

Al Şunşunah, al ‘Āmarāt district, Muscat  
Governorate, Sultanate of Oman – find notice of  
a Samad Late Iron Age settlement

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# Al Şunşunah, al ‘Āmarāt district, Muscat Governorate, Sultanate of Oman – find notice of a Samad Late Iron Age settlement<sup>1</sup>

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Figure 1 Locator map.

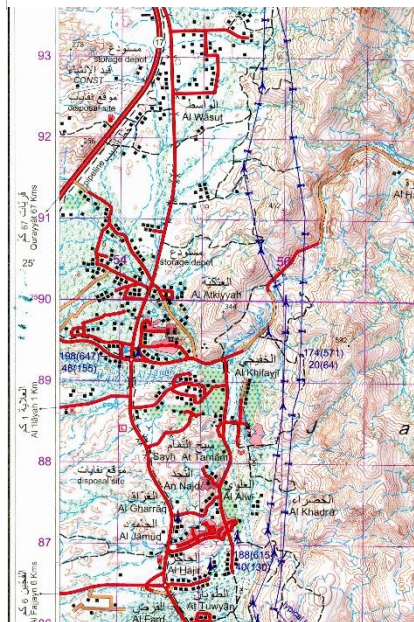


Figure 2 Map sheet 'al-Hajir' (NF 4004D1) marks the archaeological site.



Figure 3 SLIA pottery which unknown persons collected on the surface of the surface of the site.

The fortified Samad Late Iron Age (SLIA) village lies at the banks of the Wādī al Mayḥ (aka Wādī al Janhi, Fig. 1 & 2), a reliable source of water for date gardening. It lies immediately south of the large Jebel al Atkiyah. It is located 42 minutes removed from al Adhaibah, south of the capital area (47 km) and lies immediately north of the Wadi al-Meyh Street.

First noted publicly in 1987, this site has been little discussed in the archaeological literature of SE Arabia (bibliography: Yule & Mauro in press). In 2014 a field trip from the then Ministry Heritage and Culture showed Yule the site. Its importance lies in the fact that of the sites known of this assemblage the vast majority are cemeteries. Settlements are rare. SLIA sites are defined by their diagnostic pottery and other diagnostic finds which occur in a limited geographic area. Given the occurrence of stone houses inside a wall, this site is categorised as a fortified village, like another in Tiwi (Table 1) of this same period – not a fort *per se*.

The little available information points to a c. 400-600 year period beginning after 300 BCE and ending around 300 CE for the SLIA. This dating is based in part on parallel, better dated finds of the *préislamique récent* made in the United Arab Emirates, particularly at the site of Mlayha in Sharja Emirate. The dating is based on numerous diagnostic sherds found on the surface (Fig. 3). These show a known handmade pottery ware and impressed decoration (Yule – Mauro in press).

Other SLIA settlements at al Mahaliya, Qaryat al Sayh, Tiwi and Wadi Bani Khalid came to light in recent years. Whereas the SLIA type site, Samad/al Muyassar, coins the

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Figure 4 Google Earth image shows the site and its white-highlighted defensive wall. Above is north (Yule 2016).

