

Survey of Central Oman, Heidelberg University & Ministry of Heritage and Culture¹

1–6 January 2018, Khalīfa Khamis al-Rasibī, Dr. Michela Gaudiello, Prof. Dr. Paul A. Yule, internal report

01.01.2018 Survey in al-ʿAmqāt, al-Dakhilīya

While certain archaeological sites in Central Oman are published in at least as a brief find note, others once preliminarily identified are 'lost'. Some of these sites perhaps no longer exist. A second goal for our survey was to monitor site preservation at different sites. A thoroughgoing mapping was not our intention. A third reason to survey is to train for photogrammetry on selected objects. The geographic positions of various sites are unknown and cannot be determined by the published maps.

A team departed from the ministry to verify the geographic position first of the excavations at al-ʿAmqāt ², which were carried out in October 1991 (Yule 2001 I, site 13.5, pp. 364–7; II Pl. 466–76). On arrival, inspection showed that the slope north-west of the garden, uphill, which contained the five excavated Late Iron Age (LIA) graves no longer existed and succumbed to road improvement (Fig. 1). Neither the graves nor the slope exist anymore. The original find-spot can be localised by means of Google Earth (UTM 40Q 615457m E, 2593218m N, 213 m alt.) and excavation photos. Only some five LIA graves were in evidence during this visit in the slope and were not readily visible (615523m E, 2593204m N, 221m alt.). On top of the slope no graves were identified.

The main new find at this site is the identification of numerous EIA graves (site 4) some 400m to the north-west of the LIA burial site. They were grouped together in three *wādīyah*, spatially separated from the LIA graves. Other concentrations occurred (sites 2 & 3) 200–300m to the east of site 1 (Fig. 2). Time did not allow us to investigate all of the *wādīyah* in the nearly 3km long north-west slope. The vast majority of the cultural remains were destroyed during the building of the motorway in the 1990s. However, research should still continue uphill from the oasis.

In addition, the EIA fort (site 5) which in 1991 G. Weisgerber mentioned as lying 100m to the south-east gave way in the 1990s to a steel communications mast (615681m E, 2593127m N, 217m alt.). No remains survived.

02.01.2018 north of Samad al-Shān, Musfa, Wariya, Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī, al-Sharqīyah

Departing from the Ministry of Heritage and Culture in al-Khuwair, we visited a site which housed a number of Early Iron Age (EIA) hut graves near the settlement of Wariya (Fig. 3)³. We visited a second site known as Musfa, which previously was incorrectly identified. G.

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² Paul A. Yule, Carmen Yule, Khalīfa Khamis al-Rasibī, Khalid al-Sawāfi, Michela Gaudiello. The shaikh, Saʿīd Masud al-Muhārbi, al-ʿAmqāt, helped us to search.

³ Paul A. Yule, Carmen Yule, Khalīfa Khamis al-Rasibī, Michela Gaudiello.

Weisgerber's informant incorrectly identified this place-name with the J. al-Ṣalaylī site 1 (see below, Fig. 4; source: Weisgerber 1980, 66, 102 figs. 71–2).

Given the poor preservation of the site, we continued on to the nearby group of EIA graves at a site previously known as 'Jebel Salayli'. The site 1 cemetery is part of a far larger settlement, mining and smelting site. Together this complex lies in a *wādīyah* roughly in the shape of a scalene triangle (380 x 130 x 400m), surrounded by mountains. Closer questioning among the local inhabitants elicited that the adjacent ophiolite mountain to the north more correctly is known as Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī (Fig. 5).

The main EIA cemetery there (site 1) consists of 41 standing hut graves of varying size (Fig. 6) inside the valley. Ordered in rows, their entrances all face west and cover an area of nearly 80 x 50m. Although most of the roofs have caved in, the graves are in a relatively good condition. We recorded a small one photogrammetrically for 3D imagery, which measures 2.0 x 1.6 x 1.0m. Its western end is damaged presumably from robbing. Most, but not all of the graves, show a sandwich construction of the walls. Five further groups were localised, the main ones were assigned the numbers, sites 2 and 3.

