

PAUL YULE

Recently Discovered Bronze Bowls from 'Amlah,
al-Ḍāhirah Province and the Late Pre-Islamic
Assemblages of Oman¹

INTRODUCTION

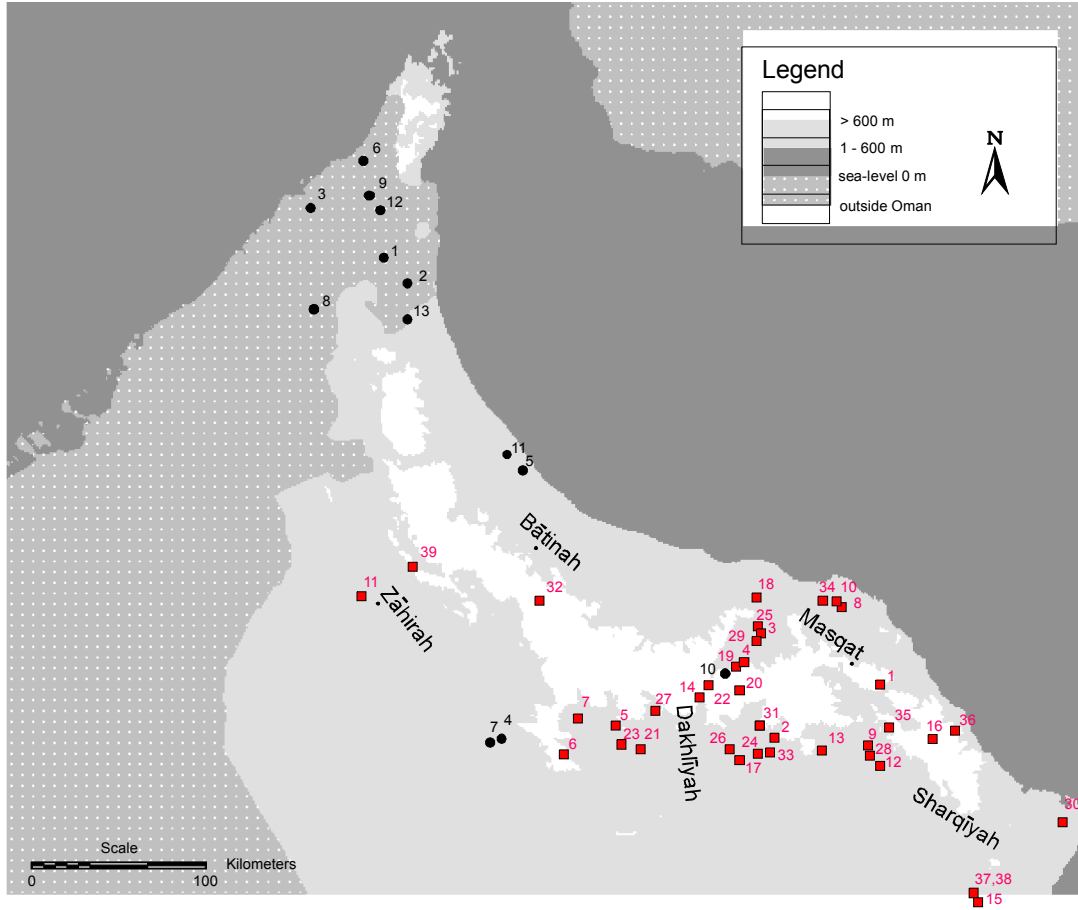
Recent plundering of Pre-Islamic graves in a plain called al-Fuwāydaḥ (Fig. 1) in Oman's „Back Province“ and generally in the Sultanate impelled the German Archaeological Mission in 1997 to recover and document as much data as was possible in the face of attrition of these cultural resources. Among the materials recovered were four engraved bowls made of copper alloy. On cleaning, two of these proved to bear elaborate figural engraving of a kind unusual in late Pre-Islamic Middle Oman. Some time after the first bowl was restored and could be studied, the remaining three followed². The latter are the point of departure of this note. Aside from the aesthetic importance of the bowls themselves, by means of their decoration they shed light on the cultural makeup of late Pre-Islamic Oman. The two best-known cultural entities of this age in Oman are the Samad Assemblage and the Northern Late Pre-Islamic Culture³ (see below).

The main goal of our field project from 1996 to 1998 was an improved chronological structuring of the Early and Late Iron Age sites and finds in South-eastern Arabia. Fur-

1 My thanks go to Joachim Kunkel of the German Mining Museum in Bochum who organized the restoration of the metal bowls. Gerd Weisgerber photographed them and criticized an early version of this paper. Irene Steuer-Siegmund drew the motifs of DA 13335 after the original, a replica, and photos. Arthur Buchholz fashioned the perspective drawing of the bowl. The University of Heidelberg Expedition was made possible by funds from the Fritz Thyssen Foundation and M.K. Domke to the author. Last, but certainly not least, many thanks go to our colleagues in the Ministry of National Heritage and Culture in the Sultanate. I thank P.O. Harper, New York, for discussing this topic with me and providing me with references. She first designated the bowls as "Post Phoenician". This study appeared in the *Baghdader Mitteilungen* 32, 2001, 255-287. N.B. In 2006, the author raised the final terminus of the Samad assemblage at the latest to c. 500 CE. Font: gentium.

2 For the discovery of the late Pre-Islamic 'Amlah/al-Fuwāydaḥ cemetery and a description of one of the decorated bowls see P. Yule 1999b, 119-186; idem 2001a, 144.

3 P. Yule 2001a, 144. The author distinguishes geographically between North-west, Middle and South Oman (Dhofar).



Elevation data: National Geophysical Data Center, Boulder, Colorado, Version Globe 05.
Digital Cartography, Paul Yule, Bochum 1998 & 2004.

Fig. 1. Sites of the Samad Assemblage and the NLPC.

Late Pre-Islamic sites in south-eastern Arabia	12 Khaḍrā' Banī Daffā'	26 al-Rustaḡ	Late North Pre-Islamic Culture ●:
Samad Assemblage ■:	13 Samā'il/al-Khobbar	27 Samad al-Shān	1 'Āṣimah
1 Abāyah	14 Maḥalīyah	28 al-Sarūj	2 Bithnah
2 al-Akhḍar	15 Manaḥ	29 al-Shāriq	3 ed-Dūr
3 al-'Amqāt	16 al-Maskūteh	30 al-Wāfi/W. Muhārak	4 al-Fuwāyдах
4 Samā'il/al-'Ayn	17 al-Maysar		5 Ghail al-Shabul
5 Baḥla BB-04	18 Multaqā		6 Julfār
6 Baḥla BB-15	19 al-Mustagh		7 al-Mais
7 Bandar Jiṣṣa	20 Muṭī		8 Mleiḥa
8 al-Baṭīn	21 al-Nib ā'		9 Nud Ziba (al-Khatt)
9 al-Bustan	22 Quthāya		10 Samā'il/al-Bārūnī
10 al-Dhurra	23 Ra's al-Ḥadd, HD-21		11 Ṣuḥār
11 Ja'lān	24 al-Rawḍah/Muqatta		12 Wa'b
	25 al-Wāfi/Rubāyrat		13 W. al-Qawr

شكل ١: مواقع حضارة سمد وحضارة أواخر ما قبل الإسلام الشمالية. مواقع أواخر عصر ما قبل الإسلام في جنوب شرقي الجزيرة العربية.

● حضارة سمد ■ حضارة أواخر عهد ما قبل الإسلام الشمالية

thermore, we attempted to locate cultures contemporary with the Samad Assemblage (post 300 B.C. - 1000 A.D.), best known at Samad al-Shān, but outside its core area. Defined by means of its pottery, stone vases, iron weapons, as well as grave architecture, this assemblage is known at 30 localities from some 48 sites, large and small, most heavily concentrated near, but rarely in the well-watered Samā' il Pass, and also from others scattered in today's Dakhliyah and Sharqiyyah provinces (Fig. 1). Understandably, more intensive and extensive research in al-Jawf than in neighbouring areas yielded more sites. The greater part of al-Jawf lies in today's Dakhliyah Province, and less to the east in the Sharqiyyah. Attributions of sites to the Samad Period vary in their reliability. Secure identifications include excavated sites, as opposed to weak ones with strayfinds (Table 1). Many sites contain the finds of more than one period which in certain cases may obscure the dating. The importance of the Samad Assemblage lies in the fact that it explains a broad passage of history in South-east Arabia that until recently only could be superficially designated „Classic“, „Hellenistic“, „Parthian“, and/or „Sasanian“, appellatives familiar and valid in neighbouring historic areas such as Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. As shall be seen, the research has proceeded past such historical/political descriptions to more exact archaeological ones. Middle Oman has a chronology and cultural identity of its own without a trace of Hellenistic material culture or a Greek ethnic presence.

THE SITES OF THE SAMAD PERIOD/ASSEMBLAGE

The number of sites attributable to the Samad Assemblage has increased steadily since its recognition in 1980, and includes the excavated settlements or dwellings M34, M43 02, and S30H. The type-sites, however, for the Samad Assemblage are the cemeteries at Samad al-Shān, S10, S20, S21, S23, S26, S30, as well as those at al-Maysar which yielded abundant finds and contexts. Other cemeteries which were investigated in the late 1980s revealed materials identical with those from Samad, for example, al-Amqāt, al-Baṭīn, al-Bustan, and al-Rawdah/Muqatta. Cemeteries at Bandar Jiṣṣa and Muṭī yielded pottery sherds on the surface and in the graves which also enabled a firm dating. Despite some borderline cases, the identity of most Samad Period sites listed in Table 1 is clear.

4 B. Vogt 1984, 271-284. For the dating cf. P. Yule 2001b, 144-163.

5 First reports: B. Vogt 1981, 219-22; G. Weisgerber 1982, 81-93; B. Vogt 1984, 271-284.

6 M34: A. Tillmann in: Weisgerber, G. et al. 1981, 233-234; P. Yule 1999a, 126-133. M43: A. Tillmann, in: Weisgerber, G. et al. 1981 234-238; P. Yule/G. Weisgerber 1999, 98-105. S30H: unpublished papers of the German Archaeological Mission to Oman.

