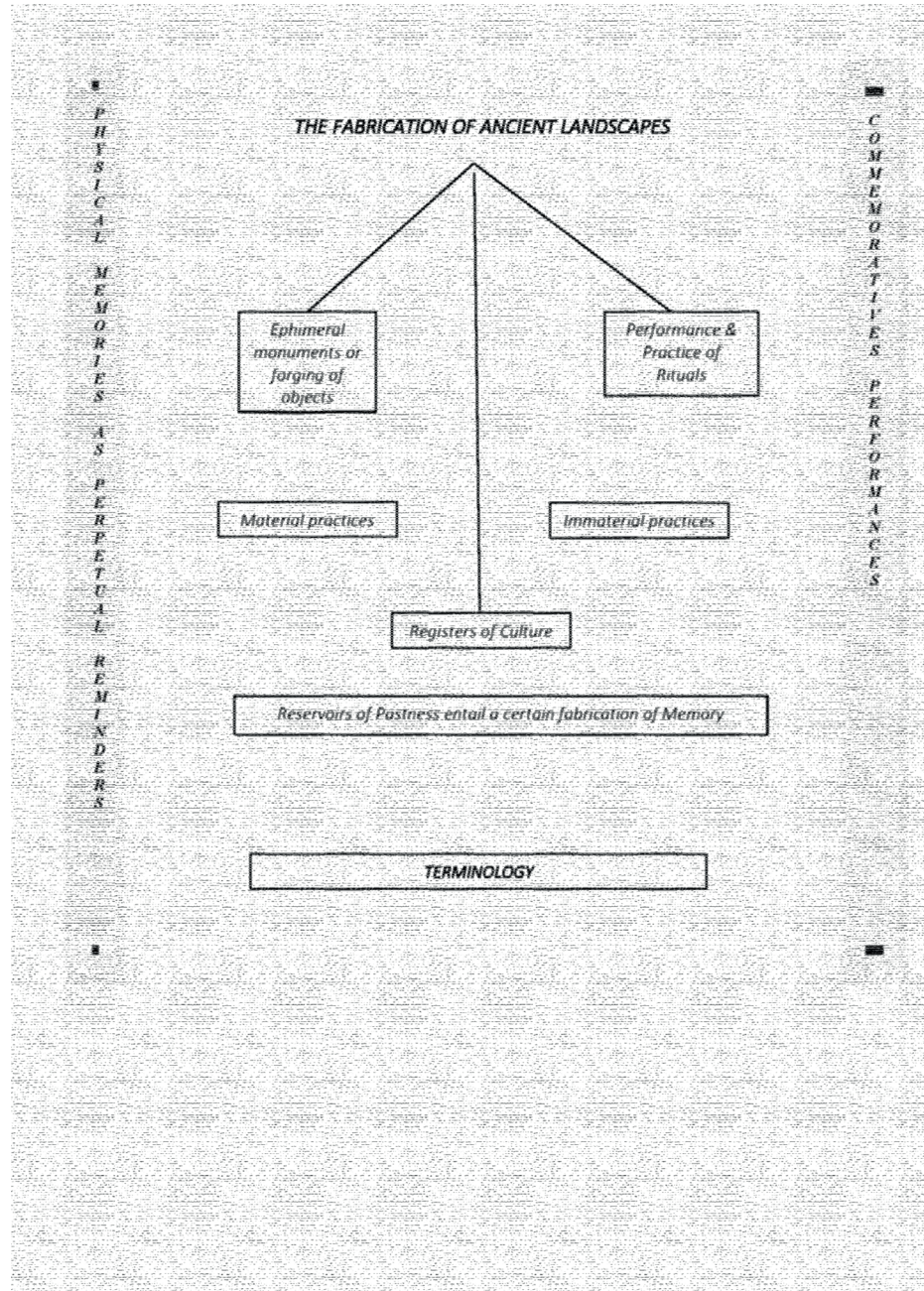
<sup>6</sup> HASTINGS ET AL. 1975.

<sup>7</sup> WEISGERBER 1978; HAUPTMANN 1985.

<sup>8</sup> COSTA, WILKINSON 1987.

<sup>9</sup> YULE, KERVRAN 1993; YULE 2001; YULE, WEISGERBER 1998.

FIGURE 1  
First original sketch  
of the diagram  
of “fabrication of ancient  
landscape” process



In recent years a team of the Sultan Qaboos University investigated the southern end of the Batinah,<sup>10</sup> while a German-Omani team worked in Wadi Bani ‘Awf,<sup>11</sup> and a Dutch team surveyed the

