

AL BATINAH

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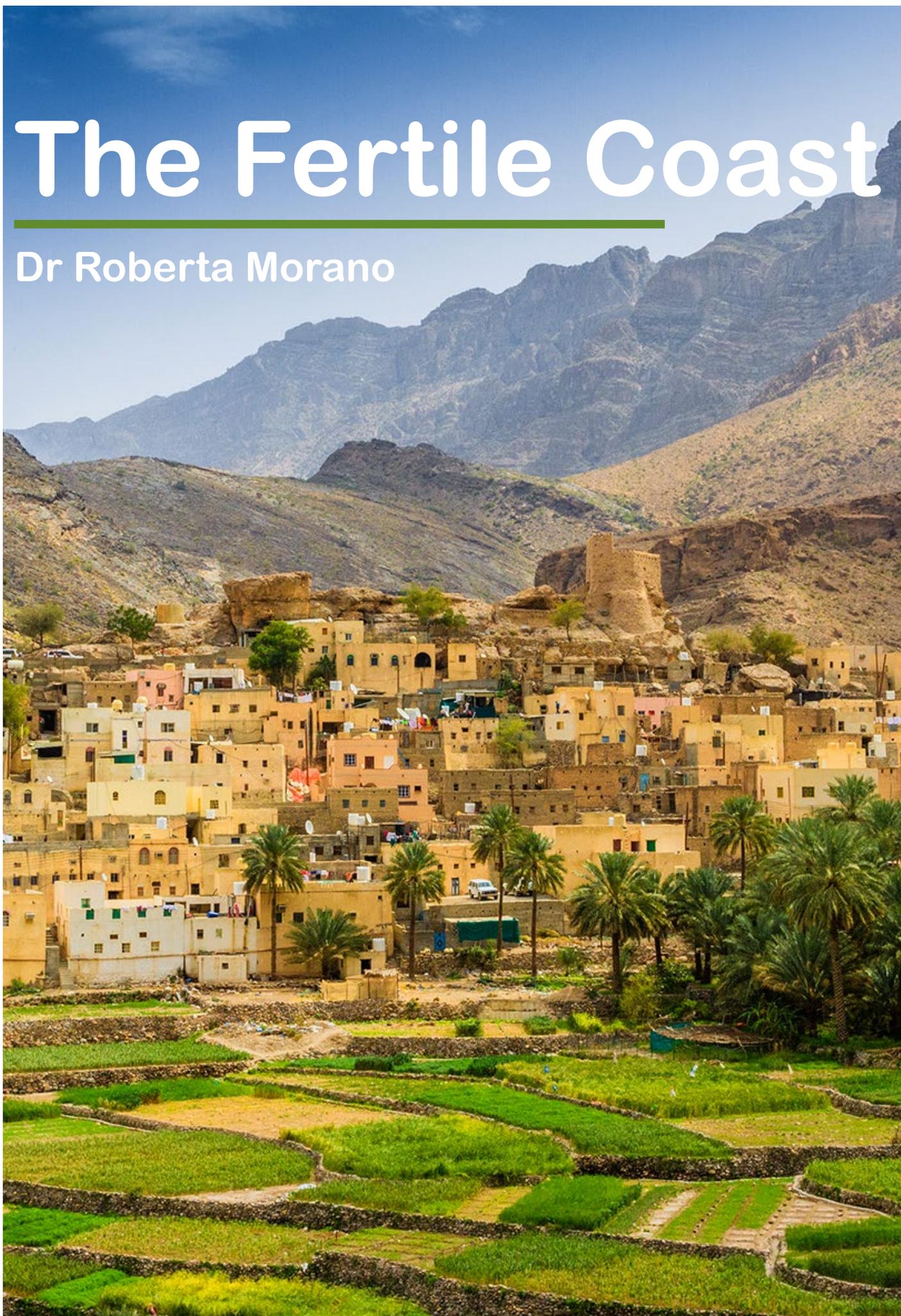
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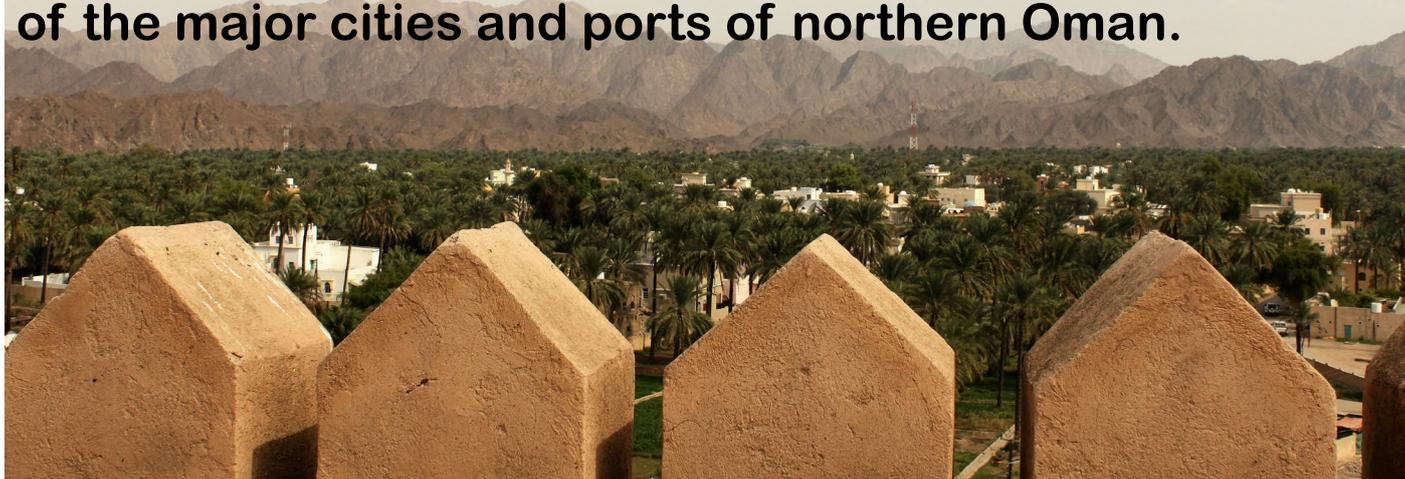
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The Fertile Coast

Dr Roberta Morano



The al-Batinah region of Oman forms the fertile coastal strip that extends for almost 300km between the Hajar Mountains and the Gulf of Oman. Split into North al-Batinah and South al-Batinah in 2011, the governorate is the most populous of the Sultanate and includes most of the major cities and ports of northern Oman.



It consists of twelve provinces (or wilayāt): Sohar, ar-Rustaq, Shinas, Liwa, Saham, al-Khaburah, Suwayq, Nakhal, Wadi al-Māwil, al-Awabi, al-Musannah and Barka.

