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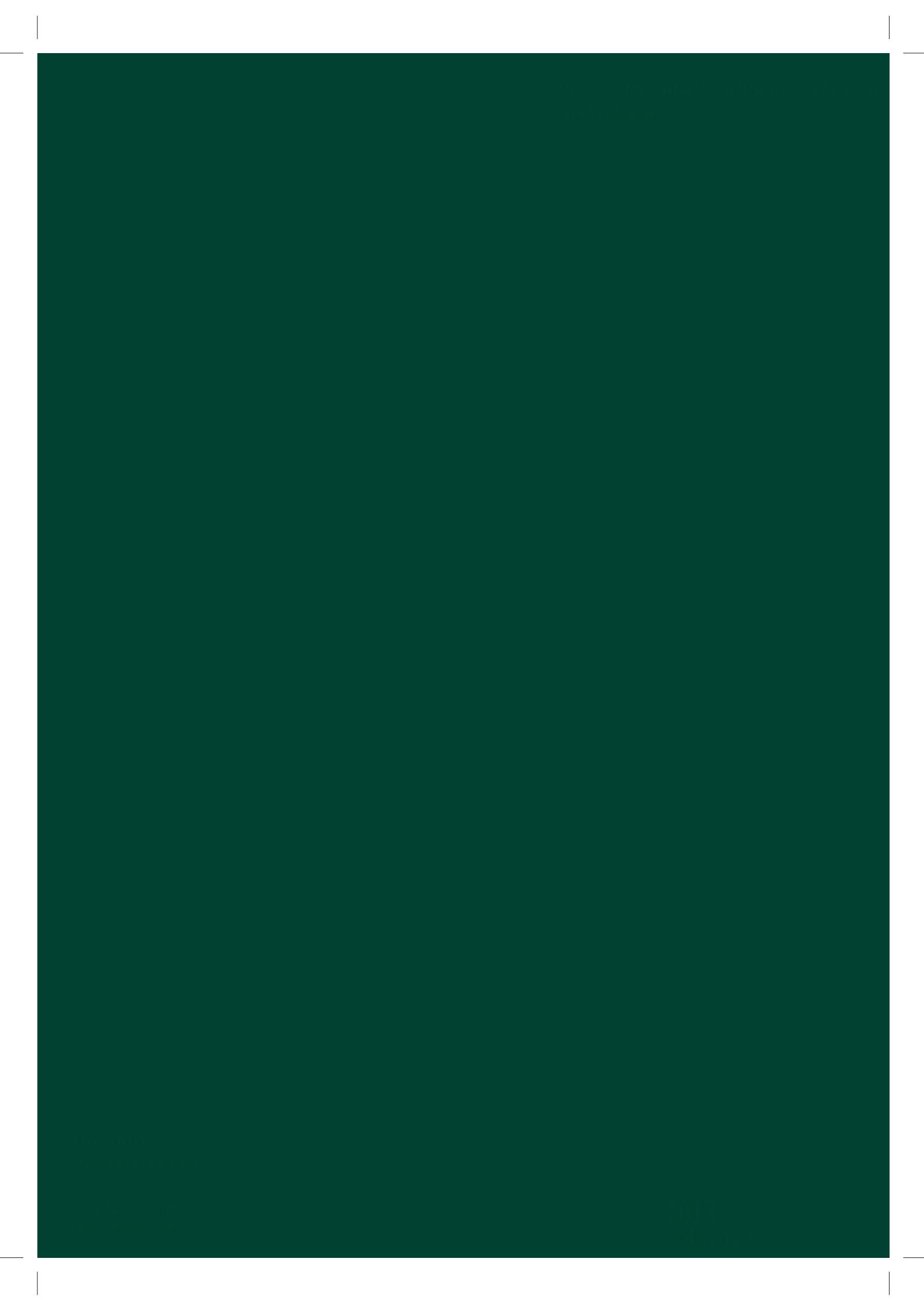


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# The site of Zafār/al-Balīd (Sultanate of Oman)

## Archaeological investigations between past and present

Proceedings of the round table held at Naples, Università L'Orientale, on June 18<sup>th</sup> 2021