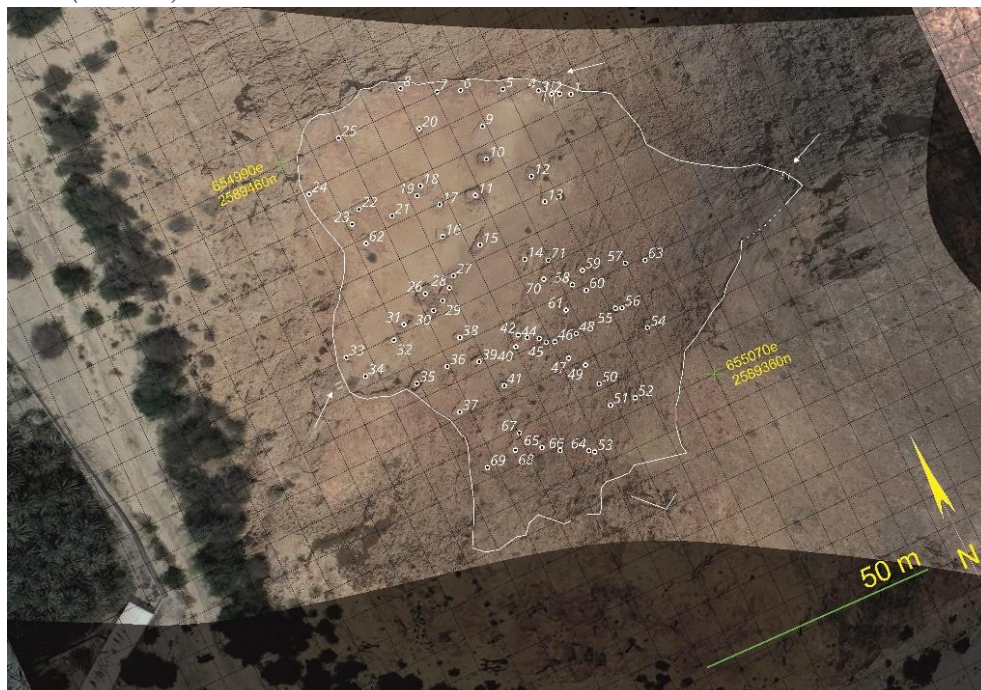


Figure 5 Geo-referenced context numbering at al Şunşunah with QGIS of a drone image and Google Earth. Drone image: (image: W. al-Ghafri, MHT, render: Al-Mustafa).

site	northings	eastings	governorate	source 1	source 2	activity
Abayah 1	23°10'20"	58°48'42"	Sharqiyah	survey, PY	-	sur
al Mahaliya CS.2.51.1	22°54'10"	58°01'13"	Sharqiyah	Al-Jahwari 2013 89 fig 104; 207	Yule-Mauro in press Fig 2.27	sur
al Muyassar M34	22°48'20"	58°08'01"	Sharqiyah	Tillmann 1981 233-5	Weisgerber 1982 81-91	exc
al Nejd	23°23'39"	58°31'07"	Muscat	Yule 2016 58 fig 16-9	Yule-al-Asmi 2019	sur
Bandar Jissa 4b	23°32'48"	58°37'55"	Muscat	Possehl 2009 fig 1.2	Yule-Mauro in press Fig. 2.22	sur
Ibra Ib52	22°41'39"	58°31'51"	Sharqiyah	Schreiber 2005	Yule 2016	sur
Izki Iz0002	22°55'37"	57°45'51"	Dachiliyah	Schreiber 2007 123 Abb 19	Yule-Mauro 2024	sur
Jebel Şunşunah	23°24'25"	58°31'02"	Muscat	Costa-Wilkinson 1987 213	Yule 2016 59 fig 20	sur
Manah al Suq	22°47'	57°36'	Dachiliyah	Salimi 1961 165	Yule 2001 I 23	sur
Qaryat al Sayh	23° 01'03"	58°00'58"E	Sharqiyah	Yule 2016 55 Table 9	Yule-Mauro in press	sur
Samad S01	22°48'56"	58°09'11"	Sharqiyah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 8	Yule 2001 I 400; II Taf 599	sur
Samad S07	22°48'22"	58°08'47"	Sharqiyah	Yule-Weisgerber 1988 8	Yule 2001 I 400 39	sur
Sur	22°34'18"	59°30'02"	Sharqiyah	Salm et al 1988 site 23	Schreiber 2007 63	sur
Tiwi Tw2	22°49'28"	59°15'18"	Sharqiyah	Salm et al 1988 site 20	Schreiber-Häser 2004 325-7	sur+excav
Wadi Bani Khalid 1	22°34'22"	59°06'08"	Sharqiyah	Loreto 2020 220 fig. 9	Yule-Mauro in press Fig 2.23	sur+excav
Wadi Siri	22°43'55"	58°42'24"	Sharqiyah	Doe 1977 039 fig 11 pl 15 no 46	al-Rāsibī et al 2018a 3	sur

Table 1. 17 SLIA fortified sites are known in core-Oman.