Sites 2 and 3 consists of two large groups of c. 30 and c. 50 outside the valley, to the north-west EIA hut graves, which we could hardly map or exactly count (Figs. 7 & 8). They were far less regular in the orientation of the grave access.

The main site is important for its slag (Fig. 9) and mine (Fig. 10) which are datable to the Islamic period (Hauptmann in Weisgerber 1980, 66, 73 fig. 21, 102 figs. 71–2). Several ruined houses (Fig. 11) lay between site and the mine and especially near site 1. Although the Muslim period houses are built partly of slag, those of the EIA use exclusively at this site, dark-grey, fine-grained granite. Photogrammetric recording shows the good preservation of these graves (Fig. 12). Time lacked to record the EIA and Islamic period settlement remains.

Importance: The J. al-Ṣalaylī site is Oman's best-preserved site for prehistoric and Early Islamic copper mining. In addition, it contains the country's best preserved Early Iron Age hut graves. Finally, for the time being, the site itself is intact, but signs of encroachment are clearly present on its edges: bull-dozing to the immediate north and a new house on the edge of the site.

03.01.2018 al-Baṭīn, Shenah, Negda Madirah, al-Sharqīyah

Proceeding to al-Baṭīn, we sought the two LIA graves excavated by G. Weisgerber in 1981 (Yule 2001 I, 368 site 13.8). We found neither nor the alleged multi-period copper smelting (Yule–Weisgerber 1996, 141), including a possible Hafit Period production.

Nearby, at Shenah 1 we located a Samad LIA cemetery (Figs. 13–15) with c. 30 graves which reportedly was partially excavated around 2008 by a team from the Sultan Qabus University. In it we also identified the possible remains of a trilith. Shenah 2 is best known

for its excellent rock art (Fig. 16). We photographed and noted recent vandalism of the site (Fig. 17).

48 km to the east-south-east, we visited what was published as the LIA site of 'al-Dhurra, Wādī Aghdā' (Doe 1977, 48 site 47b; Yule 2001 I, 394 site 13.53; Yule 2017a). As published, the site still exists in the plain, next to the wādī, and lies next to a new dam, built perhaps 10 years ago. The teacher, Muḥammad Ibn Rāšid Ibn Mālik al-Razīqī, of the school in al-Nibā' did not recognise the published place-name, and promptly orally identified the mountain as Qirn Abū Lihīyah (قرن أبو لهية) and the plain-site to its immediate west as Negda Madirah (نجد مدره)⁴ and the wādī as Wādī Siwī, not Wādī Aghdā'. Evidently Siwī is a local name and Aghdā' is the larger one (Gazetteer of Oman). Since our last visit in 25.01.2017, the major change is that we took time to climb the adjacent mountain, in the short time available to us (Figs. 18–19). It is covered with ruined dwellings and Samad LIA pottery sherds. Several ruined structures which may be dated with more detailed study. An undated vertical shaft perforates the peak there. However, there is no trace of copper ore in the immediate area. Nonetheless, anciently copper was mined and produced nearby in al-Nibā' (Yule–Weisgerber 1996, 141–2).

04.01.2018 al-Ġawābī trilith site, al-Sharqīyah

Given their relatively good preservation, we visited the triliths at al-Ġawābī, 110 air km to the south-east, and proceeded to record a section of one trilith string photogrammetrically. However, the tarmac road cuts right through the 10 trilith strings (Figs. 20–21). Before it was asphalted, the same truck road badly damaged the site as we know from photos made in 1986 (Fig. 22). In any case, the 10 trilith strings are composed of one or more sections extended from each other with a gap of a few meters between. All ash pits occurred on the north side of the stone alignments. We attempted to record one section of one of these strings photogrammetrically (Fig. 23).

05.01.2018 al-Rawdah-Muqata near Samad, al-Sharqīyah

In 1989, G. Weisgerber excavated two graves at al-Rawdah/Muqata of the Samad LIA. While they were at that time localised (Yule 2001 I, 369 site 13.60), since the reference data used were false, this incorrectly placed the grave 830m to the north-east. In all some 10 graves of different periods were sighted (ibid.).