The name originates from the Arabic word *baṭn* (“stomach, belly”): if we consider the Hajar mountain chain as the backbone of Oman, then the al-Batinah governorate would be its “belly” and the az-Zahirah governorate (cf. Arabic *ẓahr*) its “back”.

The region is entwined with the history of the Sultanate, which is deeply rooted in its language and customs. Vestiges of this history are found, for example, in the castle towns of Nakhal and Rustaq, in the fishing villages of Barka and Sohar, or in its beautiful and evocative wadis, such as Wadi Bani Kharus, Wadi Bani Awf and Wadi Mistal.

Because of its strategic position at the centre of the Arabian Sea and between the major trade routes in the Indian Ocean, the Sultanate of Oman soon became one of the major junctions in the region: at the beginning of the 7th century CE, coinciding with the advent of Islam, the country was leading in the field of naval construction. Omani sailors were known for their abilities and navigational skills, for their expeditions towards the East African coast and the Indian shores,

as well as for their harbours. It was an Omani, Abū Ubāyda Abdallāh bin al-Qāsim, who sailed from the Persian Gulf to Canton (i.e. China) and returned: 7000 km in about two years, and 800 years before Columbus reached America.

The maritime history of Oman is tightly linked to its precious coastal towns: in the 10th century CE, the Arab geographer al-Istakhri described Sohar as “the most populous and wealthy town in Oman”, adding that “it is not possible to find on the shore of the Persian Sea nor in all the land of Islam a city more rich in fine buildings or in foreign wares than Sohar”.

Allegedly the hometown of Sinbad – the fantasy sailor from *The Thousand and One Nights* – Sohar was famous, throughout its history, for its ancient harbour and copper trade, which was shipped all the way to Mesopotamia. In al-Idrisi’s *Geography* (Ar. *Nuzhat al-Mushtaq*, “The Pleasant Journeys”), dated 1154 CE, Sohar is described as “the most ancient town of Oman, and the richest in fine buildings. Merchants from all over the world would come on its shores to trade all sorts of goods”.

The territory which now forms the governorate of al-Batinah has been the site of numerous foreign dominations over the centuries: the Sasanian Empire (224-651 CE) built various forts along

the coast to defend the territory from the Arab tribes coming from Yemen, and centuries later the Portuguese (c. 1500 CE) dominated the Indian Ocean, settling on the coastal plain of Batinah to establish better control over the area.

The city of Rustaq, in the western Hajar Mountains, was the capital of Oman during the era of Imam Nasir bin Murshid al-Yarubi (1624-1649 CE), belonging to the dynasty which enforced Omani prominence in the Arabian Sea, expanding towards the East African coast to the West and towards the Persian shores to the East. The name of the city, however, originates from the Middle Persian *rostag* (“district”), the term used by the Sasanian Empire to indicate an administrative district. The fort of Rustaq, which overlooks the city, dates back to the pre-Islamic era and consists of four towers, a mosque, an armoury and four separate houses on three floors.

16km from Rustaq lies the district of al-Awabi, with the homonymous town and the renowned Wadi Bani Kharus. The town’s name derives from the Arabic *awābī* (singular *ābye*), which means “cultivated soil”, and indeed the town is home to numerous palm gardens, crops and goat breeding fields.

The Wadi Bani Kharus is a valley that goes about 26km deep into the Hajar Mountains, ending at Jabal Akhdar (“the green mountain”), the second-highest peak in the chain after Jebel Shams.

The tribe of Bani Kharus played a prominent role in the Omani Ibadism, providing numerous Imams and scholars to the group. The wadi, famed for its geological interest, is rich in petroglyphs, picturing men on horseback and camels, and solitary mosques that testify to the lives and works of these Imams.

This area of al-Batinah also offers specific linguistic traits: for example, the use of *hest* instead of *wāgid* (“much, many”), which comes from the Persian verb *hast* (“to exist”). People in the area also use rare Swahili loanwords, such as *titun* (“newborn”) – from the Swahili root *toto* (“small, little”) – or *mkebbe* (“round tupperware”), from Swahili *mkebe* (“tin, vase”).



Wadi Bani Kharus

Nakhal



Nakhal is famously known for its fort, which dominates the town. The fort has a long-running history and is a testimony to the Persian presence in the area before the 7th century CE. Constructed in 1834 by Iman Said bin Sultan on the ruins of a pre-Islamic structure, the fort is now a museum, exhibiting a historic armoury and a wonderful view of the Batinah plain and its palm gardens.

On the shores of the Gulf of Oman, in South Batinah, Barka is a thriving coastal town, home to a great fishing community. The town is renowned for its halwa, a typical Omani sweet made of cardamom, sugar, saffron, almonds, flour and rose water.

Barka



The Arabic vernaculars spoken in the region of al-Batinah are extremely rich in ancient traits and words of foreign origin. The language beautifully mirrors the history and traditions of a region which has witnessed the passage of foreign populations over the centuries, and whose ports have been at the centre of trade routes in the Indian Ocean and key sites for naval constructions for a long time. Here, Persians and Portuguese have established their dominion at different times, the former leaving traces in the names of towns and bays, and the latter leaving vestiges in the nautical lexicon of Oman.