7 Samad: P. Yule/G. Weisgerber 1988, 8-9; al-Maysar: G. Weisgerber in: G. Weisgerber et al. 1981, 176-180.

8 Summarized in a table in P. Yule 1994, 565; P. Yule 2001b, 45 Tab. 4.10.

9 P. Yule/G. Weisgerber 1988, 34.

Site	lat long	province	literature	criterion
'Abāyah 2	58° 46' 23° 09'	Sharqīyah	Doe 1977 site 02. 39-40 fig 1 de Cardi et al 1977a 17	grave arch.
Akhḍar, al-	58° 10' 22° 50'	Sharqīyah	Doe 1976 site 15. 156 Oman 20.07.1974	pottery
'Amqāt, al-	58° 08' 23° 27'	Dakhlīyah	Yule 1999a 132 Yule 2001b, 364	grave arch. finds
Andam, W, Maḥalīyah	58° 03' 23° 22'	Dakhlīyah	Yule 1999a 132 Yule daybook 22.02.95	grave arch.
Baḥlā' BB-04	57° 18' 22° 58'	Dakhlīyah	Humphries 1974 52 fig 6-7 Lombard 1985 141 fiche 47	pottery
Baḥlā' BB-15	57° 25' 22° 44'	Dakhlīyah	Humphries 1974 59 fig 2, 69-73 Yule 1999a 125	pottery
Bandar Jiṣṣa 1	58° 37' 23° 32'	Masqaṭ	Salm-Jensen 1986 70 site 07 Costa 1989 site 46. 117	grave arch. pottery
Baṭīn, al-	58° 40' 22° 46'	Sharqīyah	Yule/Weisgerber 1988 34 Yule 1999a 125 no 3	grave arch. pottery
Bidbid, Quthāya	58° 07' 23° 24'	Dakhlīyah	Yule 2000 144 Yule 2001b, 370 Pl. 581b	grave arch.
Bunzar, W. Bustan, al-	58°- 22°- 58° 37' 23° 34'	Sharqīyah Masqaṭ	Yule 2001b, 406 Yule-Weisgerber 1988 34 Yule 1999a 127 no 7	pottery grave arch. finds
Dhurra, al-, W. Aghda	58° 43' 22° 42'	Sharqīyah	Doe 1977 site 46.48 fig 11pl 1 de Cardi 1977 64-5 fig 3	pottery
Ja'īlān	59° 20' 22° 10'	Sharqīyah	Edens 1988 64-8 Yule 2000 146	metal bowl (?)
Khadra Bani Daffā'	58° 01' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Yule/Weisgerber 1988 34 Yule 2001b, 383-384	pottery
Manah (al-Sūq)	57° 36' 22° 47'	Dakhlīyah	Salimi 1961 165 Velde 1993 429	hist. mention
Maskūtah, al- Maysar, al- M08	57° 25' 22° 57' 58° 07' 22° 48'	Dakhlīyah Sharqīyah	Yule 2001b, 388 Weisgerber 1980, 97 Tillmann-Kroll 1981	pottery grave arch. finds
Maysar, al- M25	58° 07' 22° 46'	Sharqīyah	Hastings et al 1975 13 fig 3 Weisgerber 1980 94-5	grave arch. pottery
Maysar, al- M34	58° 07' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Tillmann 1981 233-8 Weisgerber 1982 81-91	pottery
Maysar, al- M42	58° 07' 22° 49'	Sharqīyah	Tillmann-Kroll 1981 223 Weisgerber et al 1981 178	pottery grave arch.
Maysar, al- M43 04	58° 07' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Tillmann 1981 234-8	pottery stone vessels
Maysar, al- M45	58° 07' 22° 49'	Sharqīyah	Weisgerber et al 1981 238-9 Yule-Weisgerber 1988 8	grave arch.
Maysar, al- M46	58° 07' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Weisgerber et al 1981 245-7 Lombard 1985 144 fiche 56	assoc. with M42 & M43
Multāqa near Sarur	58° 06' 23° 23'	Masqaṭ	Yule 1999a 128 Yule daybook 24.02.95	grave arch.
Mustagh, al- Muṭī	58° 00' 22° 48' 57° 46' 22° 59'	Sharqīyah Dakhlīyah	Yule 2001b, 383 Yule-Weisgerber 1988 34 Yule 1999a 144	cemetery grave arch.

Table 1. Sites with a Samad Period occupation. The column to the far-right gives the grounds for the identification.

Site	lat long	province	literature	criterion
Muṭī, Tawi al-'Alāyah	57° 46' 23° 00'	Dakhlīyah	Yule 2001b, 393	pottery
Niba, al-, Wadi Ḥadad	58° 41' 22° 45'	Sharqīyah	Yule daybook 16.10.96	grave arch. pottery
Ra's al-Ḥadd HD-21	59° 49' 22° 27'	Sharqīyah	Reade letter 17.09.98 Benoist/Reade 1998	pottery
Rawdah, Muqatta	58° 13' 22° 53'	Dakhlīyah	Yule 1999a 125 no 16 Yule 2001b 396–397	grave arch. finds
Rustaq, al-'Alāyah	57° 26' 23° 23'	Bāṭinah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 34 Yule 1999a 125 no 17	pottery
Rustaq, al-Marba	57° 26' 23° 24'	Bāṭinah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 34 Yule 1999a 125 no 17	pottery
Samad S01	58° 09' 22° 49'	Sharqīyah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 8 Yule 1994 39	pottery
Samad S07	58° 09' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 8 Yule 1994 39	pottery
Samad S10=old M-9	58° 09' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Weisgerber 1980a 97-8 Doe 1977 46 site 28a?	grave arch. finds
Samad S19	58° 09' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 8 Yule 2001b 400	grave arch.
Samad S20	58° 09' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 8 Yule 1994 39	grave arch. finds
Samad S21	58° 09' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 8 Yule 1994 39	grave arch. finds
Samad S23	58° 09' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 9 Yule-Weisgerber 1988 9	grave arch. finds
Samad S26	58° 09' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Yule 1994 39 Yule-Weisgerber 1988 9	grave arch. finds
Samad S28	58° 09' 22° 48'	Sharqīyah	Yule 1994 39 Yule-Weisgerber 1988 9	grave arch. finds
Samad S30 (Mendessah)	58° 09' 22° 49'	Sharqīyah	Yule 1994 39 Yule daybook 03.03.99	grave arch. finds
Samā'il, al-'Ayn	57° 50' 23° 08'	Dakhlīyah	Yule 2000 144 Yule 1999a 125 no 21	grave arch. finds
Samā'il, Khobbar, al-	58° 02' 23° 18'	Dakhlīyah	Yule 2001b, 402 Doe 1977 site 01. 33	finds pottery
Sarūj, al-	58° 27' 23° 36'	Masqaṭ	Costa 1989site 26. 108 114 Yule/-Weisgerber 1996 140 Sha2	pottery
Shāriq, al- Sha2	58° 54' 22° 53'	Sharqīyah	Yule 1999a 132 Yule 1999a 132	pottery
Wāfi, al-, Rubāyrat	59° 15' 22° 08'	Sharqīyah	Yule daybook 04.04.96 Yule daybook 04.04.96	pottery
Wāfi, al-, W Mohārak	59° 14' 22° 10'	Sharqīyah	Yule 1999a 132	pottery

total: 47, 01.06.2000

Table 1. continued

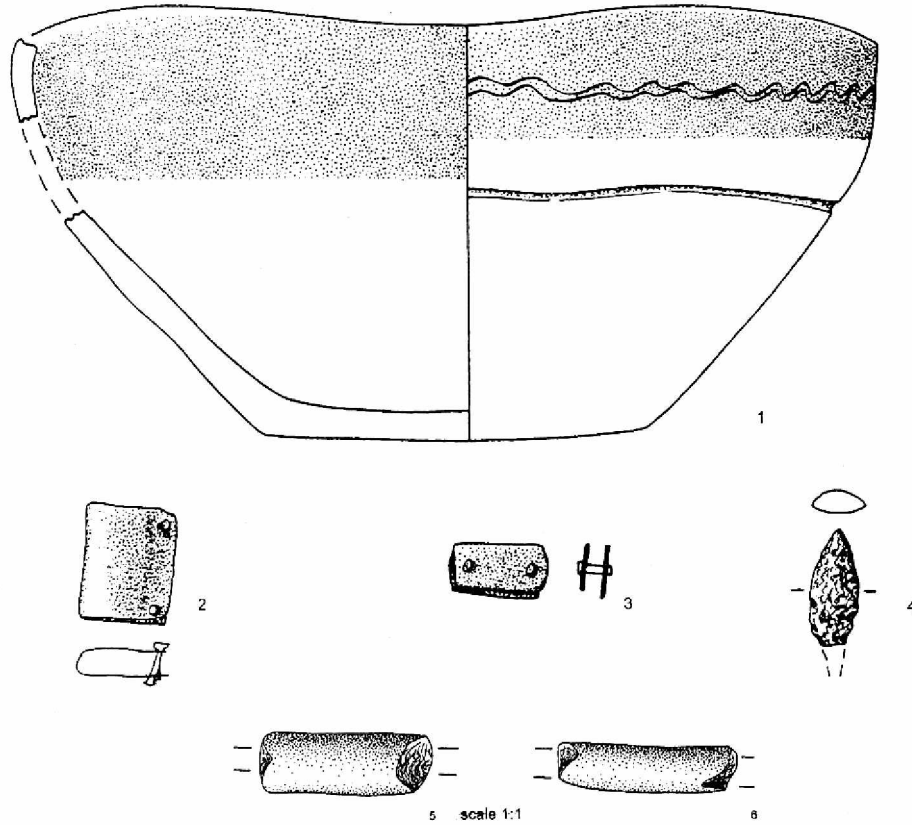


Fig. 2. Al Wafī/Muhārak: Pottery bowl, clamps and an arrow-head associated with the Samad Culture. 1–4 scale 1:2, 5–6 scale 1:1.