We searched for a trilith and a mining area which in the 1980s G. Weisgerber in an internal report sighted north-east of Lizq at the junction of the Wādī La'la and Wādī Mağazah ('Andām). It might lie near UTM 40Q c. 624119m E, c. 2513706m N. Our time ran out and we were unsuccessful.

⁴ His Arabic writing.

06.01.2018 'Abāyah, al-Sharqīyah

In 1976 B. Doe and B. de Cardi located three sites in the Wādī Bani Batash. The grave site at 'Abāyah 2 (Doe 1977, 39, pl. Xa; Yule 2001 I, 363 site 13.1) is 1.5km north-west of Mazāra town and 6.6 km west-south-west of the big bridge from the motorway into Qurīyat (Fig. 23). Doe's site 2 which he describes consists of 11 'pillbox' graves. His site 3 consisted of 13 pillbox graves. A rectangular grave and an oval stone setting comprise site 4.

To judge from his published photo (pl. Xa) we located his site 2. 10 graves are preserved. Five had a north-east/south-west long axis, one had a E/W long axis and the remained could not be oriented. Three small hand-made sherds appeared to be of LIA date, but were too small to be positively identified as of the Samad LIA.

2.5 km to the west at the highest point of the 'Abāyah oasis settlement, a fort stands which was used over several periods, possibly into recent times (Fig. 25). A few small LIA sherds lay on the surface.

Cultural Resource management priorities

The settlements, cemeteries, mine and smelting sites of J. al-Ṣalaylī form the most important site of those we visited. It is large and still surprisingly intact. It consists of the group of 41 EIA hut graves (site 1), a group of some 30 EIA such graves (site 2), yet another with 50 grave (site 3), extensive early Islamic slag heaps (site 4) and the mine of the same period, at least in its late use (site 5).

This site must be placed under protection since it is being encroached on: Directly bordering on the sites 2 and 3 the area is being bulldozed for building. At the very least, signs must be put up immediately. This site is shut-off from the outside and would make an excellent park facility.

The sites in 'Abāyah are threatened by bull-doing encroachment and three of Doe's sites could not be located during our short visit.

Conclusion

Our purpose was to locate known sites which might easily since their discovery have succumbed. We can make a few observations regarding interesting selected sites. The EIA hut graves at J. al-Ṣalaylī had different entrance orientations: At site 1 all faced west. However, at sites 2 and 3 there is much more variety. Till now only the EIA hut entrances were systematically observed at Bilād al-Mā'dīn (UTM 40Q 628528m E, 2542193m N, alt. 729 m), where they were nearly random (Yule 2001 I, 40 Table 4.9). A rough ad hoc tally of the other hut graves during our brief visit resulted showed the orientation within a group to be roughly consistent, but between different groups to differ.

Graves as at 'Abāyah, are unlike those of the Samad LIA (Yule 2017b), as presumed in 2001. The little pottery scattered around these graves is hand-made and similar to that of the

Samad LIA. The pottery found at the nearby fortified settlement also has affinities with the Samad LIA pottery. Before deciding, whether or not it belongs to the main Samad pottery group, it would be wise to first see more of it. It was a stroke of luck to identify two fortified settlements of the LIA, one at 'Abāyah 4 and another at Negda Madirah. With these two new examples, Samad LIA fortified settlements seem perhaps to be the norm at that time.

We would like to return and finish the work. We only had four days in the field.