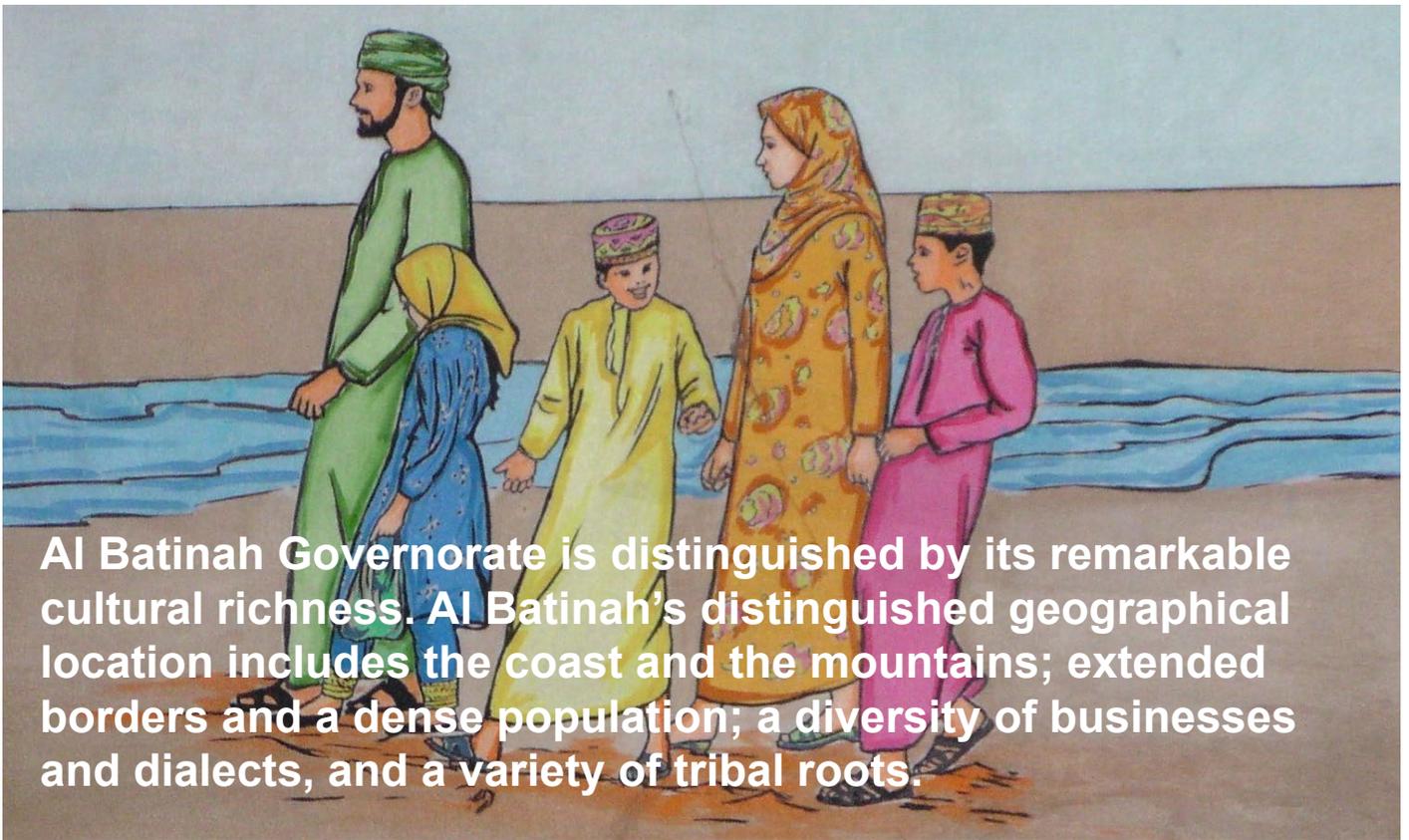
About Dr Roberta Morano

Dr Roberta Morano is a Visiting Postdoctoral Fellow at Leeds Arts and Humanities Research Institute (University of Leeds, UK). Her doctoral thesis, entitled “The Arabic dialect spoken in the district of al-Awābī, northern Oman”, gathered lexical data from the district concerning flora and fauna, traditional methods of healing, cooking, and clothing. She also explored foreign borrowing and specific linguistic traits in the vernaculars of the area and extensively researched al-Batinah’s historical connections with Persia and the East African coast. She wrote various articles on the syntax and lexicon of Omani Arabic, also investigating the relationship between linguistic diversity and identity in northern Oman.



Omani Traditional Dress

Rahma Said



Al Batinah Governorate is distinguished by its remarkable cultural richness. Al Batinah's distinguished geographical location includes the coast and the mountains; extended borders and a dense population; a diversity of businesses and dialects, and a variety of tribal roots.

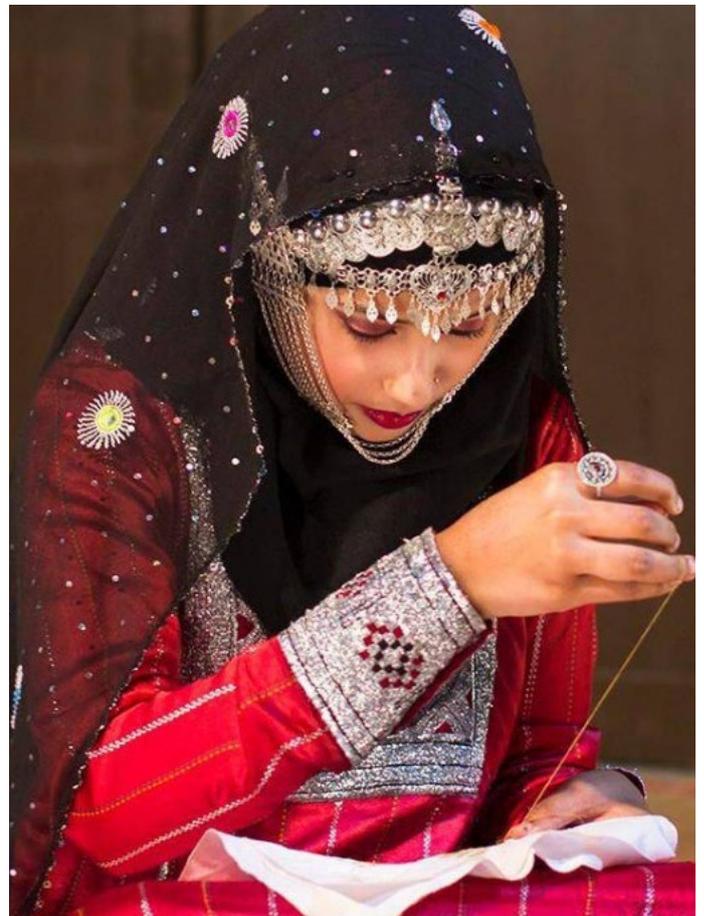
All this made Al-Batinah a centre for internal migration, an important node for external communications, and a unique gateway to Oman's culture.

Al-Batinah Governorate is also famous for its many cultural aspects that can be highlighted, such as craft industries, including shipbuilding, jewellery making, textile manufacturing, and others. Not forgetting folk arts, such as Al-Azi, Al-Malad, Al-Wailiya, Hambal, Al-Taghrood, and others, in addition to songs, folk tales, and many more tangible and intangible cultural products.

Many decades have passed since the first creation of these cultural products, and yet there are still discussions, for instance, about what Omani traditional women's costumes represent in Oman's wider culture, as a visual image and historical memory. Anyone aware of Oman's history is aware of the reasons: the diversity, craftsmanship, and dazzling details, as well as the rarity associated with wearing Omani traditional women's clothing nowadays.

The women's costumes in the governorates of North Al-Batinah share much with the fashion of women in the governorates of Musandam and Al-Dhahirah. As for the rest of Al-Batinah, their clothes are similar to Muscat and Al-Dakhiliya,

with elements similar to the costumes of Al-Shar-kiyah. This dress is called the "Al Duwary" dress, and is worn on the top of the "dishdasha". The most prominent features of this costume are the robe, the long veil, the multicolours, and the distinctive trimmings.