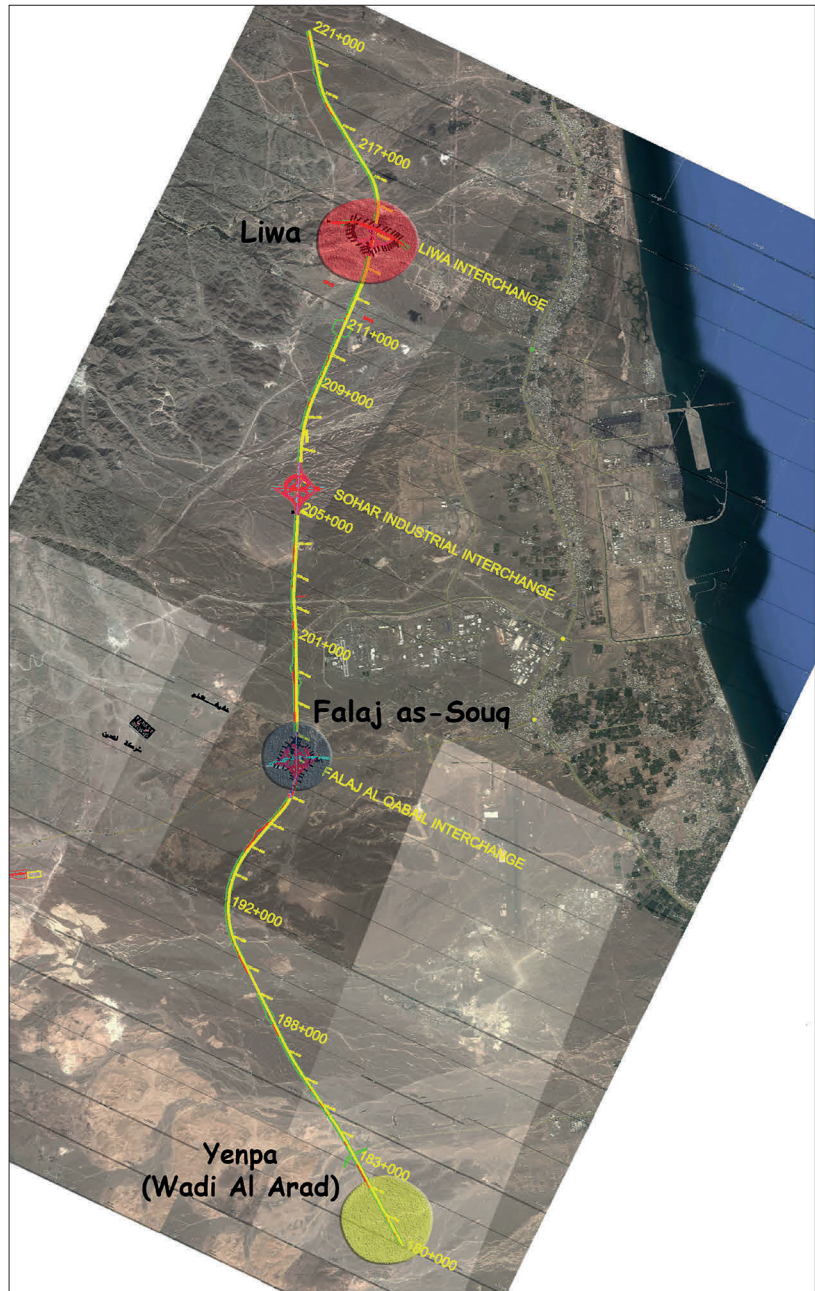
Wadi al Jizzi region.<sup>12</sup> The works for the Batinah Expressway Package 5 where our team worked was long 41 km and it begins roughly 18 km inland from the coast after Wadi Haibi in the *wilayat* of Sohar and ends in the *wilayat* of Liwa. Here we identified and excavated three graveyards, Wadi al Arad, Falaj as Souq and Liwa (fig. 2).

<sup>10</sup> AL JAHWARI, EL MAHI 2007; AL BELUSHI, EL MAHI 2008.

<sup>11</sup> HÄSER 2000, 2003; RIBBECK, GANGLER 2001.

<sup>12</sup> DÜRING, OLIJDAM 2015.

FIGURE 2  
The three graveyards  
along the Batinah Expressway  
Package 5 alignment



### 3. The graveyards

#### 3.1. Wadi al Arad

The graveyard of Wadi al Arad is located southwest of Sohar, on two low hills to the north and south of the homonymous wadi, that is part of the basin of Wadi al Jizi. The archaeological evidence consists

of about 168 graves with only one type of grave, so-called ‘tower-shaped grave’. The structure has an oval or sub-rectangular plan, and a trapezoidal outline with the sides slightly tapered and the roof flat. The grave can be divided in three distinct architectural features: the external wall, made with big large stones tightly stacked, a filling wall composed of small stones and sand, and the burial’s chamber wall made with elongated and flatted face stones. This type of grave

FIGURE 3a  
Type of graves from  
Wadi Al Arad graveyard

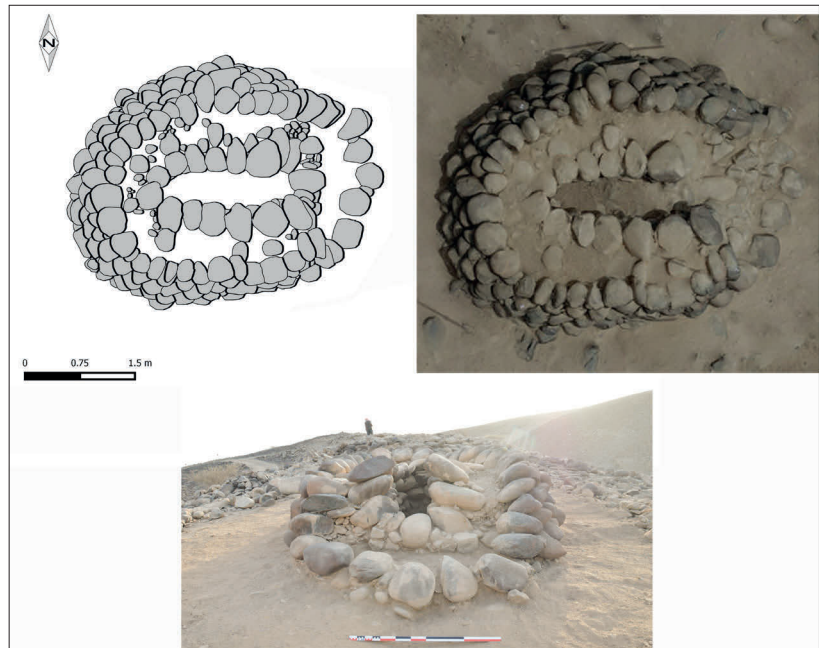


FIGURE 3b  
The lower limbs of the  
buried corpse arranged  
in a “rhomboid shape”