no.	site designation	UTM 40Q E	N	alt. m	designation	period	area	fig.
1	‘Abāyah 2	687382	2562626	139	Graves	LIA	250m ²	22
2	‘Abāyah 4	687738	2573414	195	fortified settlement	LIA	300m ²	23
3	al-‘Amqāt 1	615547	2593218	215	Graves	LIA	250m ²	1
4	al-‘Amqāt 2	615628	2593200	234	Graves	EIA	300m ²	2
5	al-‘Amqāt 3	615732	2593090	233	Graves	EIA	300m ²	1
6	al-‘Amqāt 4	615054	2593441	214	Graves	EIA	300m ²	1
7	al-‘Amqāt 5	615575	2593164	224	fort, destroyed	EIA	?	1
8	al-Baṭīn 1	672578	2519360	433?	graves?	LIA	?	-
9	al-Ġawābī	759506	2438816	40	triliths, arab. <i>‘athāfy</i>	LIA	2000m ²	20–23
10	al-Rawdah-Muqata	626992	2531404	624	Graves	LIA	1000m ²	-
11	Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 1	631901	2536305	707	Graves	EIA	360m ²	5–6, 12
12	Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 2	631235	2536611	693	Graves	EIA	5000m ²	7
13	Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 3	631311	2536763	702	Graves	EIA	5000m ²	8
14	Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 4	632056	2536283	708	slag fields	early Islamic	>2000m ²	9
15	Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 5	632313	2536336	756	mine entrance	multi-period	30m ²	10
16	Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 6	diff. ones	diff. ones	716	building ruins	early Islamic	-	11
17	Musfa	631834	2540046	736	Graves	EIA	4000m ²	4
18	Negda Madirah (plain)	675048	2514892	416	settlement	LIA	10000m ²	18
19	Qirn Abū Lihīyah	675252	2514867	446	fortified settlement	LIA	78000m ²	19
20	Shenah 1	679861	2531593	582	graves, trilith?	LIA	3000m ²	13–14
21	Shenah 2	680435	2532136	586	rock art	unknown	1000m ²	16–17
22	Wādī La’la/Wādī Majazah	?	?	?	trilith, Cu smelting	LIA	?	-
23	Wariya	631734	2540125	755	Graves	EIA	4000m ²	3

Table 1. Sites visited between 01–06.01.2018 in central Oman.

Sources cited:

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2017a

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2017b

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Images:

1. Al-ʿAmqāt, Google Earth.
2. Al-ʿAmqāt, site 2.
3. Wariya EIA cemetery site.
4. Musfa EIA cemetery site.
5. Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī, Google earth image.
6. Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 1, EIA hut graves.
7. Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 2, EIA hut tombs.
8. Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 3, EIA hut graves.
9. Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 4, Early Islamic slag field.
10. Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 5, multi-period mine entrance.
11. Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 6, ruined building, early Islamic period.
12. Ġebel al-Ṣalaylī 1, grave 30, from Fig. 6, photogrammetric view
13. Shenah overview, Google Earth image.
14. Shenah 1 LIA cemetery perimeter.
15. Shenah 1 view of LIA cemetery toward nearest buildings.
16. Shenah 2 rock art vandalised with spray paint.
17. Shenah 2 rock art.
18. Negda Madirah, toward the west-north-west.
19. Qirn Abū Lihīyah, possible mine shaft sunk into the mountain.
20. Al-Ġawābi, perimeter of LIA trilith site.
21. Al-Ġawābi, one of the LIA trilith strings, 4.1.2018.
22. Al-Ġawābi, LIA trilith site, 1986.
23. Al-Ġawābi, photogrammetric evaluation of a trilith section
24. ʿAbāyah 2, LIA graves, Wādī Bani Batāsh.
25. ʿAbāyah 4, multi-period fort.

All images were made by Paul Yule except Figs. 11, 12 & 23 from Michela Gaudiello.



Fig. 1. Al-'Amqāt, Google Earth.



Fig. 2. Al-'Amqāt 2, cemetery site.



Fig. 3. Wariya, EIA cemetery site.



Fig. 4. Musfa, EIA cemetery site.