شكل ٢: الوافي / وادي مُهَارَك: زبدية فخارية، وملازم ورأس سهم، يمكن ربطها بحضارة سمَد (١-٤ بمقياس ١:٢ و ٥-٦ بمقياس ١:١).

But some of the identifications require a word of clarification. For example, the dating of the falaj (al-Maysar M46)¹⁰ to the late Lizq/Rumaylah and to the Samad Periods, derives from that of the settlements, M42 and M43, which it served. Moreover, at al-Maysar M34, Samad Period sherds appear to date early in the sequence and they are mixed together with a number of Early Iron Age (EIA) sherds.¹¹ Samad Period cemeteries at Maḥalīyah and al-Mustagh have not been excavated, but resemble in their appearance S10 and other Samad Period cemeteries. Typical are the slightly elevated gravel heaps 2 to 4 m in diameter. Debris from the graves, for example roof stones of the chambers, lie on the surface. The pottery dating is decisive at

¹⁰ G. Weisgerber, in: G. Weisgerber et al. 1981, 245-247; P. Yule/G. Weisgerber 1999, 100-101.

¹¹ P. Yule 1999a, 126-133.

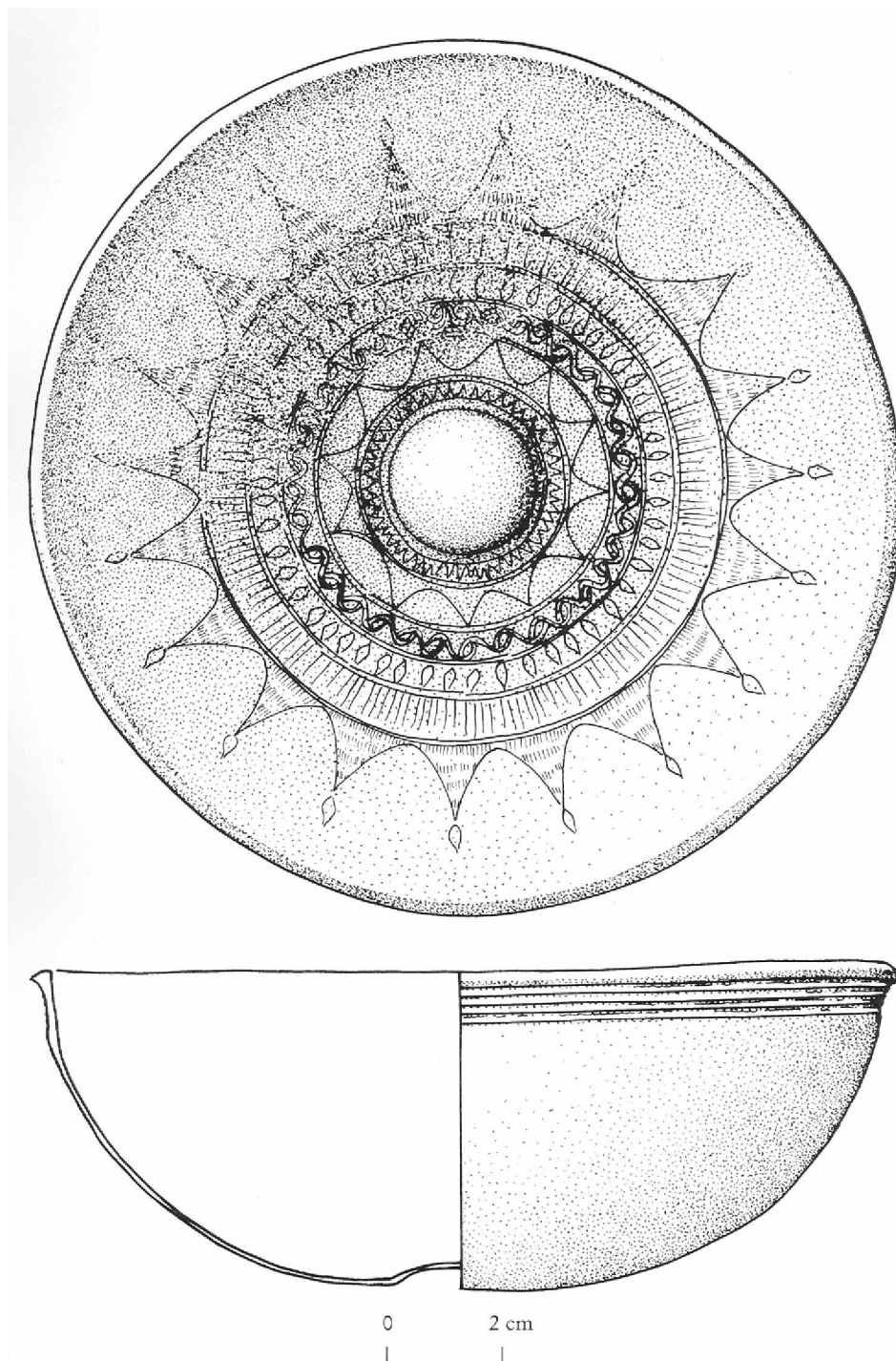


Fig. 3. Metal bowl from Ja'lān, DA 11406.

شكل ٣: زبدية معدنية من جعلان، DA 11406.

al-Amqāt¹², Bahlā' BB-04¹³, BB-15¹⁴, al-Dhurra¹⁵, al-Nibā¹⁶, Ra's al-Ḥadd HD-21¹⁷, al-Rustāq¹⁸, al-Sarūj¹⁹, al-Wāfi/Rubāyrat²⁰, and al Wāfi/W. Muhārak (Fig. 2)²¹. In certain cases the similarity lies less in terms of exact vessel comparisons and more in the hand-made characteristic fabric²². This also holds for certain vessels found in the „honeycomb cemetery“ at Bawshar (graves B06 and B65)²³. These wheel-turned bowls are fashioned in the „balsamarium ware“ of the Samad Period, but their shapes still belong in the Early Iron Age (EIA). At Bidbid/Quthāyah the grave architecture resembles closely that at Bawshar/Jāl, the dating of which is somewhat uncertain²⁴. At a given site, such as al-Dhurra or Bahlā' BB-15, relatively few sherds may belong to the Samad Assemblage. The iron weapons from Samā'il/al-'Ayn are such that the reused graves here can be so attributed²⁵. Finally, a metal bowl which C. Edens recovered during survey in Ja'lān (Fig. 3), to judge from the shape, may date to the Late rather than Early Iron Age (see below). To get an idea of the Samad material culture, it is better to concentrate on substantial deposits, such as at al-Bustan or al-'Amqāt, and not get side-tracked into discussions of small numbers of doubtful sherds in what otherwise appear to be a few EIA contexts. One reason for equivocation in certain cases with regard to the dating is that although the Samad Assemblage has a distinctive craft industry, lacking is a tradition in the visual arts which would help in making such identifications. In any case, most of the sites lie in a compact geographic area, which strengthens the notion of their cultural cohesion.

OTHER LATE PRE-ISLAMIC ASSEMBLAGES IN OMAN

The identification of certain sites (for example, at Sawir al-Tuyur and Gabal Ḥamr on Maṣīrah, al-Qaryātain, Ṣaḥam, and Samā'il/al-Bārūnī) first conjectured in the 1980s to

12 P. Yule 2001b, 364-367.

13 J.H. Humphries 1974, 64 fig. 6b, 66 fig. 7j.

14 J.H. Humphries 1974, 69 fig. 8i.

15 B. de Cardi 1977, 64 figs. 3.78 93 99 104 105.

16 B. de Cardi 1977, 66 figs. 4.118 120.

17 Letter, J.E. Reade 17.09.1998; A. Benoist/J. Reade 1998.

18 P. Yule/G. Weisgerber 1988, 34 (DA 8329). DA=Department of Antiquities

19 G.G. Costa/P. Yule 1999, 83-84 Pl. 37.

20 P. Yule daybook 04.04.1996.

21 I thank here Khalifa b. Khamis al Rassib who led me to this site.

22 Brief characterisation of the Samad Period pottery, P. Yule/M. Kervran 1993, 75-79; P. Yule 2001b, 62-63.

23 P. Yule in: P. Costa et al. 1999, 71.

24 P. Yule 1994, 549.

25 Unpublished results of the Department of Antiquities, al-Khuwair.

belong to the Samad Assemblage was based in part on negative evidence²⁶: Pottery and stone vessels not attributable to the Bronze and Early Iron Age assemblages were assigned (usually correctly) to the then little-known material culture of the late Pre-Islamic age. At first glazed wheel-turned vessels found in Samad graves were taken to be diagnostic of this assemblage, although need neither have been, nor were probably locally produced. Certain kinds of Samad Period vessels are, in fact, wheel-turned, but most are hand-made. Moreover, the wheel-turned vessels recovered from Şaḥam²⁷ and Samā'il/al-Bārūnī clearly do not belong to the Samad Assemblage. Some have parallels with pottery fabrics from sites located to the north-west²⁸. Finally, wavy line ornament, originally taken to date to the Samad Period, in fact also occurs in quantity in well-dated EIA contexts²⁹. Thus, at distant Maşīrah²⁹, this ceramic need not date to the LIA including the Samad Period, and requires reexamination.