has an average height of 1.5 m, an external diameter of  $4 \times 3$  m, and a burial's chamber of  $2.2 \times 0.7$  m, and it was disposed along the slopes of the hill on both the sides of the wadi, isolated or in cluster of two, three or more graves (fig. 3a). The anthropological remains are very poor due to the arid climate and the action of the looters. We identified 128 individuals, determining the sex of 109 skeletons (39 men and 70 women) and estimating the age of 124 individuals (101 adults, 10 young and 13 children). The data of the burial practice showed us 41 graves with a single body, 27 with two bodies, 14 with three, 2 with four, and 1 with seven. The corpse mostly laid out in supine position with the legs stretched and 14 of them had the

lower limbs arranged in a “rhomboid shape”, with the knees placed below the first row of the stones of the burial's chamber wall, clue to the originality of that position (fig. 3b). Moreover, a constant symmetry observed in the position of the bones suggest us the intentionality of the deposition.

Another peculiar feature of Wadi al Arad graveyard is that at least 50 individual of both sexes lack of the upper part of the body, with the complete removal of the bones from the grave or with the translation of certain bones of the upper part of the body in another side of the chamber. Probably it was due to the action of the looters or to any unknown funerary rituals.

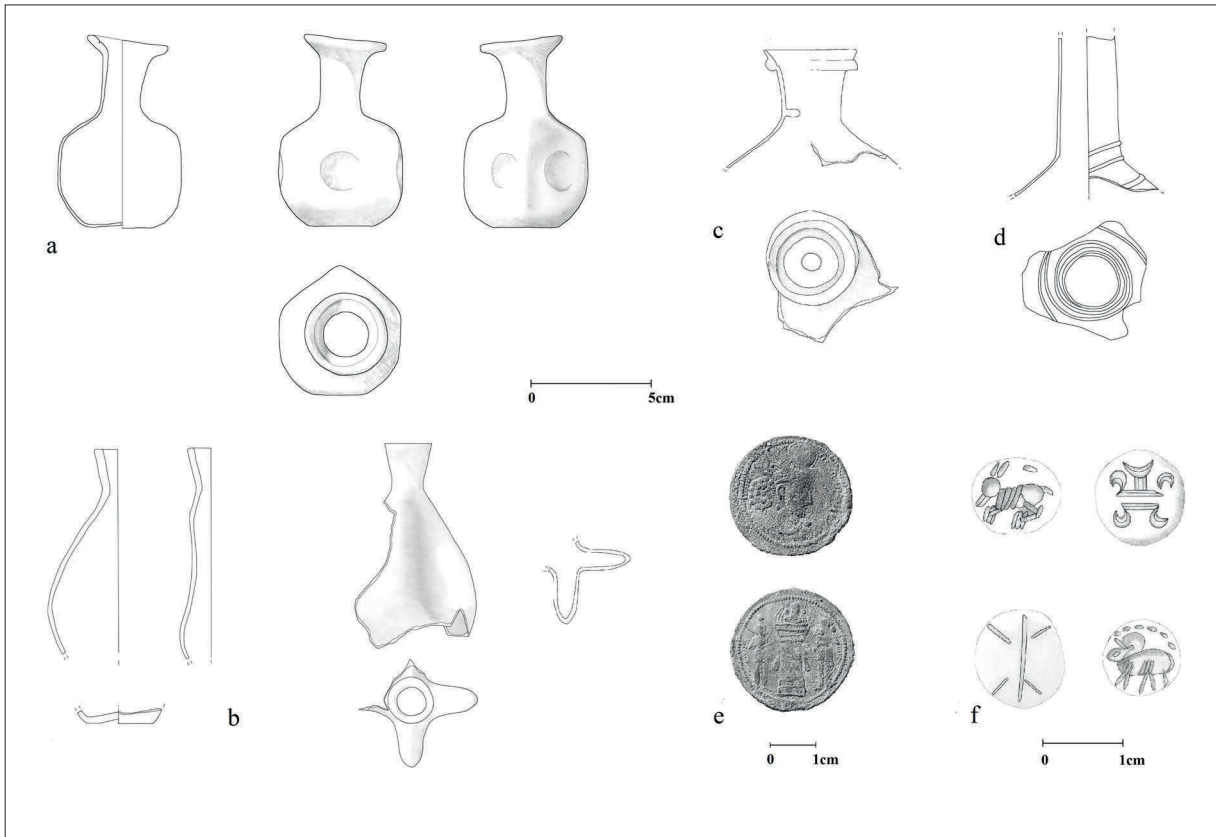


FIGURE 4  
Relevant materials from the three graveyards, testifying the reuse of the graves in later periods