Figure 6 View of the al Şunşunah site toward the east. The al Atkia mountain is visible in the background, left (Yule).

diagnostic finds, only a mere c. 200 analysed and published graves (Yule 2001) yielded these – little support for the distributional area of the SLIA of c. 17.000 km<sup>2</sup> in eastern Oman including the Muscat governorate. Recent years witness the artefactual classification of the Early Iron Age and SLIA find inventory and the registration of sites of these two periods.

Our goal in mapping al Şunşunah was to take a first limited step in the documentation of this relatively well-preserved site. It survived owing to its inaccessibility until recently. This site can be compared to others of the SLIA, but it remains unique especially owing to its good preservation.

We tallied 71 structures - mostly single-room houses (Fig. 4 & 5). The inaccuracies of the GNSS data and the drone image distortion were compensated for by QGIS image rectification. All structures are built with the sandwich technique – heavy stones outside, gravel filling. The sizes of the contexts were measured on the outside, not inside of the walls. This shows differences in wealth and/or social status. On the slopes the structure are mostly built parallel to the slope. There is no homogeneous position of the entrances, but several are located on the upper-slope wall. A few terraces occurred in the eastern part of the village. Three entrances for the village are recognisable (Fig. 6). There was no clear and unified settlement structure. Most of the dwellings lay on the eastern slope. Bigger houses such as no. 53 seem to have had terraces, perhaps for gardening. Four excavation tests revealed little ‘habitation’ soil (Fig. 7). Fine, aeolian soil predominates beneath the deflated surface. Test trenches in H11 and H18 yielded SLIA sherds (Fig. 8). This settlement was little used, perhaps only for emergencies. Occasional SLIA pottery sherds came to light in the test trenches.

The site shares casement walls with the fortlet, Al Maysar M34. The settlement at Ṭīwī site Tw2 also is a related large defensive settlement, but its preservation has suffered in since road building took place around 2004.