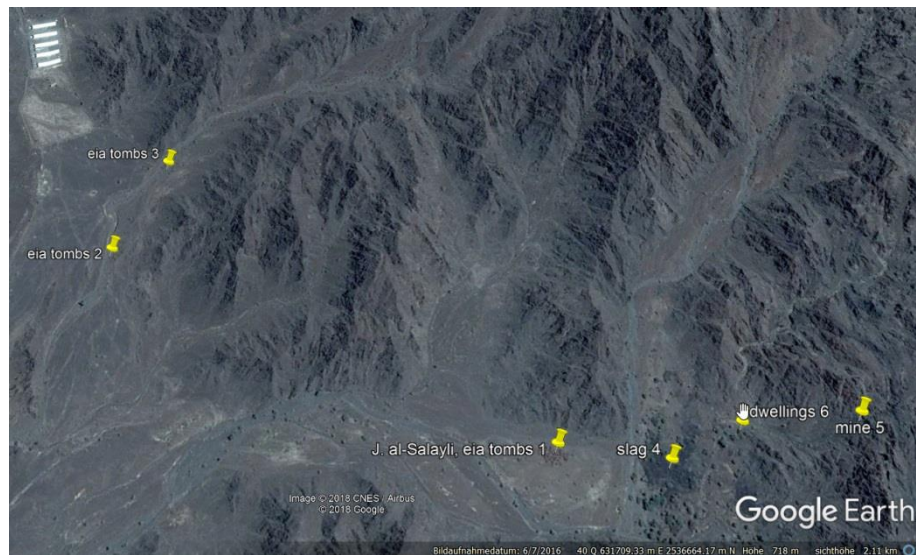


Fig. 5. Ğebel al-Şalaylī, Google earth image.



Fig. 6. Ğebel al-Şalaylī 1, EIA hut grave cemetery.



Fig. 7. Ğebel al-Şalaylī 2, EIA hut grave cemetery.



Fig. 8. Ğebel al-Şalaylī 3, EIA hut grave cemetery.



Fig. 9. Gebel al-Şalaylī 4, Early Islamic slagfield.



Fig. 10. Gebel al-Şalaylī 5, multi-period mine entrance.



Fig. 11. Ġebel al-Şalaylī 6, early Islamic building remains.

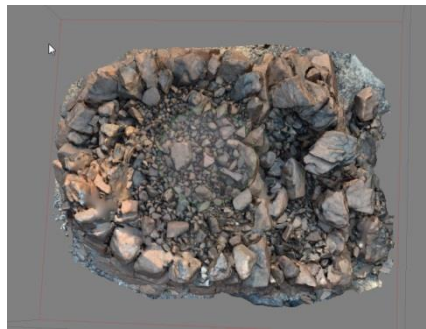
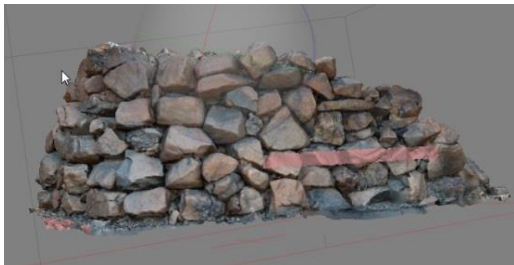


Fig. 12. Ġebel al-Şalaylī 1, grave 30, photogrammetric view.

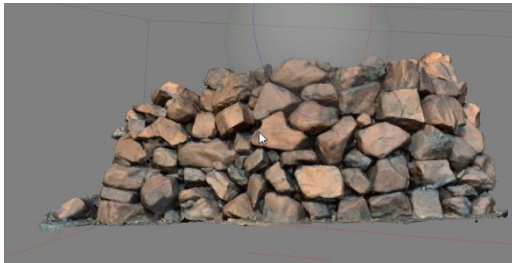




Fig. 13. Shenah overview, Google Earth image.



Fig. 14. Shenah 1, numbered flags mark the LIA cemetery perimeter. The red lines are our walking tracks.



Fig. 15. Shenah 1, view of LIA cemetery toward nearest buildings.



Fig. 16. Shenah 2, rock art.



Fig. 17. Shenah 2, rock art vandalised with spray paint.



Fig. 18. Negda Madirah plain is in the foreground, viewed from the mountain toward the west-north-west.