Sites of the Samad Assemblage were first known only from the area around Samad itself. But others suspected as far afield as on the island of Maşīrah, raised the question of a far greater distributional area³¹. The number of sites discovered mounted, and through excavation as well as survey the Samad Assemblage was proven to exist in the interior and then on the coast. In 1991 and 1988 respectively at coastal al-Bustan and at nearby Bandar Jişsa investigation took place. Once the grave goods from Samā'il/al-Bārūnī grave Barī³² and the finds from the al-Fuwāydah cemetery³³ in the core area were recognized as not belonging to the Samad Assemblage, the impression of Assemblages located in closed mutually exclusive areas became questionable. In keeping with the descriptions of different peoples in Middle Oman in early medieval times³⁴, probably their groups either did not occupy closed areas or they succeeded one another in point of time in overlapping ones, as is the case with today's tribes. This impression is reinforced by isolated late Pre-Islamic finds at Bawshar and perhaps those at Izki³⁵, the cultural associations of which are unknown.

Archaeologically, the Late Pre-Islamic of the South Province Dhofār differs entirely from that of Middle Oman, and is not nearly as well known. A local Assemblage reveals

26 P. Yule/G. Weisgerber 1988, 34.

27 P. Yule 2001b, 156, 401.

28 P. Yule/B. Kazenwadel 1994, 259-260, 267 Fig. 8.

29 P. Yule/G. Weisgerber 1996, 143 Fig. 4 the pottery identified by Weisgerber as „Samad-zeitlich“ is actually of EIA date. The site itself contains only EIA pottery and is dated by means of radiocarbon and the pottery.

A. al-Shānfarī 1987, sites 6 (Sawir al-Tuyur) and 8 (Gabal Hamr), fig. 15.1 and 8 awaken such suspicions. Al-

Shānfarī dates the latter to the EIA.

31 See above.

32 P. Yule/B. Kazenwadel 1994, 259-260, 267 Fig. 8; P. Yule 2001a for the metal bowl.

33 P. Yule 1999b, 119-186.

34 Ṭabarī 1958, 213.

35 Izki : P. Yule 1994a, 556, 555 Fig. 14; Bawshar: P. Yule in: P. Costa et al. 1999, 22, 25-27.



Fig. 4. Sherd of local red burnished ware excavated from Khor Rorī, American Foundation for the Study of Oman, Falls Church, Va.

شكل ٤: كسر فخارية من النمط المصقول الأحمر المحلي، اكتشفت في خور روري (المؤسسة الأميركية للدراسات العُمانية؛ فولس تشرش، VI).

itself by means of stray-finds and from explored settlements, as at ‘Ayn Humran, a site near Ṭāqah, and at Shisr³⁶. Key characteristics are the local hand-made burnished ware with a decoration formed by horizontal zones of dotted circle impressions and those formed by the edge of a bivalve shell in a kind of zig-zag pattern (Fig. 4)³⁷. The colour and surface polish derive from terra sigillata and Indian Red Polished Ware, but differ from them significantly. Circular houses came to light near Ṭāqah (site 92:60)³⁸. LIA Contexts in Shisr are dated by two ¹⁴C determinations: 495 and 595 A.D.³⁹. The dating of thousands of graves in Dhofār, formed by stretched ovals of boulders filled with gravel, which are designated by A. al-Shaḥrī as prehistoric „type 2" and

36 J. Zarins 1997, 652-671 in an article which deemphasizes the role of Middle Oman in its contact with Persia and the East, and overemphasizes the role of Dhofār in this connection - hence his reference for example to the „Classical Period" in Oman (p. 632) and optimistic but naive references to Ubar/Wabar (p. 636). His mention of Maka (pp. 633-637) is out of place given the topic, Dhofār. Many relevant sites (al-Maysar, Samad, Samā'il) are missing from Zarins's map of ancient trading routes, others are mistakenly mapped (Hafit: no. 107). Zarins excludes key written sources available on late Pre-Islamic Middle Oman.

37 P. Yule-M. Kervran 1993, 81 Fig. 3.6 and p. 93. J. Zarins 1997, 665 fig. 14, 670 fig. 17, and 671 fig. 18.

38 J. Zarins 1997, 653-657 figs. 10-10d.

39 J. Zarins 1997, 668 without stratigraphic data or laboratory numbers.

by the writer as of the early Islamic „Khor Rorī type“ remains controversial. A neolithic dating also has been suggested⁴⁰. Important for the dating is the local qibla orientation, the desert patina on the stones, a lack of grave goods in numerous excavated graves, and their large numbers. The existing evidence from settlements supports the assumption of a small population in Pre-Islamic Dhofār which contradicts the large numbers of Khor Rorī type graves. Most likely they are of early Islamic date.

NORTHERN LATE PRE-ISLAMIC CULTURE (NLPC)

The relation between the late Pre-Islamic archaeology of North-west Oman and that of Middle Oman has received little scholarly attention. However, in his dissertation of 1992 M. Mouton took a step in establishing clarity in the archaeological picture by separating the two. It is interesting that in terms of finds, graves, and buildings, the NLPC is in evidence as early as from the third century B.C. and complements the Samad Assemblage which unfortunately is scarcely datable prior to 200 A.D.

period	absolute years	
PIR.D	c. 225	— 1st 1/4 4th cent. A.D.
PIR.C	1st cent. B.C.	— 2nd cent. A.D.
PIR.B	2nd 1/2 2nd cent.	— 1st cent. B.C.
PIR.A	3rd cent.	— 1st 1/2 2nd cent. B.C.

The periodisation of the NLPC established at Mleiḥa and ed-Dūr⁴¹.

The kinds of stone vessels and other finds encountered in the excavations at al-Fuwāyah proved to have been known already for several years at Mleiḥa and ed-Dūr in North-west Oman. Largely on the basis of these finds, the cemetery at al-Fuwāyah appears to date to the first two phases of the NLPC. The distribution of the associated NLPC is only partly known and seems larger than that of the Samad Assemblage. With an estimated 43200 km² (180 x 240 km), the latter has a surface as large as that of Denmark. Whatever political conditions might have ruled there, the cultural connections with Mesopotamia and Iran are clearer than those in the case of the Samad Assemblage of Middle Oman. As opposed to the late Pre-Islamic culture known best

40 J. Zarins 1997, 652. The citation "Bent and Bent 1900, passim" is incorrect. See Thomas 1932, 18, 19; Albright 1982, 40; al-Shahrī 1991, 186-7; P. Yule 1994a, 559, 558 fig. 17; Pl. 23 below; P. Yule et al. 1994b, 405 Pl. 15. It is unfortunate that Zarins does not state more about the position of the skeletons, which might well help to establish either a Pre-Islamic or an Islamic date.

41 M. Mouton 1992, 35.

42 M. Mouton 1998; J. Hassel 1997, 245-281; P. Yule 1999b, 142, 175 Fig. 32; 181 Fig. 38.

43 P. Yule 1999b, 142.

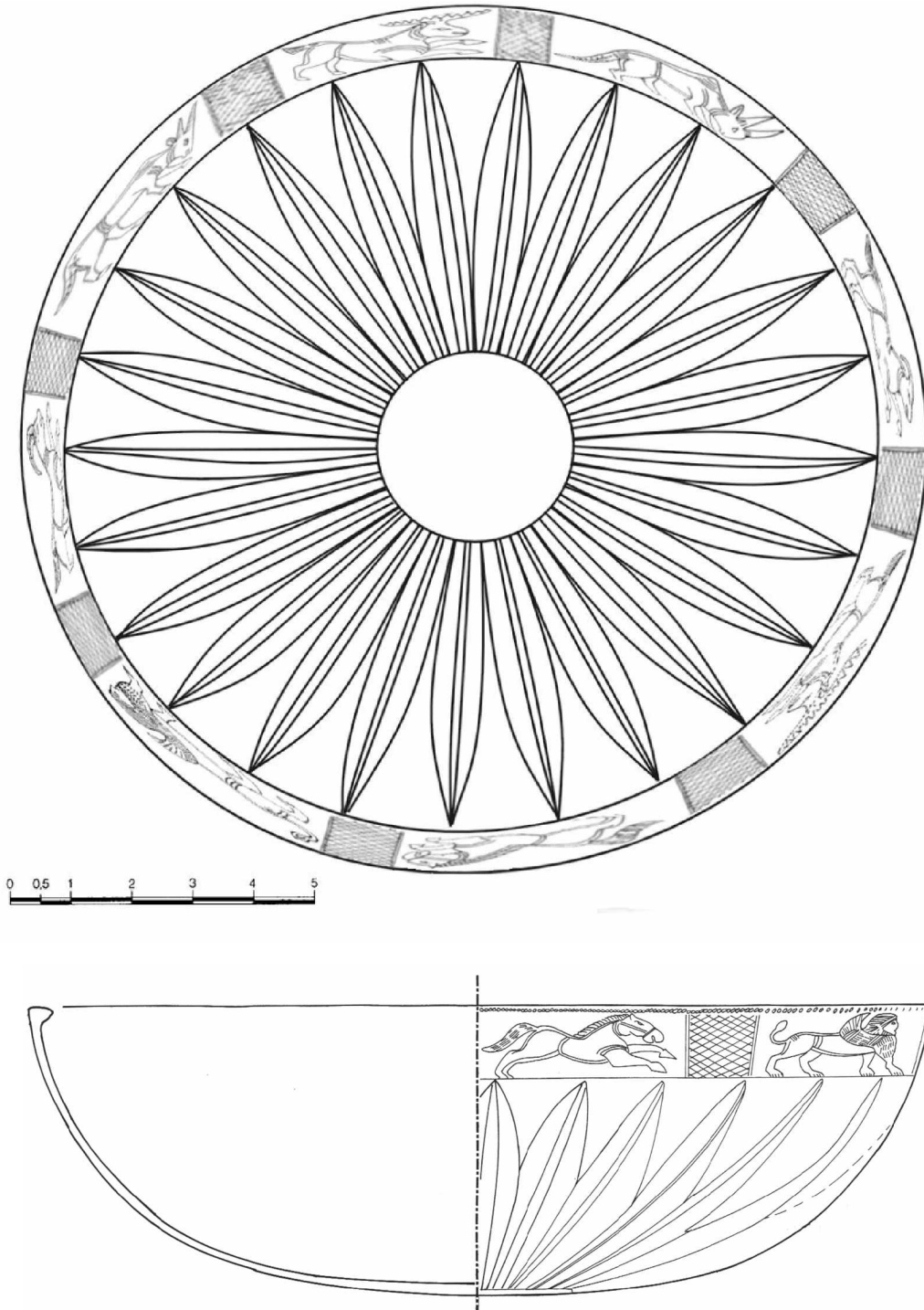


Fig. 5. DA 13335 from grave Fu09.