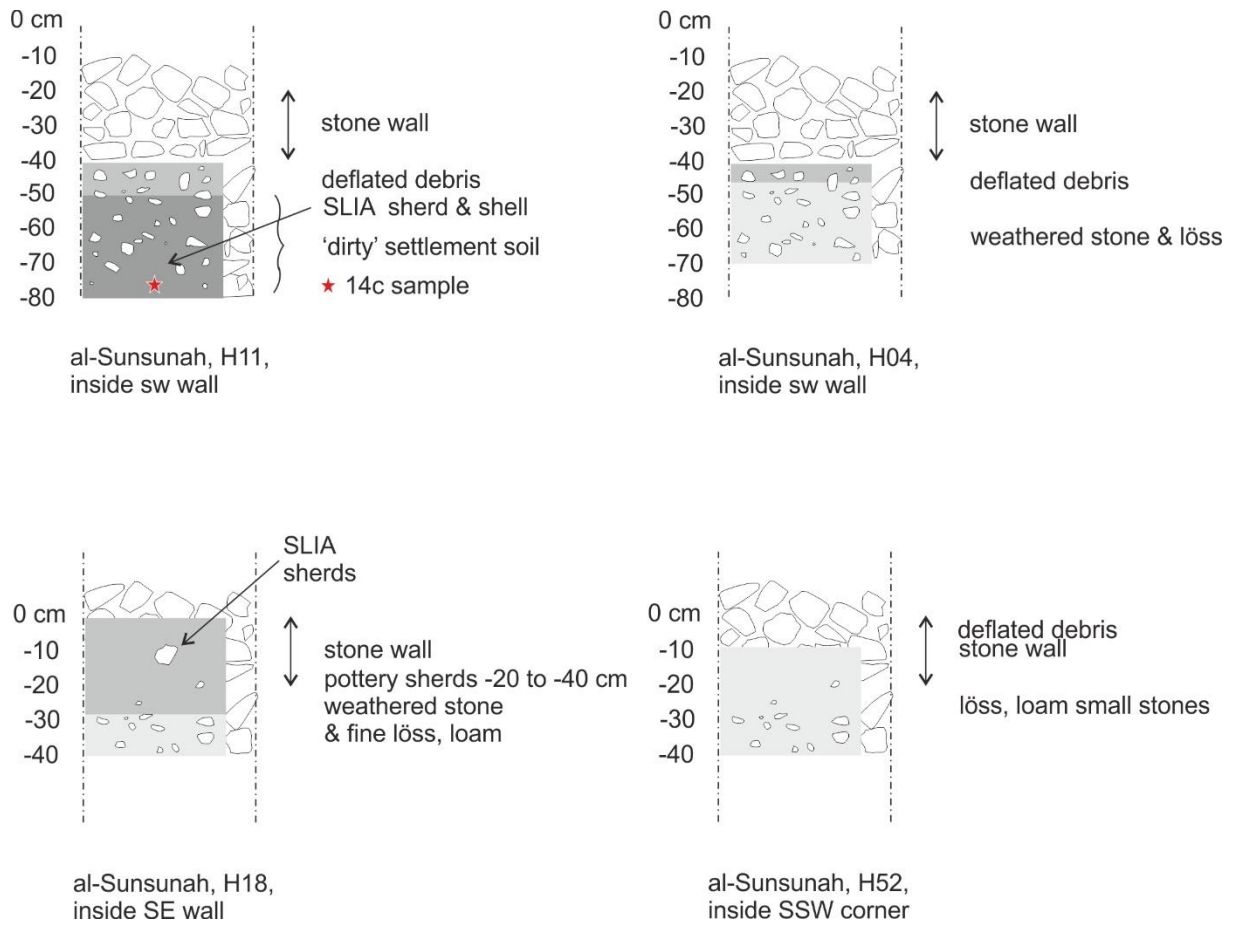


Figure 7 The four test trenches at al Ṣunṣunah, February 2024. One yielded a charcoal sample (Yule).

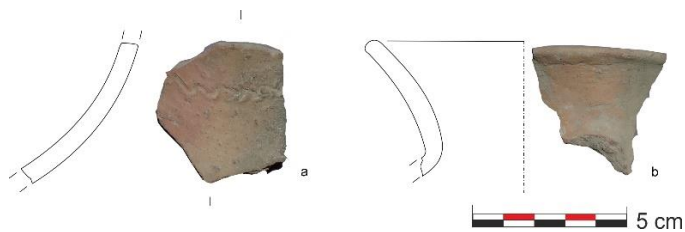


Figure 8 Diagnostic SLIA sherds from the trench H18 al Ṣunṣunah (Yule).



Figure 9 SLIA feature H35 at al Şunşunah is the best-preserved structure there (Yule).

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context	W	L	pres. H	entrance	comment	photo 1	photo 2	surface m <sup>2</sup>
1	3	5,3	1,2	SE short wall	furthest site to the NE			24.2
2	2,5	3,8	1,35	SE	Next to context 1 (=H1)			15.8
3	6	4	1,5	N-S	main entrance 1,2m width			34
4	4,5	4,7	1,5	N corner	This is a casemate next to the main entrance, NE wall 1,5m pres. height			30.35
5	4	5	1,7	S	casemate wall W of casemate 4			29
6	4	5	1,75	S	NE corner best pres.			29
7	3,3	4,2	1,8	S	much debris inside			21.36
8	2,5	4,2	0,5	SW	wall th 1,2m			17.2
9	4,3	6,7	0,5	-	L-shaped			39.81

10

3,1 3,8 1,2 E



18.68

11

3,5 5,7 1,5 SE 14C sample inside W wall



29.15

12

3,2 6,1 1 SSW E wall best pres.