In Wadi al Arad graveyard only 61 excavated graves have yielded at least one object of the funerary assemblage, the most common finds founded are small beads of different materials (mostly carnelian and shells) found in 45 tombs alone or together with other objects. Other common categories of objects are the bronze rings found in 25 graves and several fragmented glass vessels found in 13 graves, which could give us some clue for the dating of the burials. A fragmentary dark fine glass vessel found in the grave with an elongated shape (fig. 4: b) has some comparison in the Syro-Palestinian area during the late third to the fourth centuries<sup>13</sup> or maybe later. Another miniature jar of fine dark glass can be com-

pared with some finds from Qasr-i Abu Nasr<sup>14</sup> or, for a later dating, with the one recovered in the fortress of Ashdod Yam.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, we found four Sasanian stamp seals of different materials from three different graves (fig. 4: f). In one grave there is a seal of hematite with a crouching rabbit engraved, and another seal of garnet stone with a monogram incised. From other two graves it comes a bronze seal with the draw of a humped bull, and a basalt seal with a human figure engraved. All the seals could be dated, for shape and style, to the Sasanian period,<sup>16</sup> more precisely to the late fifth to half sixth centuries.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> HAYES 1975, p. 207, n. 321.

<sup>14</sup> WHITCOMB 1985, fig. 58d.

<sup>15</sup> OUAHNOUA 2014, p. 105, fig. 28.18.

<sup>16</sup> GYSELEN 1993; OSTEN 1931.

<sup>17</sup> KUTTERER ET AL. 2015, pp. 43-54.

### 3.2. Falaj as Souq

The graveyard of Falaj as Souq is located northwest of Sohar, on top of a hillock high 135 m above the sea level, within the Wadi Souq basin, at the fall of Wadi al Jizi catchment basin. Moreover, the graveyard is situated on one of the most important natural routes connecting the UAE with Oman through the Hajar al Gharbi mountain range. Our team has surveyed about 250 archaeological features – mostly funerary cairns – and excavated 59 graves and 9 stone structures that were directly interested by the destruction for the highway project. The graves can be grouped in two distinct typologies due their architectural features: the ‘Dome-shaped’ graves and the ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves (fig. 5). The ‘Dome-shaped’ grave shows a circular plan and it was built directly onto the surface, without foundation, with local stones of different sizes. Viewed by the outside, the structure is a mound of stones irregularly stacked together and the only detectable feature is the wall of the burial’s chamber made with elongated stones put in three/four courses.

This type of grave has an average size of  $5.3 \times 4.8$  m of external diameter and a burial chamber of  $2.7 \times 1.1$  m, with a height, where preserved, reaching 2.5 m. In some of the graves it was possible to detect the entrance to the burial’s chamber, which in 14 graves was oriented to SW, in 10 graves to W and just in 2 graves looking to S, practically in mostly of the graves the entrance was directed toward the Wadi Souq. Those type of graves are always isolated and never aggregated in a cluster, despite of the ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves, as we will see further on.

The ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves have an apse plan with a structure characterized by an external wall, a filling wall, and a chamber wall and it was built directly onto the surface, without a foundation or a platform. Those three features were made with local unworked stones of the same size, and just for the chamber wall elongated and flatted face stones were selected. When preserved, the top is covered with flat stones and gravel, a lintel made with a large flat stone also surmounted the entrance. The ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves are smaller than the ‘Dome-shaped’, with an average of the external diameter of  $4 \times 2.75$  m, a funerary chamber of  $2.3 \times 0.7$  m,

and a max height of 1.5 m. The entrance was recognized in all the graves except for one sample, 14 oriented to S, 6 to E, 3 to SE, and 1 to NE, W and SW. It’s quite astonishing that those two types of graves are built in the same place but have a pretty clear different orientation, probably due to the fact that they are from different chronological periods. Although few of them are isolated, 21 are aggregated in seven clusters made up from two to six graves. However, in four cases we have the occurrence of both the types of graves; two groups have three ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves, oriented N-S, and one ‘Dome-shaped’ grave, oriented E-W; one group has two ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves, oriented NW-SE and one ‘Dome-shaped’ grave, oriented E-W. Finally, there is an isolated group with an ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ grave, oriented N-S with a ‘Dome-shaped’ grave, oriented SW/NE. Archaeological investigation has find out clearly that the ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves were constructed above the ‘Dome-shaped’, suggesting a clear chronological succession between them, indicating also in some cases that stones from ‘Dome-shaped’ graves were recovered to build up the later ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves. The anthropological data for the necropolis of Falaj as Souq are very poor as the human remains were almost entirely compromised due to the acidity of the soil and the action of the looters. Of the 49 subjects identified, we were able to determinate the sex of just six individuals, all female. Also, we have estimated the age of eleven individuals: 6 adults, 2 young, 1 child, 2 infants. The data are poor also for the burial practice with the identifications of a double burial just in four graves, two ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ and two ‘Dome-shaped’. The excavations of this graveyard yielded comparatively few finds: just 33 of the graves had at least one object. The most abundant finds were the small beads found in 16 graves and made of different materials (carnelian, shells, agate and rock crystal). Bronze objects were found in 14 tombs, in two ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves we found 10 small bronze rings, while, in the ‘Dome-shaped’ graves we found 10 pins, 1 earring, 1 hook, 1 ring and 1 nail. Fragmentary glass vessels were found in just 6 graves; a light green fine glass flask with pentagonal globular body, straight neck and everted rim with rounded lip could have some