The woman wears a long, multi-coloured robe decorated with different drawings, and the sleeves are embroidered with golden or silver threads called “al-zari”, then the pants that are characterised by tightness from the bottom and with embroidered patterns, and finally a long, brightly coloured “shawl”, often the same colour as the robe and pants, or sometimes different from the two. There are many types of Omani traditional women’s costumes that are used according to their purpose. For instance, the wedding dress that contains different embroidered threads, and crystal and coloured stones are also used to decorate it in an attractive and fine-art style. Another type of costume is for official visits, made of silk or chiffon. Dresses for home are commonly made of comfortable, soft cotton with different colours and patterns.

Omani women still weave their own traditional costumes individually by hand. This means that there hasn’t been any local factories for the production of Omani traditional women’s costumes in a way that could constitute a local industry, despite the great demand for the dresses.

Some women still practice sewing to make these dresses, but this practice is limited to only sewing for themselves or close family members. The reason for the lack of development of a local industry may be attributed to the long time needed to create a single dress, the necessary accuracy and skill, and the fact it still relies on manual rather than mechanical labour. It is possible to add to this the fear of this craft slipping from the

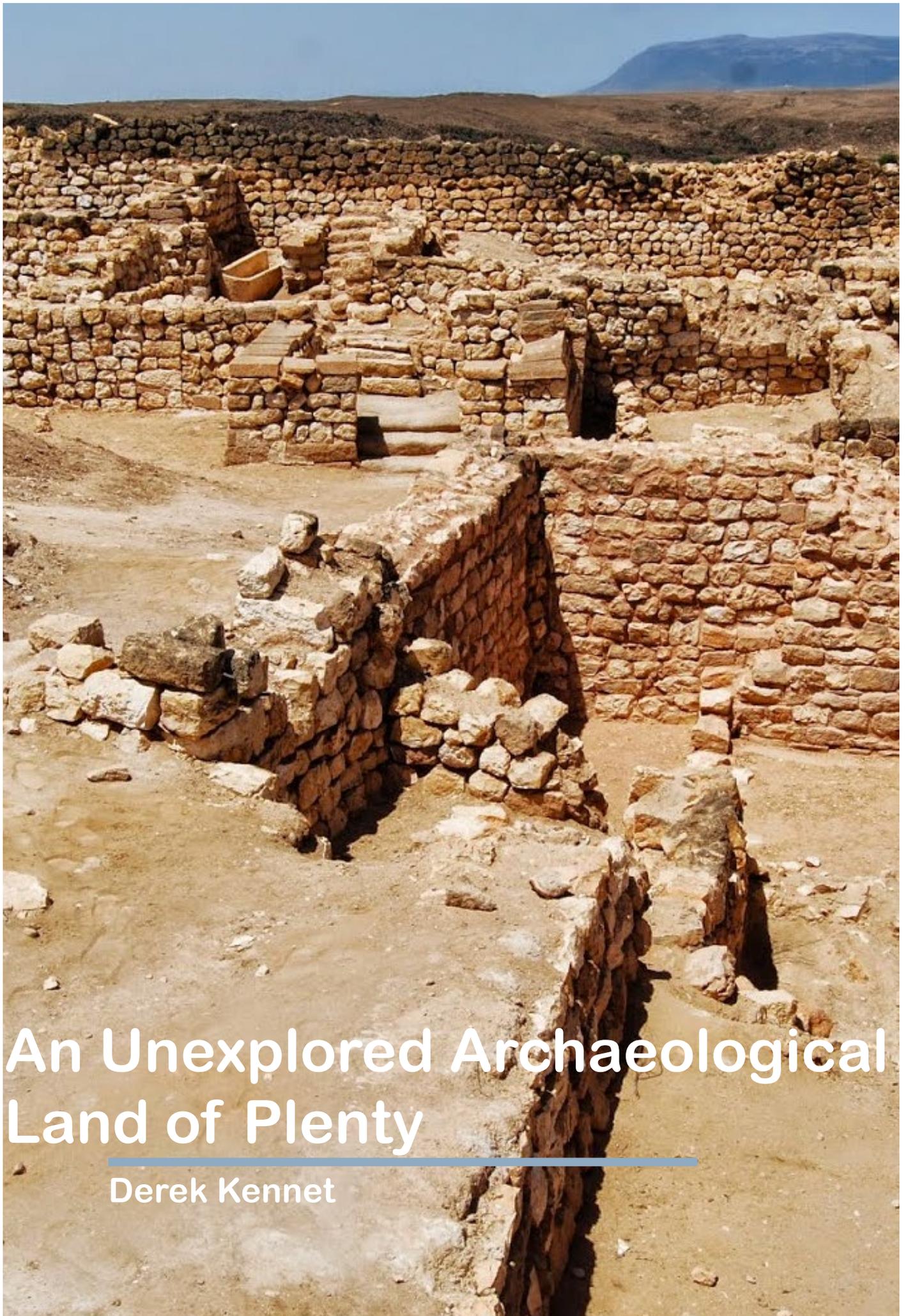
hands of the Omanis to foreign workers and the fear that technology will undercut local artisans.

Several governmental and non-governmental institutions, such as the National Museum, the Omani Women’s Associations and others have contributed to documenting the traditional Omani women’s costumes. In addition to the local and international research efforts, there are several studies, papers and research projects documenting the details of the Omani traditional costumes and the varying characteristics of each “Wilaya” in Al Batinah in particular, and Oman in general. However, the main role falls on the shoulders of those ladies who are practising this craft, and the people of the governorate in general, to provide more efforts to define their unique and spectacular women’s costume to keep it from disappearing. However, if it is bound to disappear, there should be strenuous efforts to document, preserve and record it as a cultural product of human movement, the creativity of a people’s hands, and important part of the world’s memory.

About Rahma Said Al-Kalbani

Experienced Specialist with a demonstrated history of working in the higher education sector. Social Researcher, with a Master of Arts focused on Sociology of Culture. Research interests are related to social life and cultural identities such as music, clothes & languages.