28.82

13

3,2 3,5 1 SSE



17.9

14

3 10 1,2 W



43

15

3,5 7,7 0,5 SE



38.15

16

3,5 4 0,7 NE



21.5

17

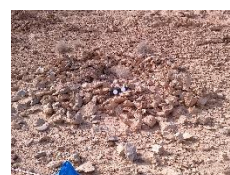
3 4,8 0,8 S corner



22.2

18

3,3 5,1 0,7 N entrance



25.23

19

2,6 2,8 0,9 - next to H18



12.68

20

4,4 3,2 1,3 SW best pres. house?



21.68

21

3,7 3 0,6 N end



17.8

22

4,1 3,2 1,1 NE



20.42

23

2,8 4,8 1,2 W side



21.04

24

3,8 7,4 1,1 E



39.32

25

4 3 0,65 W



19

26

3 5 1 N





















23

27

3,1 3,1 0,8 -



15.81

28									53
	5	8	1,1	W long wall					
29									14.36
	2,2	3,8	1	SE					
30									23.4
	3	5,1	0,9	E					
31									17.36
	2,6	4,1	1,6	W long wall					
32									22.79
	2,9	5,1	0,6	WSW					
33									27.8
	3,8	5	1	SE					
34									11.54
	2,3	2,8	0,16	none	stone square				
35									23.08
	3,3	4,6	1,4	NE wall	good pres.				
36									20.45
	2,9	4,5	1,1	S long wall					

37

3,1 3,9 0,8 S



19.09

38

3,2 5,6 0,6 W



26.72

39

2,8 6,1 1,1 SE



25.98

40

2,7 3,1 0,6 none terrace



14.17

41

3 3,5 0,8 NE wall



17

42

3 4,8 0,6 not recogn.



22.2

43

3,4 4,8 0,45 not recogn. double with H42



24.52

44

2,8 5,4 1,1 not recogn. next to H45





















23.32






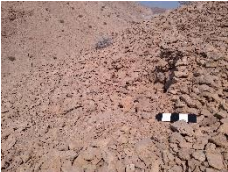












45

















2,2 4,4 1,35 NNE



16.28

46											
	3,8	5,6	0,8		not recogn.						30.68
47											
	3,1	4,1	0,9		N						19.91
48											
	3,1	4,1	1,4		S	entrance uphill					19.91
49											
	2,7	5	1,8		SE	entrance uphill					21.2
50											
	2,5	6	0,5		none	end to end w H49					23.5
51											
	1,9	4,8	0,5		not recogn.						15.82
52											
	2,7	6	1,1		NE corner	good pres.					24.9
53											
	2	6,1	0,9		N	entrance N long wall					20.3
54											
	3	6,5	1,5		S						29

55										13.04
	1,7	4,2	1,2	N	well-preserved entrance					
56										17.87
	2,7	4,1	0,6	not recogn.	parallel w H55					
57										19.91
	3,1	4,1	0,85	not recogn.	oval plan					
58										12.6
	2,4	3	0,9	S	in small wall					
59										16.48
	2,8	3,6	0,65	S	next to H58					
60										19.3
	2,5	4,8	0,65	SE	SW of H23					
61										25.65
	3,1	5,5	1,3	E						
62										18.98
	2,7	4,4	0,8	SE	S of H23					
63										45.75
	4,5	7,5	1,1	NE	W of H57					

64								23
	2	7	0,6	E	9m to H53			
65								27.12
	2,8	6,4	0,85	not recogn.	oval plan			
66								28.6
	3	6,4	1	not recogn.	7m W of H65			
67								28.44
	3,6	5,4	0,6	S	NW-SE			
68								25.68
	3,6	4,8	0,4	S?	NE-SW orientation			
69								29.36
	3,6	5,6	1,2	NE	N-S orientation			
70								11.58
	2,4	2,7	1	not recogn.	SLIA storage vessel			
71								23
	3,8	4	1,1	SE	ENE-WSW orientation			