شكل ٥ : DA 13335 من القبر Fu 09 (الفويدة).

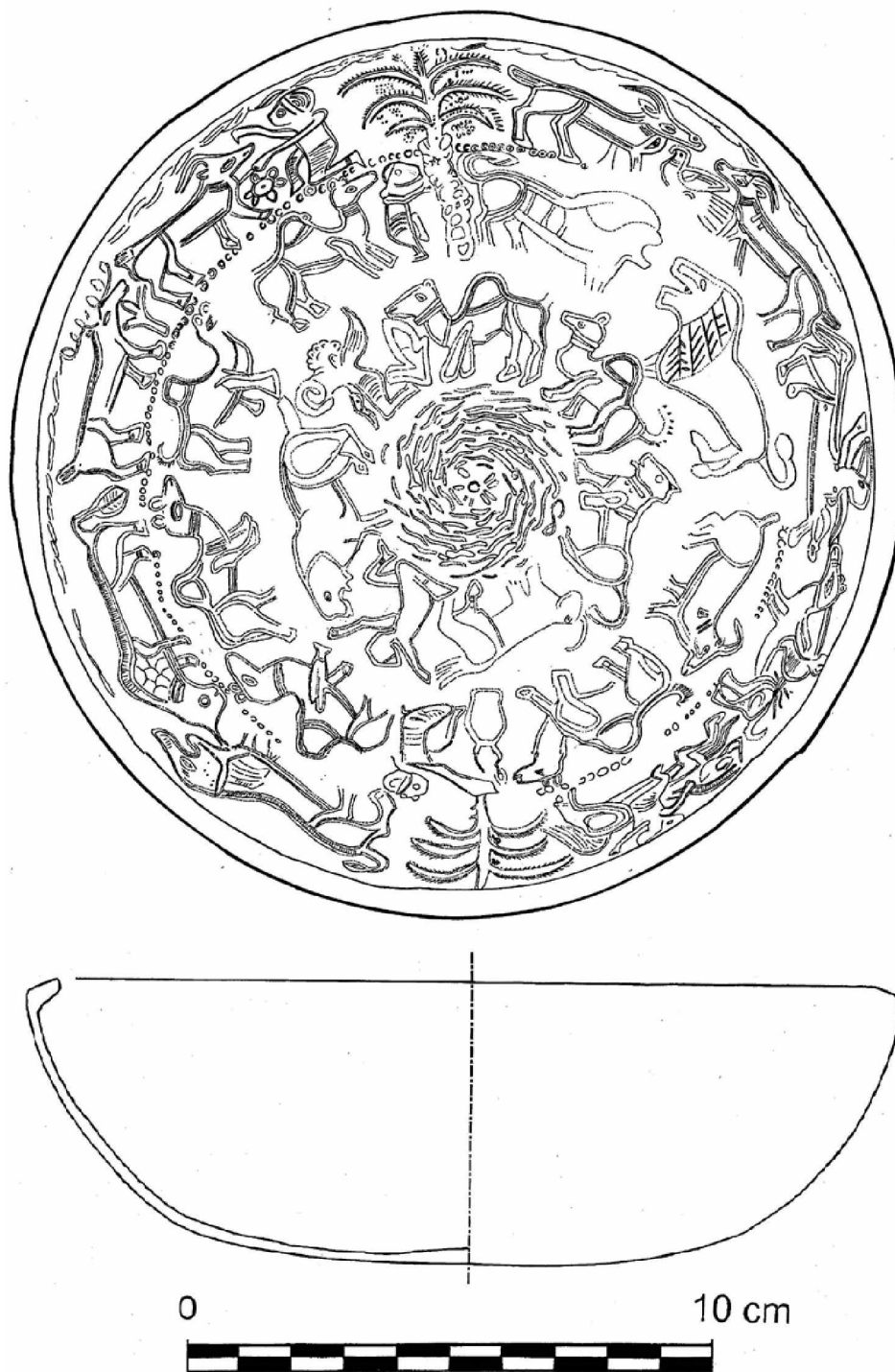


Fig. 6. DA 13363 from gr. Fu11.

شكل ٦ : DA 13363 من القبر Fu 11 (الفويدة).

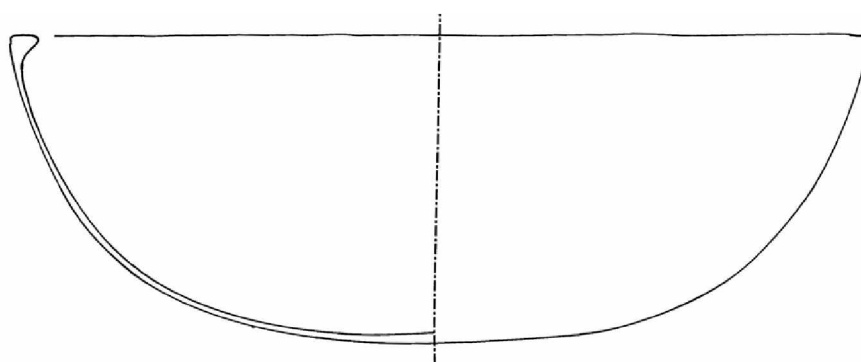
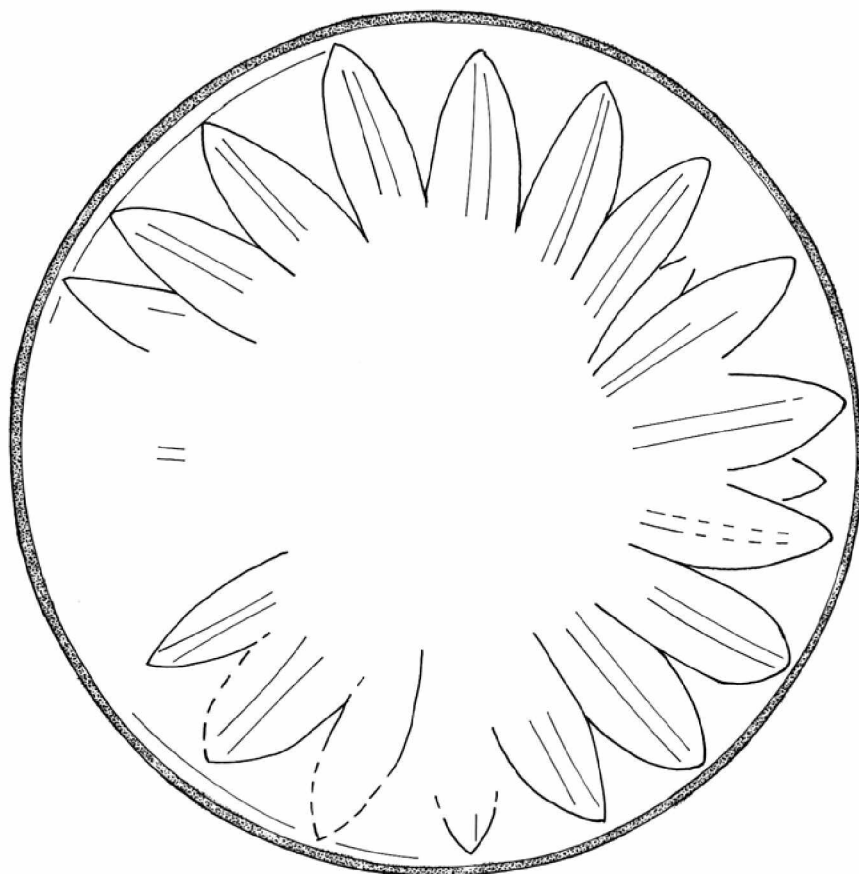


Fig. 7. DA 13700 from gr. Fu18.

شكل ٧: DA 13700 من القبر Fu 18 (الفويذة).

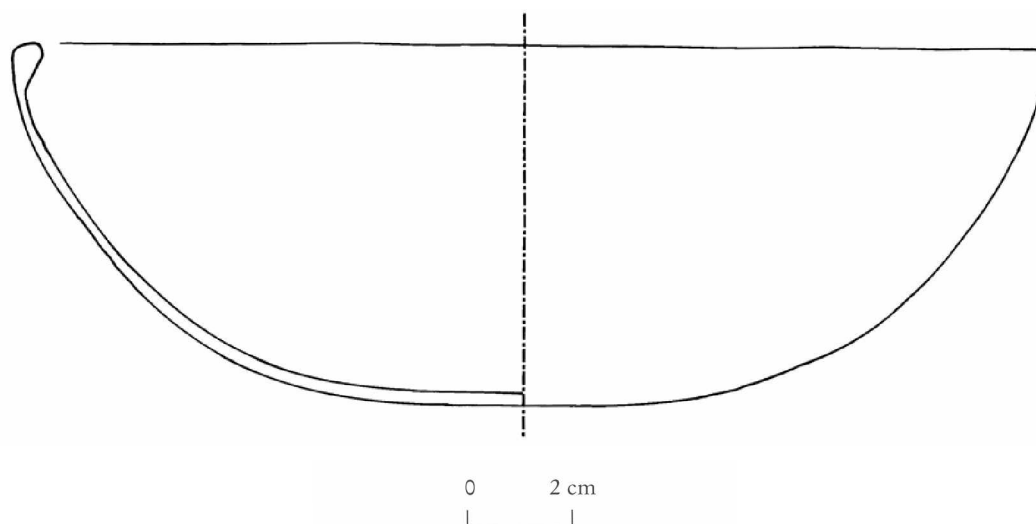


Fig. 8. DA 13324 from grave Fu06.