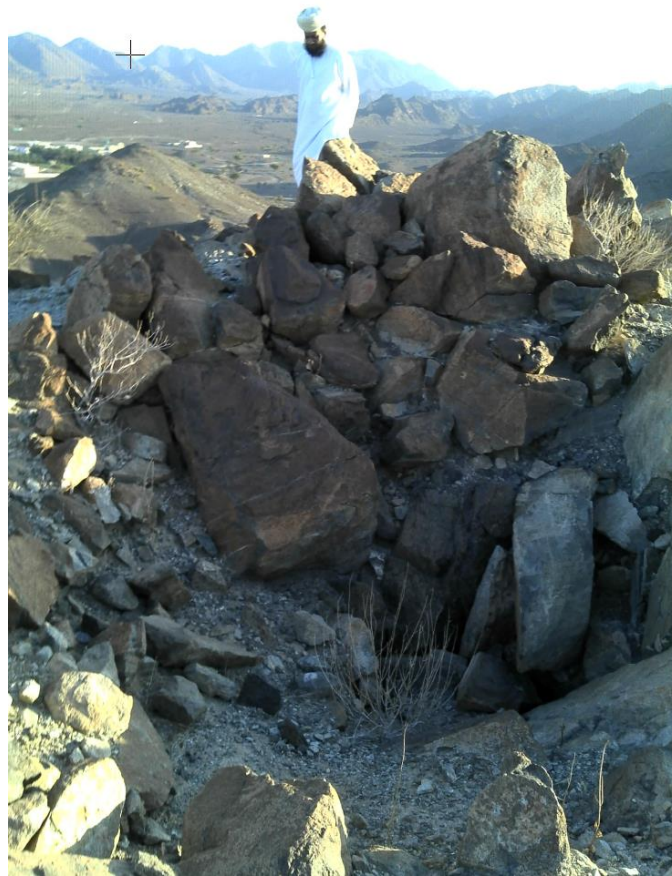


Fig. 19. Qirn Abū Lihīyah, vertical mine shaft into the mountain.

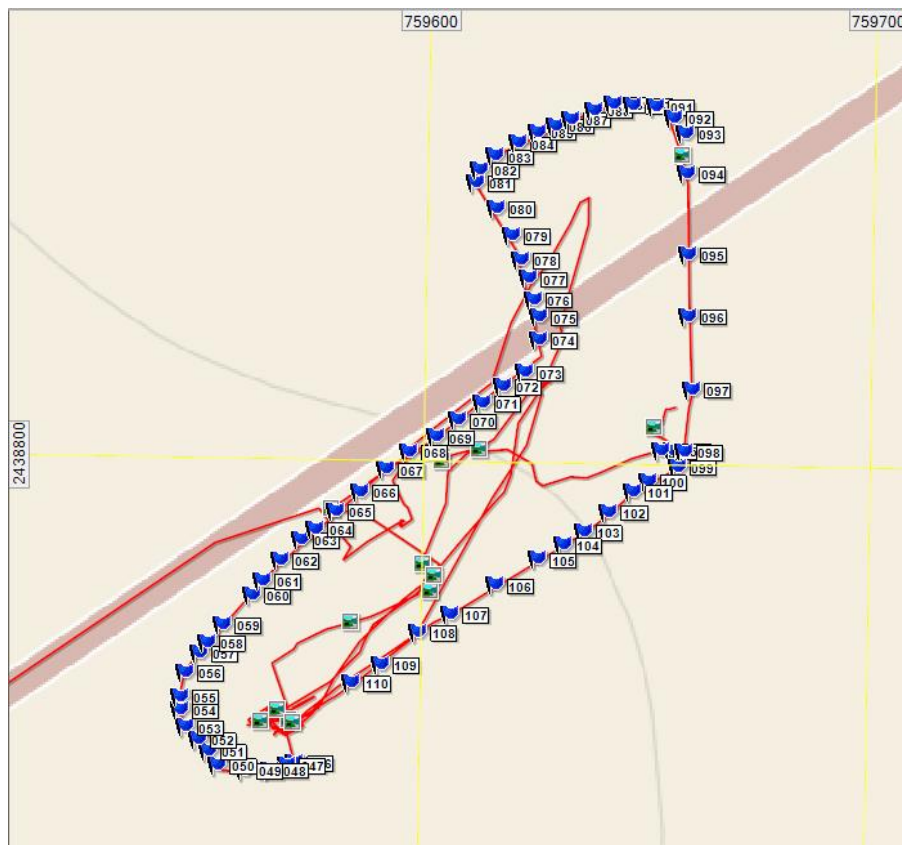


Fig. 20. Al-Ġawābi, the numbered flags define the perimeter of the trilith site. The red lines are our walking tracks.



Fig. 21. Al-Ġawābi, one of the trilith strings.



Fig. 22. Al-Ġawābi, trilith site, photographed 1986. Cf. Fig. 21.