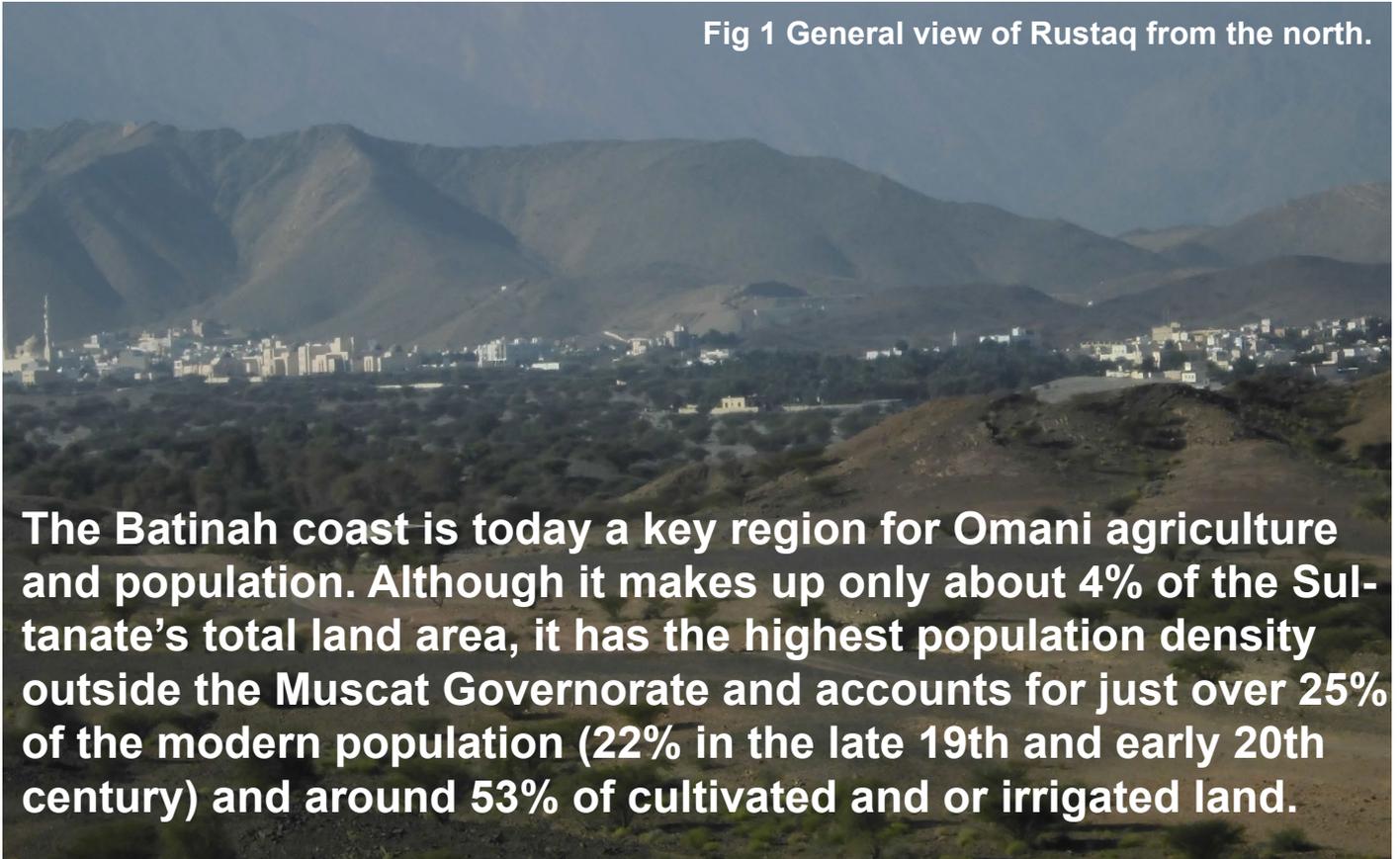




An Unexplored Archaeological Land of Plenty

Derek Kennet

Fig 1 General view of Rustaq from the north.



The Batinah coast is today a key region for Omani agriculture and population. Although it makes up only about 4% of the Sultanate's total land area, it has the highest population density outside the Muscat Governorate and accounts for just over 25% of the modern population (22% in the late 19th and early 20th century) and around 53% of cultivated and or irrigated land.

Given these figures, it might be expected to have been the location of similarly high levels of ancient settlement and thereby a great number of archaeological sites. However, the Ministry of Heritage and Culture's list of key archaeological sites demonstrates that this is not the case – with the exception of Sohar and its surrounding areas and one or two other locations, the Batinah appears to be almost empty of key national sites.

The reason for this is simply a lack of archaeological exploration. Due to the heavy agricultural presence and deep sediment deposition close to the coast, archaeological sites are not well preserved or are not easily visible, and archaeological research teams have therefore tended to focus their work elsewhere in Oman in areas such as Bat, Bisya, Ras al-Jinz, Ras al-Hadd, Maysar etc.

The first archaeological research on the Batinah was a series of excavations in Sohar in the 1950s carried out through the American Foundation for the Study of Man, but given its significance, the Batinah remained relatively unexplored until very recently when Dr Nasser al-Jahwari from Sultan Qaboos University, began a survey in the Saham region, whilst a Dutch team from Leiden has recently worked in the Wadi Jizzi region, and a Brit-

ish team from Durham University around Rustaq. The construction of the Batinah Express Highway (2014 onwards) also led to survey and rescue excavation in advance of road construction and thereby led to the discovery of a number of archaeological sites.

Knowing that many more important archaeological sites still remain to be discovered we are still not in a position to assess fully the nature of ancient settlement on the Batinah, but we can say more now than would have been possible just a few years ago.

The archaeological sites that are known tend to cluster in a number of key areas. Firstly, at the northern limits of the Batinah there is Sohar, where the Wadi Jizzi comes down to meet the sea, and, at the southern end, there is the Seeb/al-Khoud area, where the Wadi Sumail does the same. These two wadis were key trade routes in ancient times – indeed up until the 20th century, camel caravans still plied them regularly and they are still major modern roads today. In the middle there is Rustaq, which is also linked to the interior by an ancient route. But Rustaq is unique in being situated at the back of the plain, close to the mountains.

Sohar is an internationally famous site of histor-

ic interest. It has the honour of having been the first true town in Oman’s history – it emerged in the early Islamic era between the 8th and the 9th centuries as an important sea-trade emporium famed across the Indian Ocean as far as China, India and East Africa. Its fortunes have since come and gone, but it remains a key town today and is now, once again, the main port of Oman. Much earlier than this, in the Bronze Age, the dense deposits of copper ore in the Sohar hinterland made the area a focus for early merchants from Mesopotamia (Iraq) and the Indus Valley (Pakistan) in search of the key commodity, thus opening up Oman to cultural influence from more developed parts of the world as early as 5,000 years ago and deeply affecting its own development. The 4,000-year-old Bronze Age cemetery in the nearby Wadi Suq has yielded important grave goods. Recent work has thrown up Sasanian-period (3rd – 7th AD) burials, Bronze Age settlements as well as collective graves and a wealth of evidence of agricultural fields and villages dating to the last 2,000 years.

Seeb was probably almost as significant as Sohar in the medieval era, although it is not well preserved. All that remains today are fragments of glazed Abbasid and Chinese pottery which can be found scattered on the sandy ground between modern houses, roads and roundabouts. It was once one of the key sea ports of Oman; it connected important towns such as Nizwa with the sea.