FIGURE 5a  
Dome-shaped types of graves  
from Falaj as Souq graveyard

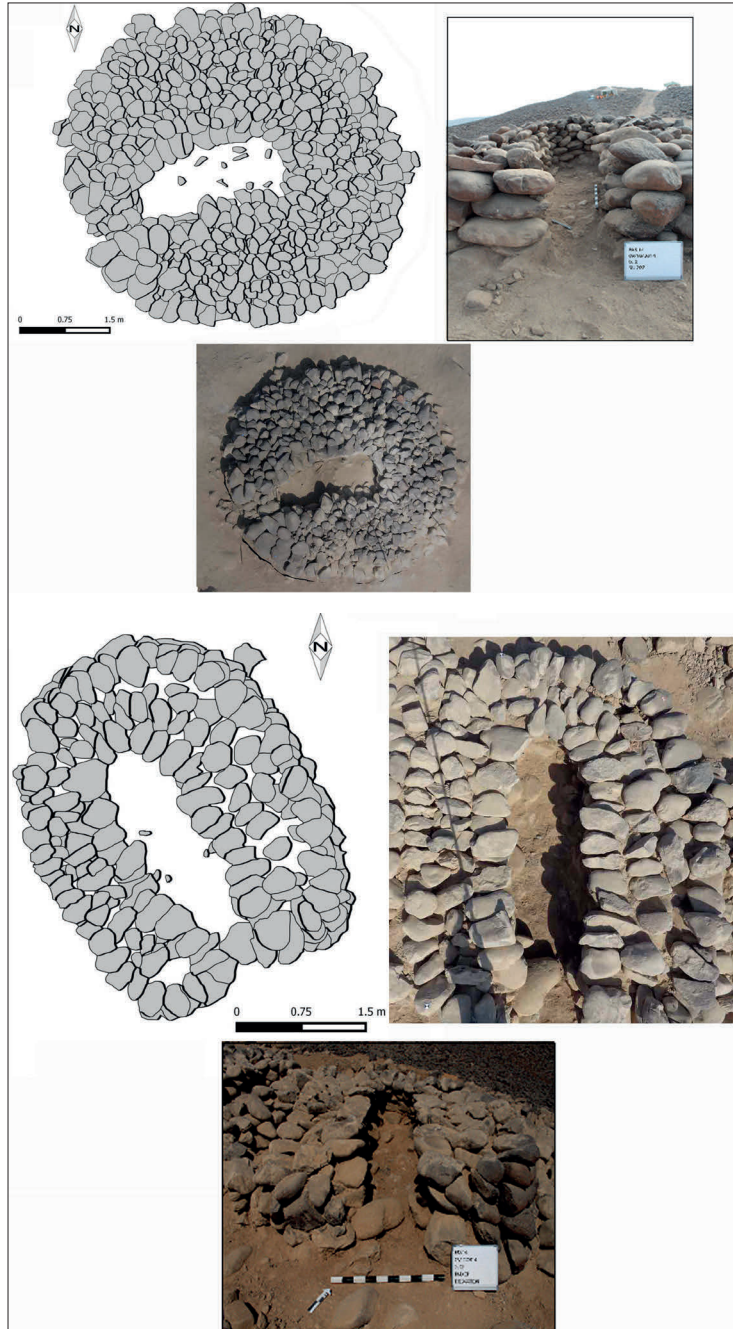


FIGURE 5b  
Horseshoe-shaped types of  
graves from Falaj as Souq  
graveyard

comparisons with the material from the Syro-Palestinian area of the fourth centuries (fig. 4: a).<sup>18</sup> Two flat rims of two blue glass *unguentaria* with long cylinder and flared neck have some comparison from the site of Abu Skhair during the second half of the third century and beginning of the fourth century.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> HAYES 1975, p. 207, n. 320; WHITEHOUSE 1997, p. 179, n. 315.

<sup>19</sup> NEGRO PONZI 1972, pp. 215-237; SIMPSON 2014,

Finally, there is a light blue thin glass with outplayed rim and rounded lips, probably belonging to a small pear-shaped bottle (fig. 4: c). Similar bottles occur in the sites of Veh Ardashir and Nineveh during the Early and the Middle Sasanian period (third-fifth cent. AD).<sup>20</sup>

p. 220, fig. 20.19.3.

<sup>20</sup> SIMPSON 2005, p. 147, fig. 1.11.



### 3.3. Liwa

The graveyard of Liwa is located west of the homonymous town, along the Wadi Bani Umar al Gharbi basin, and it is concentrated on two hills high 100 m above the sea level. The valley between the two hills is occupied by a huge dump. The northern hill is a wide plateau with 25 excavated graves; 19 are on the top and 6 along the southern slope. The southern hill has been modelled in a pyramidal shape by the works for the near dump and here the Italian team has excavated totally 29 graves, 9 of them placed on the top, and the others along the western slopes.