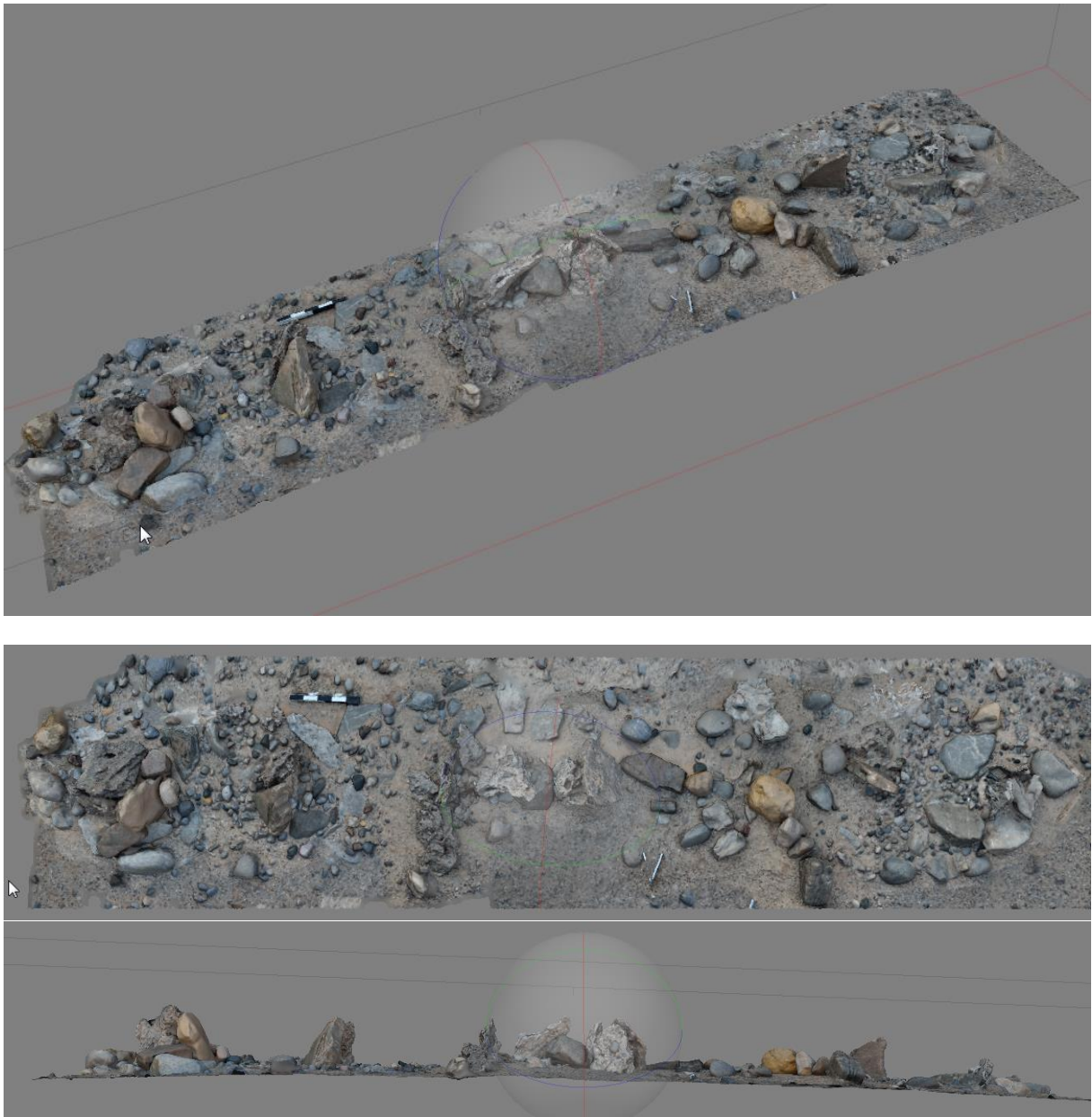


Fig. 23. Al-Ġawābi, trilith, photogrammetric rendering of a trilith section.



Fig. 24. 'Abāyah 2, LIA graves in the Wādī Bani Batāsh.



Fig. 25. 'Abāyah 4, multi-period fort.