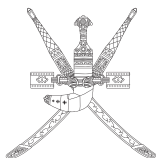


The Archaeological Heritage of Oman

PREHISTORIC FISHERFOLK OF OMAN

The Neolithic Village of Ras Al-Hamra RH-5

LAPO GIANNI MARCUCCI, EMILIE BADEL & FRANCESCO GENCHI



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Ministry of Heritage and Tourism
Sultanate of Oman, Muscat
P.O. Box 200, Postal Code 115
Thaqafah Street
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Cover image: Rendering of the archaeological park at Ras Al-Hamra (image by *F+LR Architecture*).

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This book is dedicated to the memory of the late Prof. Maurizio Tosi

Introduction ¹

The discovery of aceramic shell middens clustered along the western cliff of Ras Al-Hamra in the Capital Area has provided the consistent evidence for the investigation of an early stage in the still poorly documented prehistory of coastal adaptations in the Middle East.

The district of Qurum represents for Muscat one of the most exclusive zones in the capital of the Sultanate, not only from a tourist-residential point of view but even from an environmental one, for the presence of the Qurum Nature Reserve, and, last but not least, from a patrimonial one, thanks to rich archaeological sites explored in the area (Figure A). This cluster of sites which belongs to the Omani cultural heritage represents an exceptional area of fieldwork not only for archaeologists, but also for anthropologists, geologists, climatologists and many other specialists of natural and human sciences. The resumption of the excavations at RH-5, and recently also at RH-6, thus far have brought new and numerous data that provide precise details on the synchronous and diachronic dynamics of the human occupation in this zone, as also on the economic and social dynamics of the Neolithic societies of Southeastern Arabia giving new information to the scientific debate for the study of hunter-gatherers Neolithic populations.

The sites named RH-5 and RH-6, inhabited between the 6th and 4th millennia BC, represent exceptional examples of the coastal adaptation of Neolithic groups in Oman during the Middle Holocene period. Archaeological research has provided plentiful evidence of daily life and mortuary practices of these ancient societies, whose subsistence was mainly oriented toward marine and coastal resources. In both, abundant remains have been found in the settlement structures made up by huts, whose foundations, recognized thanks to the postholes and by the small base trench foundations, allow us to reconstruct the architectural development of the two sites, in space and in time. The excavations have also brought to light numerous auxiliary structures, such as fireplaces for fish processing or areas destined only for shell processing, as well as a large pit oven for the needs of the entire community. Moreover, research has confirmed the importance of the graveyard of RH-5 with the excavation of many graves and the finding of new ones in a zone that was suspected to have none, making the sepulchral area the most extended in Oman².

These and other discoveries confirm that the area of Ras Al-Hamra represents a highly strategic point for the human development in Oman. Surrounded by various ecological niches, since antiquity, it could have hosted numerous tribal groups and allowed them to create a new style of life, the sedentary one that a few millennia after will determine the “Great Transformation” (Cleuziou and Tosi 2007) that will permit the growth of the “Land of Magan”, which the cuneiform texts speak about³.

¹ This book was written and illustrated between 2016 and 2017 updating the data provided in the original field reports submitted by the authors to the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (now Heritage and Tourism) and the derived scholarly papers. Therefore, the most recent publications and discoveries are not taken into account.

² Regarding the anthropological study of the graveyard of RH-5 see the publications by Sandro Salvatori (Excavations 1981-1985) and Olivia Munoz (Excavations 2005, 2008-2010).

³ The term Magan appears for the first time in a cuneiform text of ca. 2300 BC under the reign of Sargon of Akkad (it is reported that boats of Dilmun, Magan and Meluhha were docked at the port of his city), even if it is believed that the eastern region of the Arabian Peninsula was for a long time known in Mesopotamia during the period of this first citation for its supply of copper and diorite.