The dominant typology defined 'Tumuli-shaped graves' has an oval or circular plan made up with big irregular stones stacked together like the 'Dome-shaped' graves of Falaj as Souq. Otherwise, this type shows a wide range of adaptation to the surface on which grave was built up. As we can see, the graves built on the slope of the hill follow the inclination of the ground, with a tumulus of elliptical shape with a narrowest funerary chamber. For this reason, the measures of the external perimeter of those graves range from  $6 \times 5$  to  $2.5 \times 1.35$  m and the burial chamber from  $2.2 \times 0.8$  m to  $1.5 \times 0.43$  m. Moreover, this type has a more irregular plan than the 'Dome-shaped' graves of Falaj as Souq, and that's why we have preferred to distinct the two types. In this type of grave we did not find an entrance, but the chamber's orientation is often E-W (21 graves) and the remaining graves were oriented N-S (7), SW-NE (6) and SE-NW (5). The 'Tumuli-shaped graves' are found both isolated and in clusters of two, three or five tombs. In Liwa we have also two examples of another type of grave, the graves 644 and 650, and they seem very similar at the 'Dome-shaped' graves found in Falaj as Souq. Both have a circular plan, but the grave 644 has a diameter of  $7.17 \times 6.95$  m and the chamber of  $4 \times 1.69$  m, instead the 650 has the diameter of  $6.8 \times 6.32$  and the chamber of  $4 \times 1.45$  m, as we can see they are bigger than those of Falaj as Souq. Another shared characteristic is that they were built near the edge of the northern hill, suggesting a high visibility on the surrounding landscape. The grave 644 is flanked on its east, west and south side by three 'Tumuli-shaped graves' that are stratigraphically later. Furthermore,

this grave shows also a kind of monumental entrance flanked by an angular jamb and closed with some big stones irregularly packed (fig. 6).

In Liwa graveyard the anthropological data are very poor, identifying only 83 individuals (65 adults, 1 young and 4 infants), with 12 males and 18 females between the adults. For the burial practice we have 29 graves with a single burial, 13 with two, 4 with three, 2 with four and 1 with six individuals. The 'Dome-shaped' grave 644 presents three adults, one male, one female and one of indeterminate sex, and one infant; instead the grave 650 of the same typology has only one adult female.

From the 54 graves of Liwa, only 28 has at least one funerary object; the most represented funerary good are beads of different materials (found in

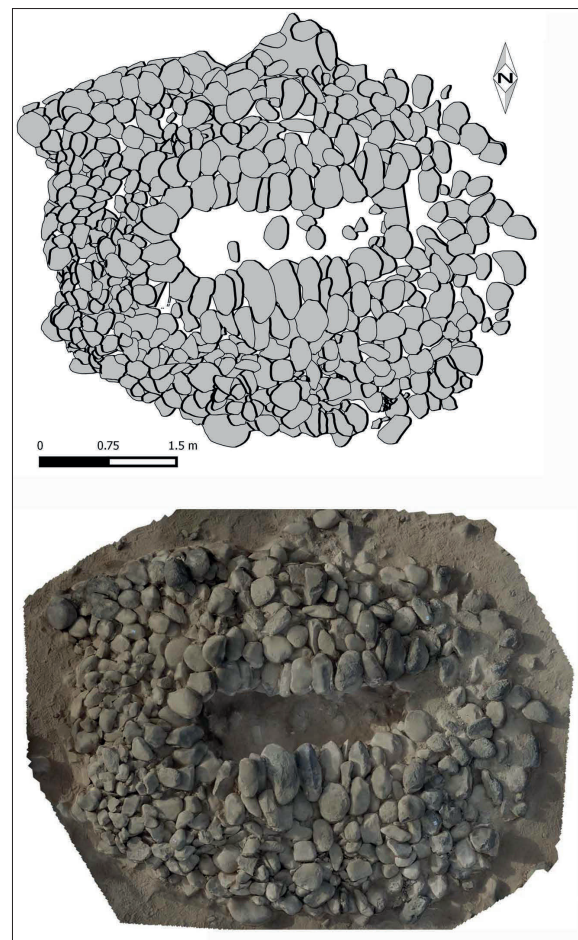


FIGURE 6  
Tumuli-shaped type of graves from Liwa grave yard

20 graves), some bronze rings in 5 graves and some fragmented glass vessels found in 7 graves. The fragmentary rim with a folded-in lip and a conical neck can be dated to the Late Sasanian period with some influence by Syrian productions.<sup>21</sup> Another fragmented bottle of dark glass can be compared with some finds from Nippur.<sup>22</sup> In another grave, we found a flagon jug characterized by a spiral thread of plain glass wound loosely round shoulder and lower part of neck, dated to the Early Sasanian period<sup>23</sup> (fig. 4: d). Finally, in the ‘Dome-shaped’ tomb G644 archaeologists recovered a Sasanian coin of Hormizd II (303 – 309 AD) in which is represented: D/ a bust right, wearing an eagle crown with *korymbos*; R/ fire altar with ribbon and bust left in flames flanked by two attendants both with *korymbos* (fig. 4: e).