Rustaq is of similar importance, though for different reasons (Fig 1). Having been the capital of Oman during the Ya’rubid dynasty (1624-1742) when, under the great Sultan bin Saif (1649-88), Oman was the only Asian nation to challenge the emerging European sea powers of Portugal, the Dutch and the English in the 16th to 17th centuries, establishing its own colony in East Africa in the process. At this time, Rustaq saw dense occupation as wealth made its way to the town and a great deal of money was invested in agriculture in the surrounding area. Remains of country estates irrigated by long, elaborate falaj tunnels are still to be seen standing in the surrounding countryside.



Fig. 3: Aerial view of one of the 3,000-year-old structures in an Iron Age village near to Rustaq.



Recent archaeological exploration of Rustaq and its surrounding areas by a team from Durham University between 2013 and 2017 (funded by the Anglo-Omani Society), revealed an unexpected range of archaeological evidence, including one of the largest and earliest settlements from the Bronze Age (4,500 years old), located behind the modern courts next to the Ibri roundabout. The settlement included stone houses (Fig 2), collective tombs, and three large circular stone platforms that were possibly used for ritual purposes. Almost uniquely for Oman, Rustaq yielded evidence of settlement in all periods of Oman's ancient and more recent history. During the Iron Age (3000-2300 years ago) a dense network of agricultural villages came to light, stretching along the banks of the wadi (Fig. 3). From the same period, evidence of cultic activity came to light in the form of a unique circular platform located on a prominent hilltop (Fig 4, 5). It may have been used for celebrations or offerings. The Iron Age is the time when the camel



Fig. 4: Composite drone image of the unique circular hilltop shrine.

was first domesticated in Arabia. Camels were clearly important to the inhabitants of Rustaq - perhaps used to communicate with the coast 45 km (30 miles) over the barren gravel plain. Hundreds of fragments of small terracotta camel figurines were found scattered on the surface of the Iron Age villages (Fig 6). These may have been children's toys, votive objects, or perhaps they

were used to keep a tally of camel ownership.

The archaeological evidence that exists demonstrates the existence of a rich and thriving culture on the Batinah throughout many thousands of years. There is no doubt that many more archaeological sites of great significance wait to be discovered along the Batinah, in particular in the narrow cultivated strip by the sea. It is to be hoped that they come to light before modern construction damages or destroys them completely.

About Derek Kennet

Dr Derek Kennet is a lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Durham UK. He specialises in the Archaeology of Arabia and the Gulf. He has been conducting fieldwork in the region for over 30 years and has recently finished an archaeological survey of Rustaq in Oman Funded by the Anglo-Omani Society.

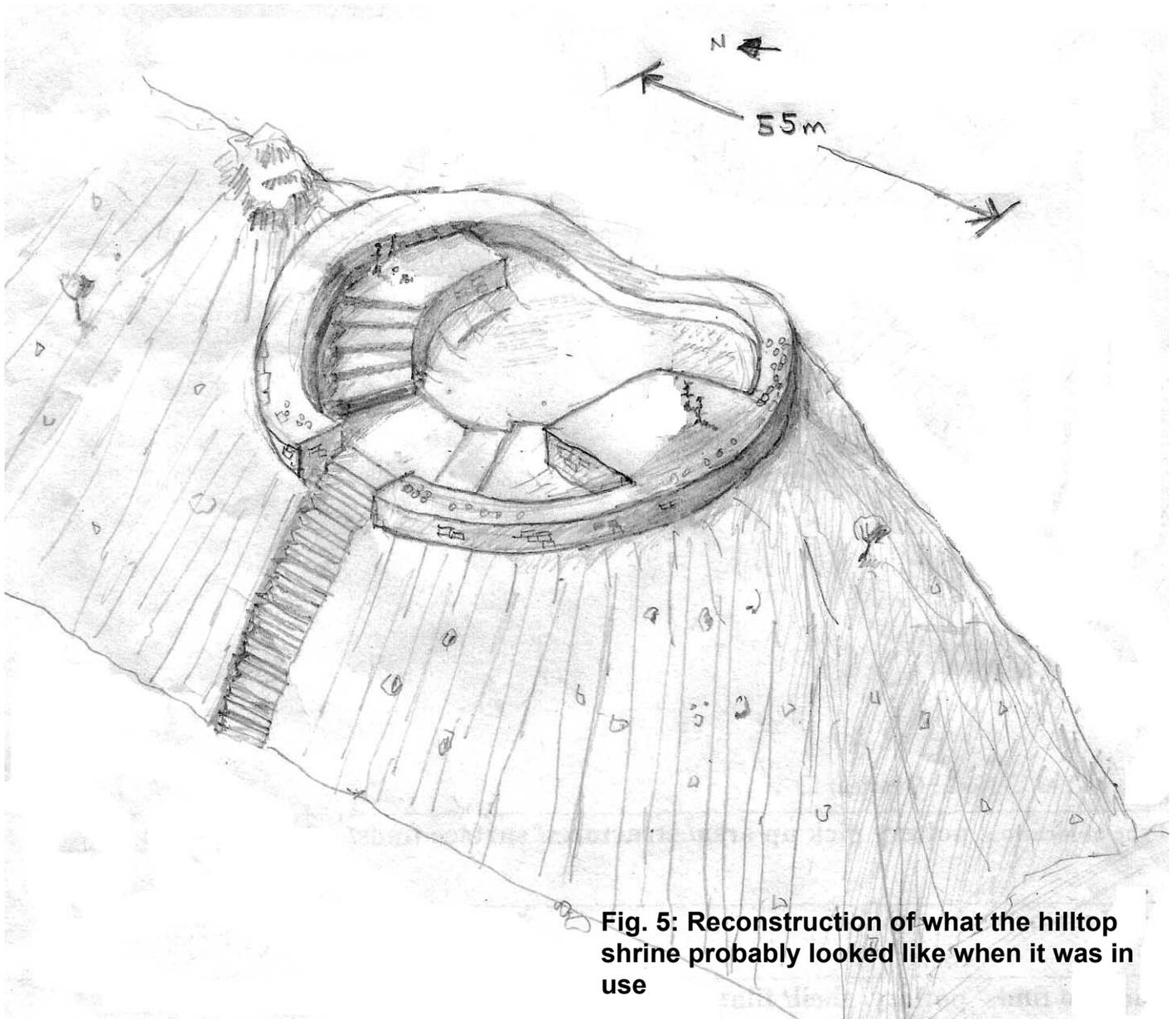


Fig. 5: Reconstruction of what the hilltop shrine probably looked like when it was in use

Al Batinah

Tony Walsh



Al Batinah is Oman's second-most populous region, though for many people it's only the route between Muscat and Dubai. But, take a turn off the highway and enjoy the variety of Al Batinah's attractions.