شكل ٨ : DA 13324 من القبر Fu 06 (الغويذة).

Samad al-Shān, this one is partly urban and literate, as coins from associated excavated settlements bear witness to⁴⁴. Weisgerber and others refer to the "Late Iron Age" for the Samad Assemblage, since only individual characters and no true writing have thus far come to light in its domain. In the event that indigenous texts one day are discovered in the central part of Oman, the nomenclature may have to change. But the question can still be raised, were a single inscription to come to light in a context unclear in its identity, would this be reason enough to designate an entire period/culture as literate? Since other groups also populated the country in the last centuries prior to Islam, if such a find be made, the find circumstances would have to be exceedingly clear for it to be associated with the Samad Assemblage.

The preceding Lizq/Rumaylah Period/Culture is documented down to shortly after 300 B.C. in the entire region. After this time one has little recourse more than to postulate an early beginning for the Samad Assemblage rather than a continuation of the preceding EIA (Lizq/Rumaylah Period), the latter which otherwise could not be shown together with unequivocally late ¹⁴C results anywhere. But archaeologists have not yet been able to narrow the chronological gap, which in fact exists between the Early and Late Iron Age in Middle Oman.

44 E. Haerinck et al. 1992, 48 fig. 5 and 6; E. Haerinck 1993, 223 fig. 20.

FIND CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE METAL BOWLS

Following these necessary digressions, we may turn to the bowls themselves. The point of departure for this essay are four bowls which came to light in different subterranean single graves at al-Fuwāydah. The bronze bowl decorated on its outside surface with a frieze of animal figures derives from grave Fu09 (DA 13335, Figs. 5, 9, 10). With a 2.26 m interior length and an east-south-east long axis, this narrow grave was similar to the others in the cemetery. Although robbed, and the skeleton destroyed, still preserved were a knife, an arrowhead, a stone bowl, a bronze bangle, a ring, beads, a storage jar, and a pilgrim flask⁴⁵. By virtue of the pattern of the finds, particularly the arrowhead, knife, and pilgrim flask, its owner can be identified as a man⁴⁶. To judge from the neighbouring Samad Assemblage, women's graves virtually never contain weapons and seldom tools. In a period when hardly any ancient Near Eastern metal vessels are datable, whatever the ultimate origin of the al-Fuwāydah vessels, their provenance from this cemetery is uncontested⁴⁷.

THE DECORATION OF THE ANIMAL FRIEZE BOWL DA 13335

The exterior of DA 13335 (Figs. 9 and 10) shows radially ordered willow leaf ornament at the base and a zone of alternating cross hatching and animals in metope-like vignettes at the rim. Eight animals are depicted in fields respectively less than 5 cm in width: 1 an oryx with straight horns, 2 a caprid with curved horns, 3 a stag, 4 a horse, 5 a sphinx, 6 a caprid with curved horns, 7 an oryx with straight horns, 8 a stag. The animals were rendered by an experienced engraver with a steady hand. All show stout proportions, are similar to each other in style, and despite their respective size in nature are reproduced in the same approximate size, resulting from the desire to fill the small metopes in a uniform way.

Quadrupeds with straight (Fig. 9.1, 7) and with bent horns (Fig. 9.2, 6) can be distinguished. Owing to their bodily proportions, at first glance all four examples might seem to be goats, but closer scrutiny reveals that the two animals with straight horns have a long tail and a slight hump at the shoulder. The oryx comes to mind. As opposed to the jumping posture of the goats (nos. 2 and 6), the oryx nos. 1 and 7 stand. The caprids with curved horns (nos. 2 and 6) may be wild or domesticated. Oryx gazella leucoryx, known as the white oryx, inhabited Arabia and Mesopotamia until 1972 when it became extinct. In 1986 it was reintroduced to the Sultanate.

45 P. Yule 1999, 126-127 for a description of gr. Fu09 and its finds.

46 P. Yule 2001b, 165-170.

47 With regard to the need to critically look at the provenance of archaeological artefacts see O. Muscarella 1988, 23-39.



a



b

Fig. 9. Motives engraved on DA 13335, grave Fu09. a. Oryx with straight horns.— b. Caprid with curved horns.

شكل ٩ : أشكال منقوشة على DA 13335 ، القبر Fu 09 (الفويدة) : a. بقر وحشي ذو قرون مستقيمة. - b. ماعز ذو قرون منحنية.



a



b

Fig. 10. Motives engraved on DA 13335, gr. Fu09. a. Stag. – b. Horse.

شكل ١٠: أشكال منقوشة على DA 13335، القبر Fu 09 (الفويدة): a. أيل. – b. حصان.



Fig. 11. Motives engraved on DA 13335, gr. Fu09. a. Sphinx. – b. Caprid with curved horns.

شكل ١١ : أشكال منقوشة على DA 13335 ، القبر Fu 09 (الفويذة) : a. أبو الهول. - b. ماعز ذو قرون منحنية.



Fig. 12. Motives engraved on DA 13334, gr. Fu09. a. Oryx with straight horns. – b. Stag.

شكل ١٢: أشكال منقوشة على DA 13335، القبر Fu 09 (الفويدة): a. بقر وحشي ذو قرون مستقيمة. – b. أيل.

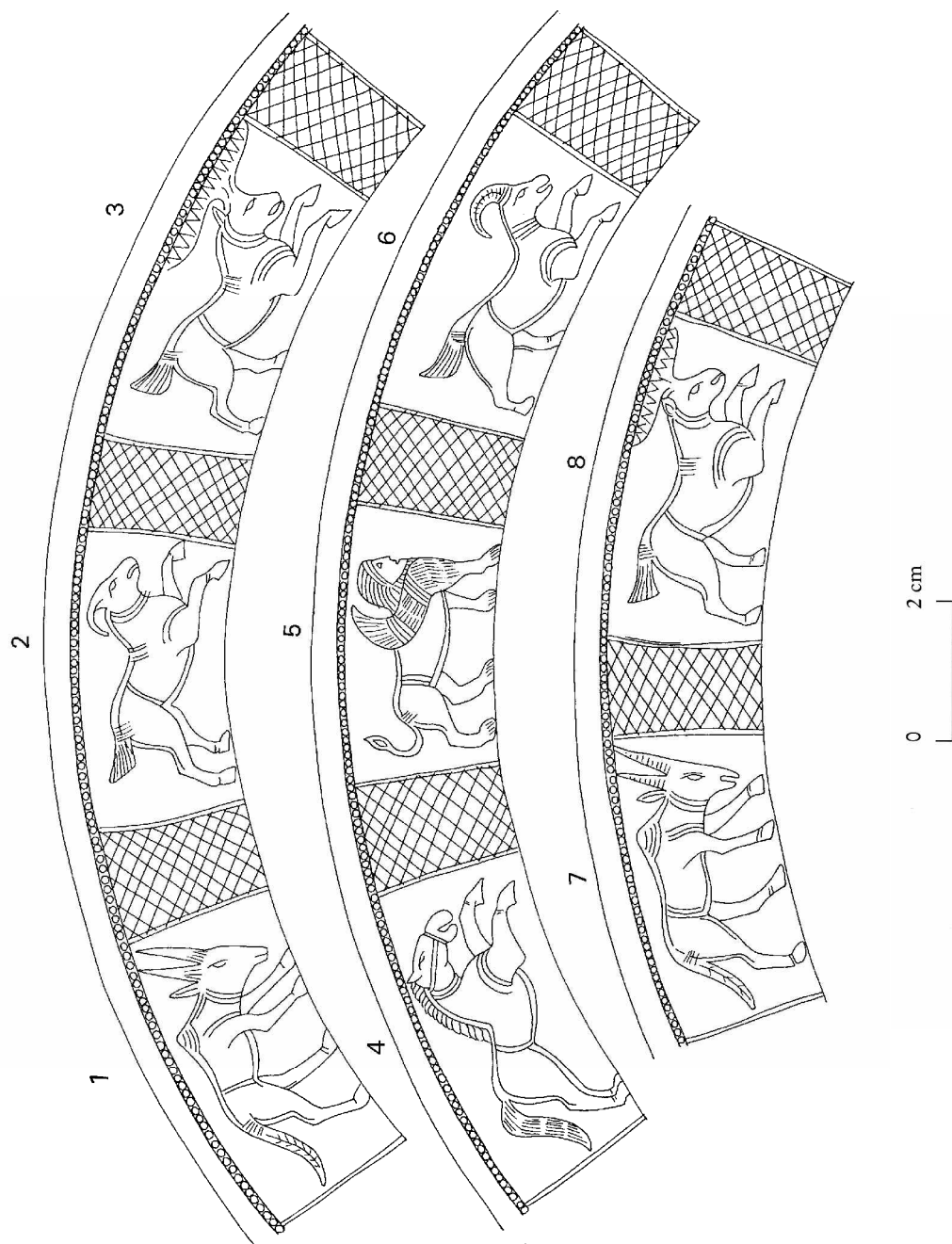


Fig. 13. Drawing of the motives engraved on DA 13335, grave Fu09.
شكل ١٣ : رسم للأشكال النقوشة على القبر Fu 09 (الغوية).