### 3.4. Chronological Remarks

With this few elements it is very difficult to suggest a chronological sequence for the three graveyards; however, some suggestions can be made considering the architecture, measurements, orientation, building techniques and some findings. The ‘Dome-shaped’ graves typology is very common in the Batinah<sup>24</sup> and across the Oman, where is dated to the Hafit period; in our cases, those from Falaj as Souq, with a simpler structure than the two from Liwa, are similar to graves find in Kalba,<sup>25</sup> HD-10<sup>26</sup> and Jebel Buhais.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, due to the Sasanian coin from Liwa and the glasses fragmentary vessels found there and in Falaj as Souq, it is strongly possible to suggest a reuse of the graves also thousands of years later. Besides, as seen before, the ‘Dome-shaped’ graves are stratigraphically earlier than the ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ tombs of Falaj as Souq and the ‘Tumuli-shaped graves’ of Liwa. For the ‘Horseshoe-shaped’ graves there are some few examples in Batinah<sup>28</sup> and many across the Oman penin-

sula, as from Wadi al-Qawr,<sup>29</sup> 90 km north to Sohar, Jebel Buhais<sup>30</sup> and Samad,<sup>31</sup> all dated for the materials to the Wadi Suq Period. If this is the case, also this type should be reused for the presence of glass vessels in some graves, as pointed out earlier. The ‘Tumuli’ of Liwa are more difficult to understand due to the high variety of its forms; however, some comparison can be traced in Jebel Buhais,<sup>32</sup> where a grave has the same structure and it is dated to the Wadi Suq period. Another quite similar grave dated to the same period was recently found from the anglo-omani excavations of the Packages 3-4 in Batinah.<sup>33</sup> But there are also several similar graves excavated in Samad dated to the Iron Age II-III (1000 – 250 BC) for the materials found.<sup>34</sup> ‘Tumuli’ type shows clearly a reuse also for the Sasanian glasses found in some graves. The ‘Tower-shaped graves’ of Wadi al Arad share parallels with a number of structures recorded across the Oman peninsula. The closest matches are the graves excavated by Frifelt in Wadi Jizzi, in northern al-Batinah, dated to the Late Iron Age.<sup>35</sup> Another comparison can be made with some graves excavated by De Cardi in Kalba, in the coastal Sharjah, also dated to the Iron Age.<sup>36</sup> German teams have called this type ‘hut-graves’ (*Kastengräber*) and found them in different regions of Oman dating to the Iron Age II-III<sup>37</sup>, or also reused in the Late Iron Age.<sup>38</sup>

Considering those data, the graves of Wadi al Arad can be dated to the Iron Age, but thanks to the comparison of the glass vessels and for the stamp seals, it is possible determinate a reuse also for this graveyard at least until the Sasanian period (Tab. 1 and 2).

fig. 18.

<sup>29</sup> PHILLIPS 1997, p. 209.

<sup>30</sup> UERPMAN ET AL. 2006, pp. 25-27.

<sup>31</sup> YULE, KAZENWADEL 1993, p. 254.

<sup>32</sup> UERPMAN ET AL. 2006, pp. 27-29.

<sup>33</sup> SAUNDERS 2016, pp. 126, fig. 279.

<sup>34</sup> YULE 2001, p. 237, p. 245, p. 252.

<sup>35</sup> FRIFELT 1975, p. 373, fig. 62.

<sup>36</sup> DE CARDI 1975, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> WEISGERBER 1981, pp. 224-225; YULE, WEISGERBER 1988, p. 14; YULE, KAZENWADEL 1993, p. 254; YULE ET AL. 1994, pp. 396-398.

<sup>38</sup> YULE 2001, pp. 396-397; YULE, WEISGERBER 1988, p. 210.

<sup>21</sup> LAMM 1931, p. 361.

<sup>22</sup> MEYER 1996, p. 248, n. 20.

<sup>23</sup> HAYES 1975, p. 213, n. 436.

<sup>24</sup> SAUNDERS 2016, type 1, 9, fig. 8.

<sup>25</sup> EDDISFORD, PHILLIPS 2009, p. 101, fig. 3.

<sup>26</sup> SALVATORI 2001.

<sup>27</sup> JASIM 2012, p. 173, fig. 143, 157, figs. 190-191.

<sup>28</sup> FRIFELT 1975, p. 392; SAUNDERS 2016, type 6, 14,

TABLE 1  
Measurements comparison between the different types of graves

Tomb Typology	External Max.	External Min.	External Average	Chamber Max.	Chamber Min.	Chamber Average
Dome-shaped (Falaj as Souq)	7.4 x 6 m	3.7 x 2.6 m	5.3 x 4.8 m	5 x 1.1 m	1.9 x 0.5 m	2.7 x 1.1 m
Dome-shaped (Liwa)	7.17 x 6.95 m	6.8 x 6.32 m	6.9 x 6.6 m	4 x 1.69 m	4 x 1.45 m	4 x 1.6 m
Horseshoe-shaped (Falaj as Souq)	4.8 x 3.6 m	2.4 x 2 m	4 x 2.75 m	2 x 0.6 m	1 x 0.5 m	2.3 x 0.7 m
Tumuli (Liwa)	6 x 5 m	2.7 x 1.35 m	4.3 x 3.4 m	3.5 x 1.08 m	1.5 x 0.4 m	2.5 x 0.75 m
Tower-shaped (Wadi al Arad)	5.5 x 3.9 m	2 x 1.5 m	4 x 3 m	1.9 x 0.6	1.1 x 0.8 m	2.2 x 0.7 m

TABLE 2  
Hypothesis of chronological timetable of the three graveyards in the Batinah Region

Type of graves	Site	Data	Parallels	Re-use
Dome-shaped	Falaj as Souq, Liwa	Hafit Period	Kalba, Jebel Buhais	Sasanian Period
Horseshoe-shaped	Falaj as Souq	Wadi Suq Period	Wadi al-Qawr, Jebel Buhais, Samad	Sasanian Period
Tumuli	Liwa	Wadi Suq / Iron Age II-III	Jebel Buhais, Samad	Sasanian Period
Tower-shaped	Wadi al-Arad	Iron Age II-III / Late Iron Age	Wadi Jizzi, Kalba	Sasanian Period