Off Al Batinah's Sea of Oman coast are two archipelagos, the Dimaniyyat and Sawadi islands, classic desert islands. The Sawadi group's main island is so close to the beach it can be walked to at low tide. The distant Dimaniyyat islands are home to numerous birds including breeding pairs of common noddy, greater crested tern, osprey, red-billed tropicbird, western reef heron and the sooty falcon that migrates from Madagascar to breed in Oman during summer. For scuba enthusiasts, the Dimaniyyats are a nature reserve. Arabian angelfish, Arabian butterflyfish, Arabian Picasso triggerfish, black-spotted rubberlip, Red Sea clownfish, moray eel and green turtles are usually seen. Less common in these rich waters are whale sharks, the world's largest fish, which pass through as they filter-feed.

The 300km coastline is an almost continual ribbon of settlements, surrounded by the agricultural lands of Oman's 'breadbasket'. Some of their names suggest a purpose, these include Kadhara Al Burashid, a farming area for the Al Burashid tribe, or As Suwayq referring to its important suq area.

Most larger villages and towns on the coast have a fortification, many of which are referred to as a 'sur' (سور), a wall. Sur Al Maghabsha is particularly easy to reach, as it's next to a petrol station on the Al Batinah Highway, west of As Suwayq.

These sur's are, in essence, merely a walled enclosure, usually constructed from mudbrick, with bastions and chemin de ronde. A sur's specific purpose was to offer the local population protection, for a minimal time, during raids. Larger towns on the coast naturally have larger fortifications, the most famous being Sohar Fort in the north of Al Batinah. Its location on the edge of a wadi where it enters the sea has occupation from the 8th century AD, and the fort itself dates from the 14th century, with later improvement by Portugal in the 16th century. Uniquely for a fort in Oman, kiln-fired bricks have been used in Sohar Fort's construction, and these may date from the Portuguese period. Within the fort is the grave for Sultan Thuwaini bin Said Al Said, who ruled Oman in the mid-19th century, an indication of the town's importance within Oman.

To the west of Sohar is the Ziggurat at Arja. This ancient structure is probably unique in Arabia. Its location in the heart of Oman's copper-age mining region suggests that traders from southern Mesopotamia arriving in the land of Magan, their name in the 3rd millennium BC for northern Oman, influenced the culture here.

Al Batinah is not, however, only a coastline. The region's southwestern administrative boundary includes Oman's highest peak, Jabal Shams, at over 3,000m.

This range of mountains shelters Ar Rustaq, which dates from at least the period of the Persian Sasanian (224–651 AD) dynasty. Ar Rustaq's name indicates the Sassanids' reach in Oman as it means, in ancient Persian, 'frontier district'. From this Persian period is the central keep of Ar Rustaq Fort. During the rule of the Imam Ahmad bin Said Al Said, who died in 1783 AD, the fort was enlarged; he clearly regarded the town as home, for his mausoleum is located to the south of the fort on the edge of the date oasis. Ar Rustaq benefits from one of Oman's hot springs at Ain Al Kasfa, a couple of kilometres drive west of the fort.

Hot springs in Oman follow the contact edge between the chocolate brown ophiolite igneous rocks and the higher sedimentary limestone range. South of Ar Rustaq at the town of Nakhal is another hot spring, Ayn A'Thawarah. This town's name is very appropriate as a verdant date oasis surrounds it and, in Arabic, Nakhal means date palm. Nakhal has one of Oman's most picturesque forts, set on a rock outcrop with the building flowing down the slope, the oldest areas at the top and more recent ones lower down; these include the impressive entrance gate that dates to 1834 AD.

Off the road between Ar Rustaq and Nakhal is the entrance into one of Oman's deep chasms, Wadi Mistal. A wadi is an area where water can flow, be it a shallow route, a deep narrow gorge, as here at Wadi Mistal, even a river such as Wadi Al Neel, the Nile Valley. Oman's wadis are generally dry, though occasionally raging flash floods can sweep along them. Wadi Mistal has some attractive small mountain village locations on its slopes, with one of Oman's most beautiful, Wakkan, set at 1,400m. Here, in February, the slopes above the village become a flower festival as apricot and peach trees burst into blossom. A further visit means that the delicious small apricot fruit can be purchased in early May, rewarding the farmers for growing these beautiful trees.

Wadi Mistal is one of several valleys on the road between Ar Rustaq and Nakhal, perhaps the most impressive is Wadi bani Awf. This valley has cut down more than 600m through the mountains, creating one of Oman's most spectacular drives; remarkably it's on an all-weather tarmac road. Almost as if to add to a sense of adventure, the tarmac finally ends after the canyon, before a rough track leads onto a cliff-hugging drive towards the mountain village of Bald Sayt (also Bilad Sait). Like so many villages in Oman,



© Tony Walsh



this site has been settled for thousands of years, in this case, due to several water springs. Today these springs irrigate a fertile oasis with a mix of date palms, vegetables and grain with fodder crops for livestock.

Leading ever on and up, the track from Wadi bani Awf at times seems blocked by the mountain cliffs. Remarkably a route does lead up to the pass of Sharafat Al Alamayn, spectacularly located with panoramic views at 2,000m. From here, a less intimidating tarmac road leads into Oman's Dakhiliyah region.

About Tony Walsh

Tony Walsh lived in Arabia, mainly in Oman, between 1986 & 2016. Initially, he continued the retail career he had in England, including managing British Home Stores in Saudi Arabia and then his own retail business in Oman.