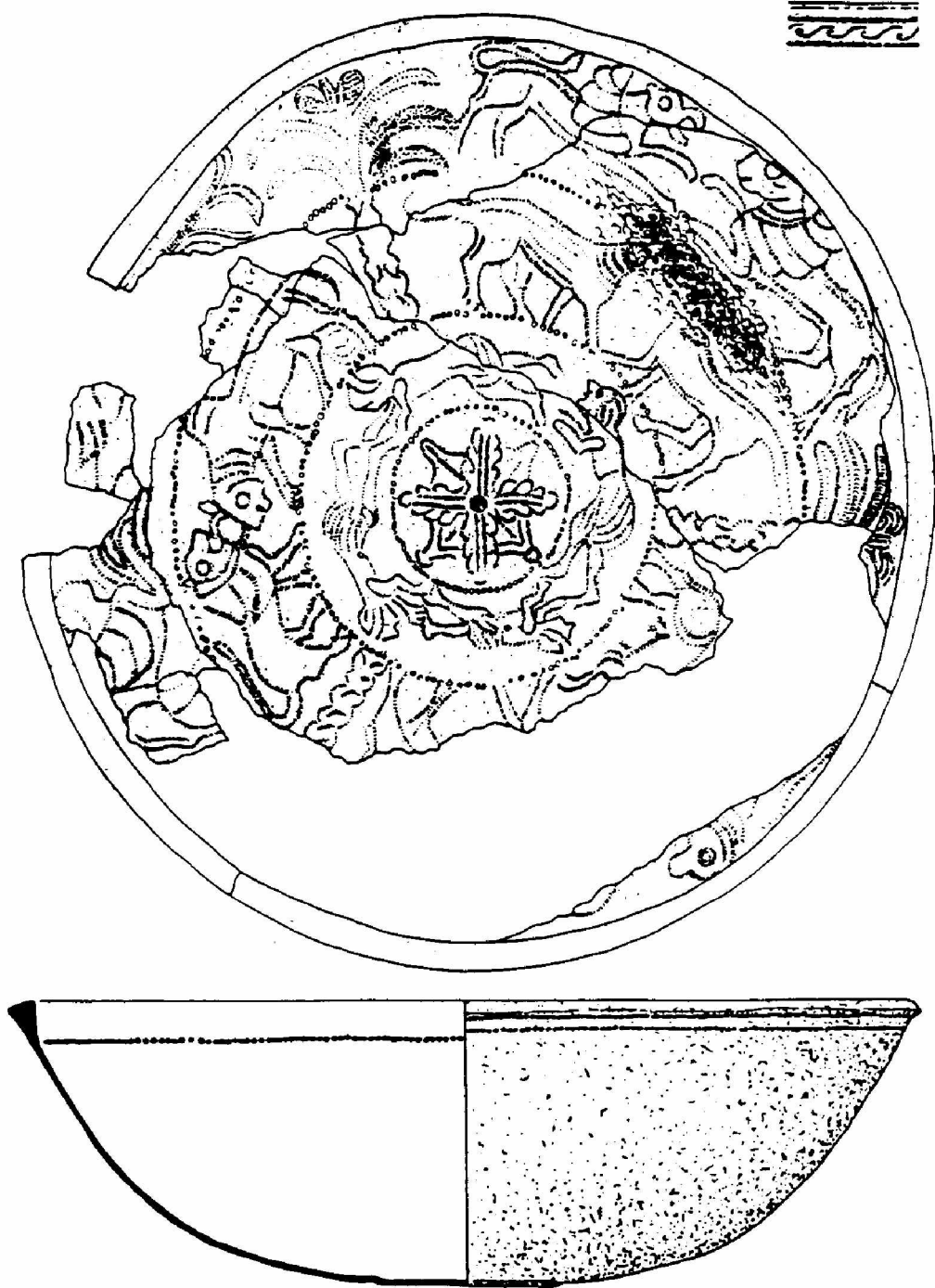


Fig. 14. Bowl from Mleiha, uf137 (after Boucharlat et al. 1989).

شكل ١٤ : زبدية من ملىحة، uf 137 (عن Boucharlat et al. 1989).



Fig. 15. a. *Guilloche* engraved on DA 13324 from grave Fu06. – b. Hastily executed *guilloche* on DA 13700 from grave Fu18.

شكل ١٥: a. صغيرة منقوشة على DA 13324 في القبر Fu 06 (الفويذة) - b. صغيرة منقوشة على DA 13700 على القبر Fu 18 (الفويذة).

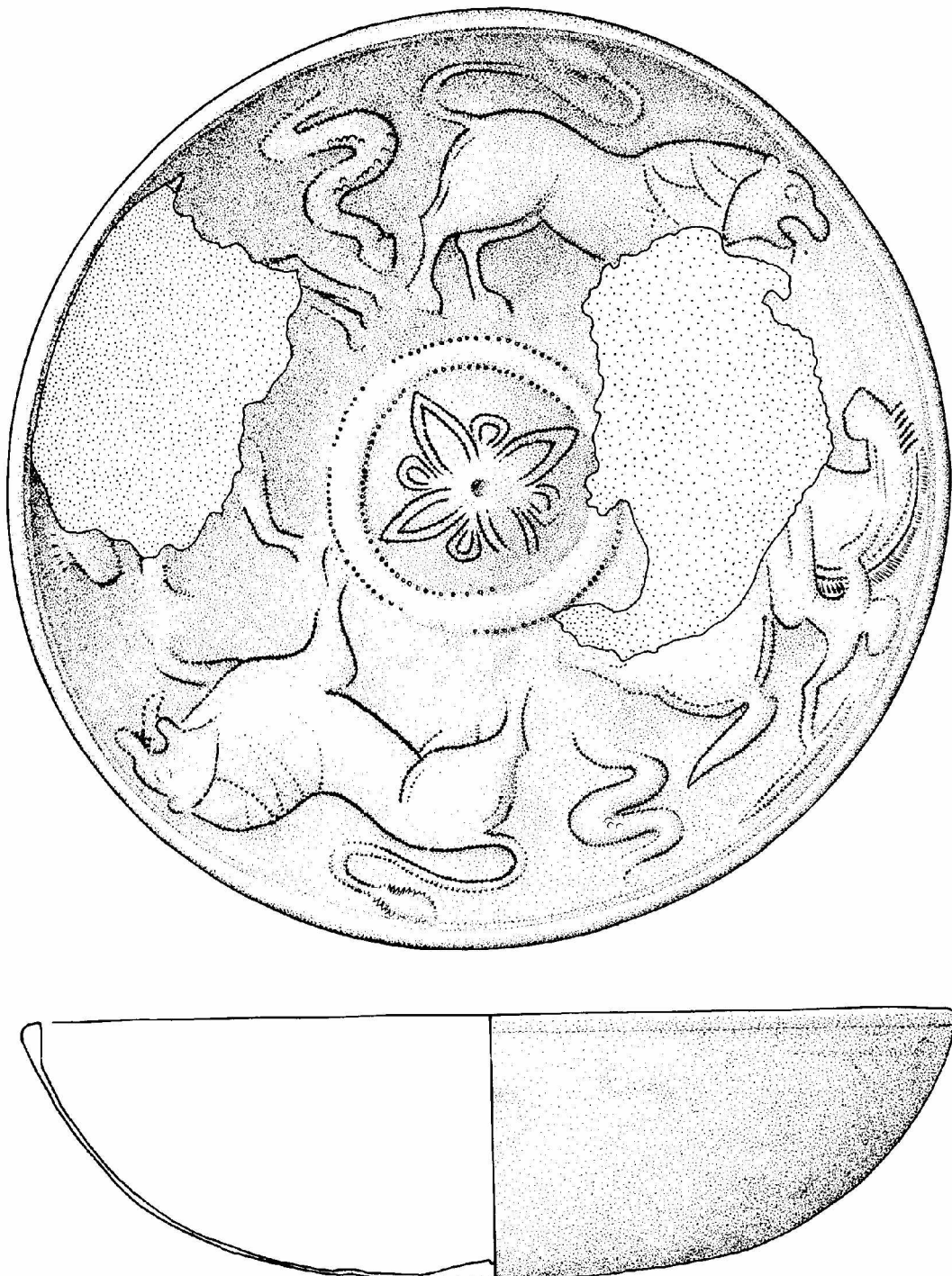


Fig. 16. Lion hunt bowl DA 10617, Sama'il grave Bar1.

شكل ١٦ : زبدية تحمل تصويراً لصيد أسد DA 10617، سماءل، القبر Bar 1.

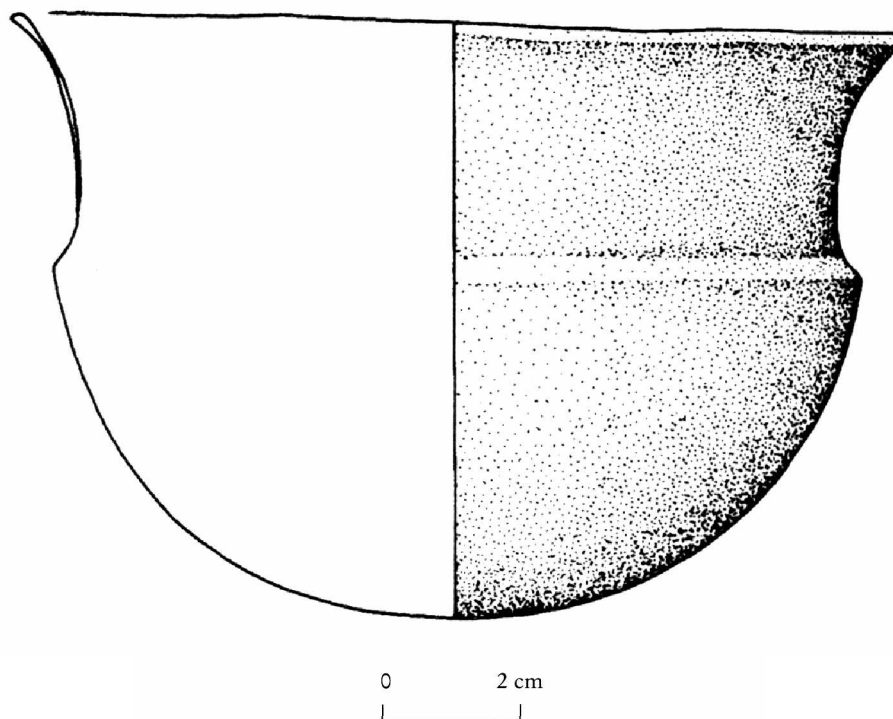


Fig. 17. Bowl DA 12118 from a Samad Period grave S10815.