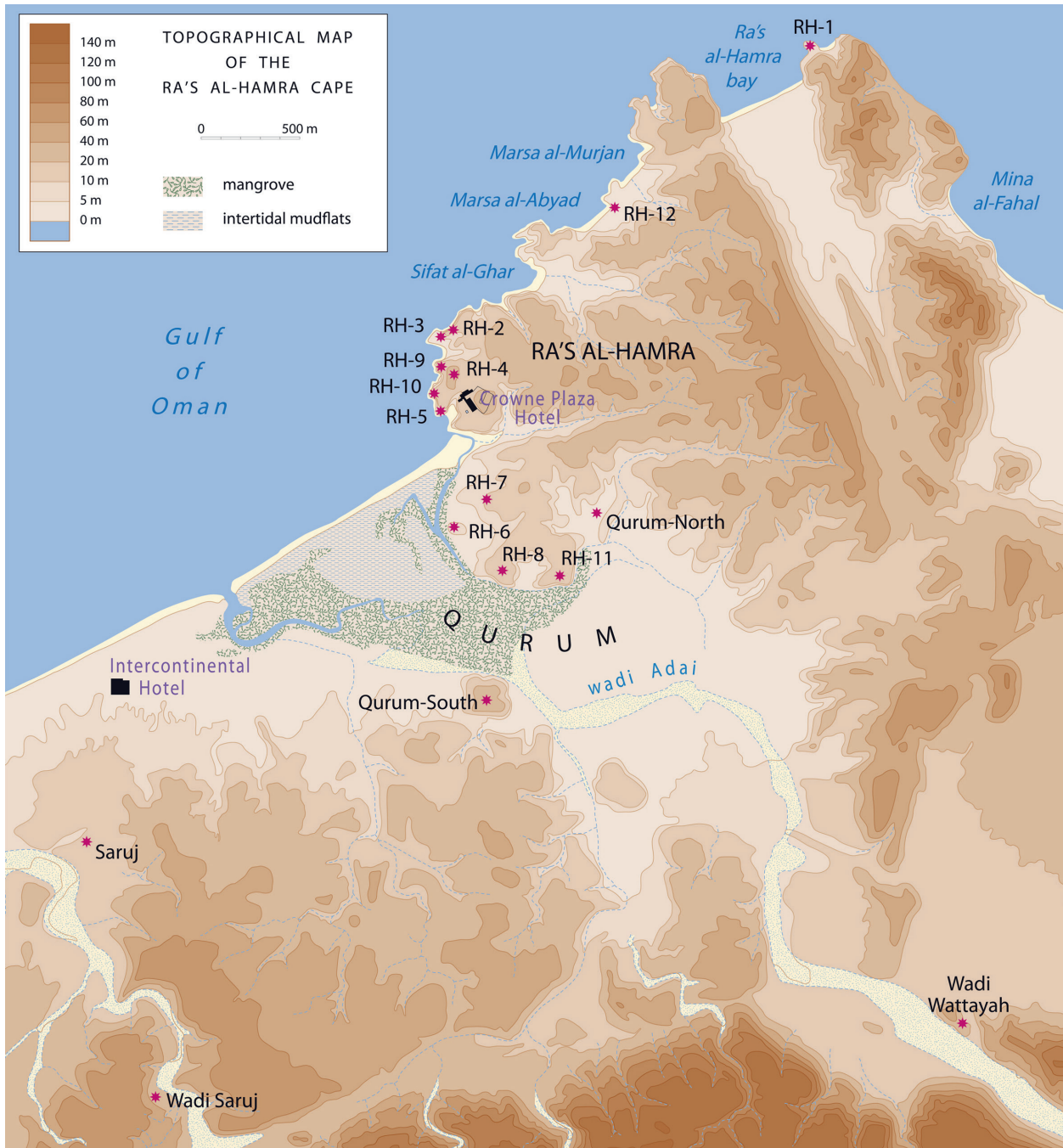


Figure A. Topographic map of the promontory of Ras Al-Hamra, the mouth of Wadi Adai, the Qurum mangrove and the position of the archaeological sites (modified after Cleuziou and Tosi 2007: fig. 45).

Then followed two military expeditions (2220 and 2200 BC) from Mesopotamia by Man-ištušu and Narām Sin, respectively son and nephew of Sargon of Agade. The first brought to the conquest of thirty-two strongholds (maybe to identify with the towers of the oasis of Magan; others believe that they can refer to strongholds in Iran), while the second defeated a fleet and captured a “lord” of Magan (probably a temporary commander elected to head a tribe coalition). In another case, an administrative text informs us (2040 BC) of a certain Nabud-’El, qualified as “Prince” of Magan (Glassner 1989: 181/185-187, and 1996: 156; Potts 1990: 138-139).