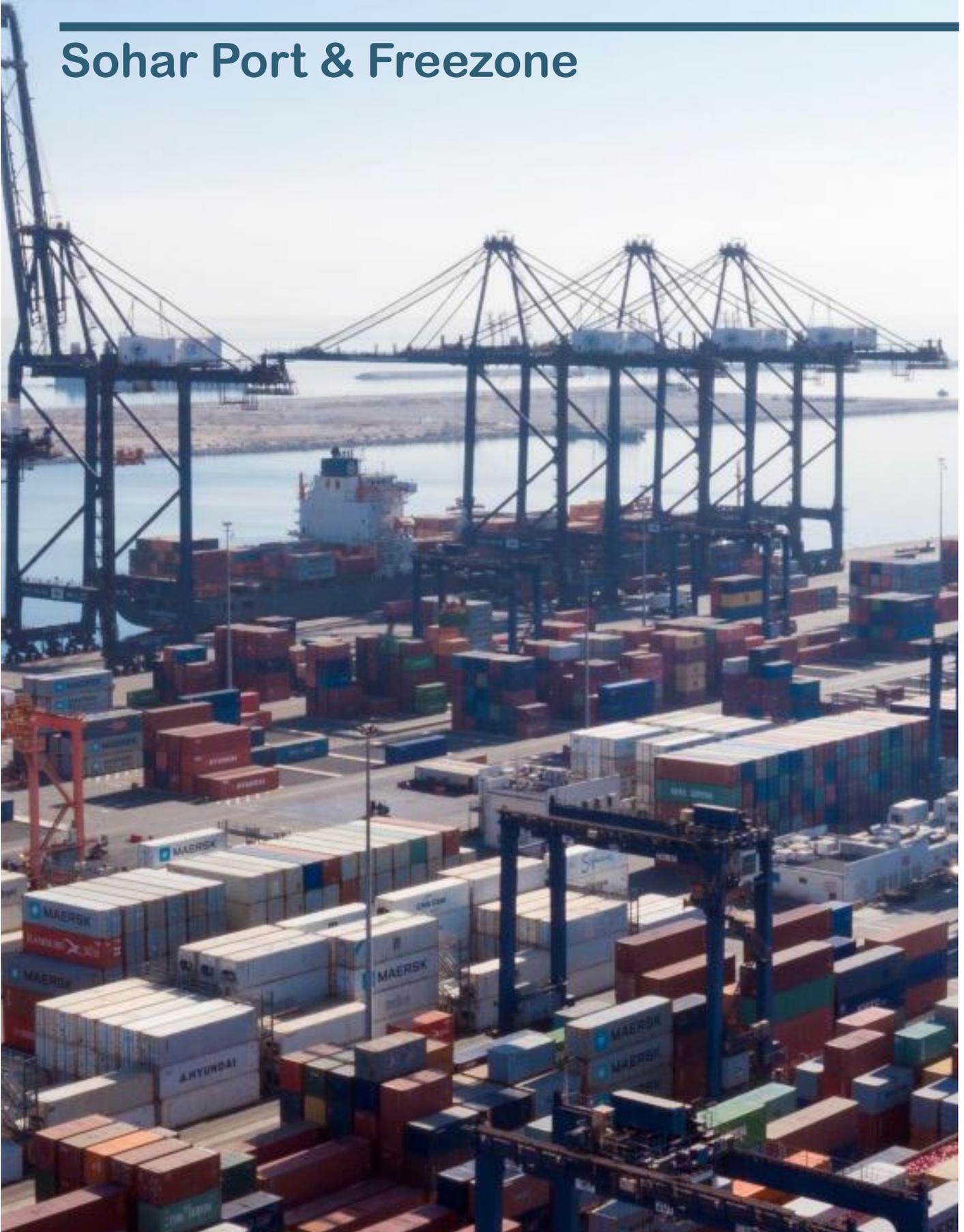
With the rise of Oman's tourism, Tony started an inbound tour company, providing tailor-made cultural tours for individuals and small groups for some 20 years.

Tony currently writes about Oman for magazines and has authored several books, including the current Bradt guide to Oman, he continues to lead tour groups throughout Arabia. His web site www.TonyWalsh.me



BUILDING ON AL BATINAH'S MARITIME LEGACY

Sohar Port & Freezone





Al Batinah has always played an important part in Oman's maritime history. Sitting midway between Dubai and Muscat and, more broadly, at the centre of global trade routes between Asia and Europe, since ancient times its capital, Sohar has served as an important port town. Meanwhile, the region's wealth of economic resources has made it a prime commercial outlet and an abundance of raw materials have provided the basis for several important heavy industries.

Under this context, SOHAR Port and Freezone was created. A powerful combination of the expertise of both the Port of Rotterdam and the government of the Sultanate of Oman, represented by ASYAD, it is earmarked as one of the Sultanate's mega-projects and a major industrial hub. Today, after 17 years of operation, it serves as the main gateway for import and export in Oman, contributing 2.8% of the country's GDP (as per NCSI – Oman), and almost 26,000 direct and indirect employment opportunities. With a focus on sustainable development and cutting-edge technology, it is leading the development and modernization of the Sultanate's logistics infrastructure and supporting the economic diversification objectives of Oman's 2040 Vision.

As one of the fastest-growing port and free zone developments anywhere in the world, SOHAR has an abundance of space that is readily available and filling up fast. The very first phase of the Freezone is almost fully leased out, three years ahead of schedule, and some 26 companies are already reaping the benefits of unrivalled access to land, low-cost energy, and a skilled workforce. SOHAR is currently home to logistics, petrochemicals and metal clusters that provide downstream industries with iron, steel, plastics, marble, fertilisers, quartz and chemicals. Moreover, its new Food Zone boasts the region's first dedicated agro-terminal offering an ideal, close-

to-market base to import, process, package and distribute fresh food products to the region and beyond.

Moving towards a cleaner future

To shape a more sustainable energy future and develop Sohar into a global hub for 'energy of the future', SOHAR Port and Freezone is pioneering solar PV. Tapping into the Sultanate's huge renewable energy potential, the company entered into a land lease agreement with Shell Development Oman (SDO) in collaboration with Shell New Energies, which will see the provision of clean energy solutions through the facilitation of solar photovoltaic (PV) projects, to meet the energy demands of industrial tenants within SOHAR Freezone. SOHAR has allocated 600-hectares of land for solar plants under development, with capacities of 10 MW and above. The pioneering project of 25MW will create long-lasting economic value for companies within the Freezone, enable further economic development in Sohar, and unlock large-scale solar opportunities for the nation. Meanwhile, the company recently installed

"Light-on-demand" technology, reducing the energy consumption of street lights in its complex by up to 80%.

A purposeful social responsibility strategy

An important part of its commitment to building a sustainable future is community. Ranging from education to entrepreneurship, environmental to health, SOHAR Port and Freezone's Corporate Social Responsibility strategy is designed in a manner that is sustainable, balanced and provides long term benefit to Sohar residents and to the nation. One of its major projects, SOHAR Works, was launched in November 2020 in collaboration with Oman's Ministry of Labour. Under the programme, graduates from different disciplines will be employed by five companies in the Port, after completing a blended preparatory program designed and managed by Oman Sail and hosted by the International Maritime College (IMCO). The aim of the program is to enhance the essential soft and technical skills of fresh graduates from North Al Batinah, provide them with more opportunities for employment and more broadly, add meaningful value to the region. In response to COVID-19, and in coordination with six of its tenants, the company also sponsored a molecular PCR (Polymerase Chain Reaction) laboratory in North Al Batinah to enhance healthcare efforts in the surrounding areas. Other CSR initiatives include the construction of artificial reefs in the local marine area and a plantation project, which planted 200 trees in the port and freezone area using a unique water-saving solution called Waterboxx.

As SOHAR Port and Freezone looks to the next phase of development, it is through these pillars that it continues to build on its unique positioning and drive Oman's growing logistics and maritime sectors sustainably.