شكل ١٧: زبدية DA 12118 من قبر (S 10815) يرجع لعصر سمد.

The stag numbered 3 and 8 has shovel-like and not branched antlers. It brings to mind the Mesopotamian spotted fallow deer (*dama dama mesopotamica*) which still exists as an endangered species in Khuzistan⁴⁸. In antiquity had a range that included until recently western Iran, southern Turkey, and northern Arabia⁴⁹. But the artist need never have seen this or any other animal, since they also existed as motives in the figural arts. Motive 5, the sphinx, is clearly recognizable despite the breaks in the vessel wall. It has a leonine body, wings, and a human face. Its parallels are mostly Greek, Assyrian, and Achaemenid ones, which generally show a mythological animal predominantly horse-like in character⁵⁰. Finally, the horse on the no. 4 position is rendered as bounding or galloping in a conventional way with the hindlegs on the

48 L.H. Heck 1968, 166-179.

49 D. Harrison 2 1968, 365-368; D. Harrison – Bates 1991, 204-207. I thank Michael Gallagher for this reference.

50 A. Dessenne 1957, pl. 1-38; Orthmann 1971, 339-343.

ground and the forelegs in the air. This convention is common in ancient Near Eastern, for example in Neohittite and Neoassyrian art. That the animal is domesticated is certain because it is depicted wearing a halter.

BOWLS WITH ORNAMENTAL DECORATION

Well-known are Achaemenid and Hellenistic metal bowls with radially arranged willow leaf ornament on the outside of the base such as those from al-Fuwāydah (Figs. 5-8)⁵¹. Two particularly close parallels to DA 13335 derive from the art market and bear no provenance. A third such one has a dealer's provenance "from the Nile delta"⁵². On stylistic grounds, the willow leaf decoration of these is Hellenistic in date, although its development begins earlier in Pre-Hellenistic times. It is distributed throughout the Hellenistic world. Systems for the decoration of chalices include willow leaf ornament span more than 200 years⁵³. The animal frieze and the willow-leaf ornament combine non-Greek and Greek motives in a way not unexpected in the Hellenistic Orient.

POST PHOENICIAN METAL BOWLS

The metal bowls of the NLPC have a register composition significantly similar to that commonly designated as "Phoenician"⁵⁴. But the main series of Phoenician bowls date earlier, from the ninth to the late sixth century B.C. This designation is somewhat inappropriate for our bowls because not all show the typical concentric figural registers, date later, have a local iconography, and lie outside the direct sphere of political, economic, and cultural influence of the Phoenicians. On the other hand, by virtue of shared decorative characteristics, they form a group probably of Arabian origin. To define this group, we turn to a particularly characteristic metal bowl which came to light during excavations at al-Fuwāydah (Fig. 6). This vessel shares the register decoration with another from Mleiḥa (Fig. 11). Also common to both are the tree motive which pierces the registers. Other motives common to this group are pairs of fighting animals, sphinxes, and camels. Radial willow leaf composition ties some vessels into the group which otherwise do not show the register composition. It also dates these vessels to Achaemenid/Hellenistic times. The craftsman of the bowl from grave Fu11 (Fig. 6) did not fashion willow leaf ornament on its outer surface which is broken by the repoussé technique. But this bowl is central in style and iconography to the

51 M. Pfrommer 1985, 75 "Lanzettblattwerk"; M. Abka i-Kavari, 1988, 115 fig. 1; 123 fig. 5; 127 fig. 7.

52 M. Pfrommer 1985, pl. 48c; 49b, 50a.

53 M. Pfrommer 1985, Taf. 62 shows the development of the vessel forms.

54 G. Markoe 1985 and J. Canby 1988.

Source	l/dm	h	gr	inv. no. (DA) ¹	vessel class ²
1 'Amlah/al-Fuwāydhah gr Fu06	16.5	5.6	370	13324	MeOB12
2 'Amlah/al-Fuwāydhah gr Fu09	17.0	5.4	422	13335	MeOB12
3 'Amlah/al-Fuwāydhah gr Fu11	16.2	4.5	362	13363	MeOB12
4 'Amlah/al-Fuwāydhah gr Fu18	16.5	6.0	434	13700	MeOB12
5 Mleiḥa/necrop. F	17.0	5.3	-	uf137	Me
6 Mleiḥa/necrop. C	18.0	3.5	-	uf201	Me
7 Mleiḥa/necrop. C	18.5	2.5p	-	uf14	Me
8 Samad gr S101124	13.6	6.1	-	5943	MeOB11
9 al-Bustan gr Bu5	13.0	8.0	184	11982	MeOB11
10 Samad gr S10815	14.0	9.4	296	12118	MeOB11
11 Samā'il/al-Bārūnī Bar1	15.8	4.5	247p ³	10617	MeOB12
12 Ja'lān	15.0	6.0	227	11406	MeOB12
13 Samā'il/al-Bārūnī Bar1	18.0	6.0p	155	10619	MeGB07
14 Samā'il/al-Bārūnī Bar1	7.1	3.5	42	10614	Sc

1 The DA prefix before a number stands for Department of Antiquities. „Uf“ is the excavation no. of the French Mission in the United Arab Emirates.

2 In the classification of Pre-Islamic artefacts from Central Oman, P. Yule 2001b, 84–89.

3 „P“ designates „preserved“, i.e. these are the preserved dimensions and not the original ones.

Table 2. Characteristics of metal bowls related to those of the NLPC.

group, and is datable by its context. Two vessels from al-Fuwāydhah graves Fu18 and Fu06 (Figs. 7 and 13, 8 and 12) combine radial willow leaves and a simple degenerate guilloche band. Metal bowls deriving from the NLPC appear listed in Table 2. The bowl with a lion hunt motif from Samā'il gr. Bar1 (Fig. 14) is a special problem in that it derives from the heartland of the Samad Assemblage, but it and its associated grave goods appear to be imports from the North-west. This bowl differs from the others in its manner of a format-filling motive, a lion hunt. It is not built with registers but rather with four figures which fill the field. Associated finds are conform with a stylistic dating to ca. 200-400 A.D.⁵⁵.

The few such bowls that exist contrast with those from contexts of the Samad Assemblage in that the latter which have come to light are undecorated and usually have a concave carinated rim (Fig. 15). The ultimate origin of the bowls which came to light in Samad Period graves is more difficult to establish than for those of the NLPC. On the other hand, the depiction of camels and signs of a Semitic script suggest a local provenance for the bowls of the NLPC in South-east Arabia. The motives in the figural arts of the Samad Assemblage are stylistically heterogeneous. A metal bowl excavated (?) from Ja'lān (Fig. 3) is interesting from a standpoint of its origin. Although deriving from an area associated with the Samad Assemblage and showing a shape characteristic of the LIA, its ultimate origin is unclear. Against the proposed

LIA dating, it can be argued that the large omphallos is better known from the EIA Lizq/Rumaylah or some other Assemblage contemporary with it⁵⁶. Thus, the dating of this bowl is somewhat uncertain.

In any case, the Post Phoenician NLPC metal bowls are a newly discovered group with closer ties to the Hellenistic material culture of the West than can be expected of the Samad Assemblage.

ABSTRACT

In 1997 rescue operations in ‘Amlah, al-ẓāhirah Province, brought to light four copper alloy bowls the decoration of which sheds light on the late Pre-Islamic Period in this little explored part of south-eastern Arabia. Here a site belonging to the Northern Late Pre-Islamic Culture (NLPC), as known till now only from the United Arab Emirates, came to light unexpectedly. This find raises the question of the distribution and character of the different late Pre-Islamic Assemblages in the region. At this still very early stage of research the distributions of the NLPC and Samad Assemblage appear not to be mutually exclusive, but rather mix with each other. Obviously the Sharqīyah is archaeologically the best researched part of the country. Here and in adjacent Dakhlīyah the Samad Assemblage has been sighted frequently. The distribution and character of neighbouring late Pre-Islamic Assemblages is far sketchier. Whereas the new bowls reveal the art of the NLPC, for the Samad Assemblage still hardly any evidence exists. Least well-known is the material culture of late Pre-Islamic Dhofar.

كُشف خلال عمليات الإنقاذ في عمّلا وإقليم الظهيرية عام ١٩٩٧م عن أربع زبادي من النحاس المشوب والتي تلقي زخرفتها بعض الضوء على أواخر عصر ما قبل الإسلام في هذا القسم الغير مستكشف بشكل واف من الجنوب الشرقي للجزيرة العربية. وهنا ظهر إلى حيز الوجود وبشكل مفاجئ موقع ينتمي لحضارة أواخر ما قبل الإسلام الشمالية (NLPC) وهي الغير معروفة خارج الإمارات العربية المتحدة حتى الآن. يطرح هذا الاكتشاف السؤال عن توزيع وماهية حضارة أواخر ما قبل الإسلام في الإقليم. ويُظهر انتشار حضارة أواخر ما قبل الإسلام الشمالية وحضارة سمد في هذه الفترة المبكرة من الأبحاث عدم تواجد إحداها دون الأخرى في مكان ما، وإنما تمازجها مع بعضهما البعض إلى حد ما. ومن الواضح أن الشرقية هي المنطقة المدروسة أثرياً على الوجه الأفضل بين مناطق البلاد. وكثيراً ما لوحظت حضارة سمد هنا أو في منطقة الداخلية المتاخمة. أما المعرفة حول توزيع وماهية حضارات أواخر ما قبل الإسلام المجاورة فهي أكثر سطحية. ففي حين أن الزبادي الجديدة تكشف عن فن حضارة أواخر ما قبل الإسلام الشمالية، فإن وجود دليل لحضارة سمد ما زال أمراً نادراً. أما الحضارة المادية لظفار العائدة لأواخر ما قبل الإسلام فهي معروفة بشكل أقل.

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