#### 4. The “fabrication of the ancient landscape”: from the recognizing of the material and immaterial practices

At the end of the fieldworks we had in our hands almost 300 excavated graves, with a lot of information regarding the physicality of monuments and objects of funerary equipment (*material practices*) and the necessity to individuate the representation and traces of so-called ritual practices and technological know-how (intended as a specialized craftsmanship transmitted by “master” to “apprentice”) in the construction of the funerary monuments (immaterial practices) that place the subjects in a new time/space understanding: trajectories that fuse the past, the present and the future. The first

evidence coming out from excavations to be connected with immaterial practices was the building techniques of the graves, considering and focusing on all a set of details linked to the building techniques of the funerary monuments. From the data of the excavation of grave 21 of Falaj as Souq (made in a more detailed way, dismantling the rows of stones one by one) we arrived to elaborate the building technique of those monuments understanding that behind such a physical and hard work there is the hand of skilled workers able firstly to draw on the ground the base plan of the funerary monument and to choose accurately the stones for size, material and shape. The master was helped by at least 4 skilled workers (number determined by the need to build up the at the same time the walls of the burial

chamber and the outer one, in order to guarantee its stability) during the building of the monument with the help of several workers involved in the carriage and the preparation of the stones.

Another important aspect regarding the immaterial practices was the evidence of the reuse of such monuments. The practice of reuse regards in reality almost all the funerary monuments in Oman but in the specific case of Falaj as Souq we have seen that the reuse regards not only the single monument but the place where funerary monuments were placed. From the excavations at Falaj as Souq we show that that 'Horseshoe-shaped' graves (surely of a later period) were built up on largest 'Dome-shaped' graves (of an earlier period), in some case reusing the same stones of the earlier graves for their building and removing also the burial bones in a closer external round pit grave. The reuse of such monuments was clear to us also observing the disposition of the bodies inside some graves besides the discovery of materials of later periods, as seen before in Wadi al Arad graveyard. At this point, we arrived to define the material and immaterial practices, a set of cultural indicators considered as containers of that past which contributes to the production of cultural memory of a community. But this cultural memory is displaced in a precise and well-defined space, as we saw looking at the disposition of the graves in the three graveyards. In fact, the hugest graves of Falaj as Souq and of Liwa were displaced all on the top of the hills, besides the graves of Wadi al Arad and the smallest of Liwa were placed all along the slopes above the wadi valley, with their entrance directed towards the wadi beds. This allow us to think that communities with a well-defined cultural memory tend to shape the landscape according certain characteristics designed to create a memory of the places to be preserved in the future. In our case clear indicators of it were the spatial distribution of the funerary monuments, well visible from down of the

wadi valleys, a kind of topographical markers along the natural routes of the country, their distribution along the main natural routes, represented by the ancient wadi beds, hypothesis confirmed by an article of 1925 of an English traveler Sir Percy Cox published on *Geographical Journal*<sup>39</sup> and also the fact that all the graveyards were placed at an almost similar distance of 12/13 Km between the coast line and the main ore mines placed under the mountains of Hajar, the mine of Arja for the graveyard of Wadi Al Arad, Lasail for the graveyard of Falaj as Souq and the mine of Fizh for the graveyard of Liwa, as seen from the study of R. G. Coleman and E. H. Bailey for U.S. Geological Survey of 1974.<sup>40</sup>

## 5. Conclusions

Our work allows us to identify that process for what communities with a well-defined cultural memory tend to shape the landscape according to certain characteristics, designed to create a memory of the places to be preserved in the future. So, in such a way the cultural memory combined with the memory of places leads to the construction of a social memory: I bury my dead in certain monuments and with certain rituals that involve certain goods (cultural memory); I do all this in a given landscape, whose characteristics become for my group guiding principles to create and maintain memory and social memory (fig. 7).

So, our role as archaeologists must be simultaneously to be able to explore the moments and tensions between the memory of material and immaterial work. Therefore, we need to stimulate our method of doing research and digging, expanding our ability to read archaeological contexts, being able to perceive and identify the so-called immaterial practices from the material data that the excavation gives us back.

<sup>39</sup> COX 1925.

<sup>40</sup> COLEMAN, BAILEY 1974.

Monuments and objects	Celebration of ritual practices and technological know-how
<p><i>Dome-shape graves</i>  <i>Horse-shoe shape graves</i>  <i>Tower shape graves</i>  <i>Tumulus shape graves</i>  <i>Honey-comb shape graves</i>                      ...                      Stone structures</p> <p>beads                      glasses                      pottery                      metals                      seals                      coins                      weapons                      ...</p>	<p>Building technique</p> <p>Ways of working</p> <p>Preparation of the corpse</p> <p>Deposition of remains</p> <p>Celebration</p> <p>Reuse</p>
Material Practices	Immaterial Practices
Cultural indicators	
Containers of a past that contribute to the creation of a “cultural memory”	
Frequentation of a landscape with specific characteristics: a landscape with certain characteristics leads to the creation of a memory of places	
Cultural memory combined with the memory of places leads to the fabrication of a social memory: I bury my dead in certain monuments, with certain rituals that involve certain goods (cultural memory); I do all this in a given landscape, whose characteristics become for my group guiding principles for creating and maintaining “social memory”.	

FIGURE 7  
 The fabrication of ancient landscape chart

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