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## THE URBAN SPACE BETWEEN REPORTS AND EXCAVATIONS

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The resumption of archaeological investigations in the site of al-Balid and in the surroundings must necessarily start from a reasoned analysis of the various interventions that have taken place over the last 70 years and of the lines of research that the various missions have carried out so far. The consideration on a new approach represents a decisive element for a rediscovery of the settlement, also conducted thanks to the contribution of interdisciplinary investigations. Unfortunately, the state of the places, the progressive abandonment of the site until its final demise in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the systematic reuse of architectural elements in modern buildings of the city of Salalah, and, finally, the urban expansion, make it difficult to face the study of the city with a comprehensive and exhaustive approach also in the perspective of the history of *longue durée*. The written sources, the reports of the travellers of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the results of the excavations assume a decisive role in the historical reconstruction of the site, even in the presence of numerous and serious gaps in the documentation mainly due to the partiality of the investigations on the ground.

The objective of investigating the most ancient phases of occupation of the settlement in search of a presumed pre-Islamic al-Balid has strongly conditioned the start of specific topographical studies focused on the analysis of the urban pattern, of the organization of the space inside and outside the city wall and of the diachrony of the monuments. Rather than delving into the study of specific sectors of the city, such as the road layout (still partly unknown), the location of private housing areas, public buildings and productive structures, the relationship between the lagoon area, the western moat, and the landing points, it was preferred to work in depth, not always, however, with encouraging results. The foundation of the site and the events of its development are still unclear.

Starting from a preliminary reinterpretation of historical and archaeological data, especially related to the first phases of life of the settlement and its most significant transformations, this contribution tries to propose some possible lines of research for the start of a new season of investigations in the medieval port of al-Balid.

### HISTORICAL SOURCES

The few and not entirely consistent information on the origins of Zafar is due to geographers, travellers and Arab and Chinese merchants and diplomats who frequented the area directly or had information from previous scholars.<sup>1</sup>

To date the oldest and most controversial evidence of the toponym is found in a note of the work of al-Bukhārī (810-870) where, in reference to the *costus* of Dzafar, the commentator specifies that the perfume arrived from India through the port of Dzafar (El-Bokhari 1903, 115 and n. 3; Amaldi 1996, 239). Equally uncertain is another source which, annotating Ibn Hawqal's text (Amaldi 1996, 239-240), reports that in 1145 Ahmad b. Manjawī ruled over Mirbāt, described as a small city on the shores of the sea at a day and a half from the city of Zafar, also controlled by the same ruler. Although it is not possible to verify the authenticity of the information, it should be noted that the author distinguishes Mirbāt, described as a city on the sea, from Zafar, which in my opinion is to be located further inland, in contrast to what is reported, however, by the commentator of al-Bukhārī who would evidence the presence of a port in relation to the ancient town. It seems therefore that Ibn Hawqal, whose work is dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, had no knowledge about Zafar because in his map of the region the area is generically indicated as Land of Mahra. The Yemeni geographer al-Hamdānī (893-945) also does not mention Zafar in his work, but only the coastal towns of Mirbāt, Hāsik and Rāysūt. Costa (1979, 146) deduces that Zafar was not founded before the middle of the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

The existence of a city named Zafar in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century on the coast of the Indian Ocean is confirmed by the Arab scholar Yaqūt al-Hamawī (1179-1229), author of a geography of the Arab world datable between 1224 and 1228 (Nutzel 1891, 80; Sprenger 1875, 97).

Even Ibn Khaldūn (1332-1406; see Kay 1892, 182) testifies to the presence of the coastal city of Mirbāt and Zafar instead located in the interior; at the time of the author, in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, both the cities were in ruins. Ibn Khaldūn, considered unreliable by many modern scholars (Guest 1935, 403; Costa

<sup>1</sup> In recent years, the study of Arabic historical sources related to Zafar has been addressed by Smith (1985), Amaldi (1996) and Newton, Zarins (2017) to whom one refers for further discussion. For the Chinese sources, see Visconti in this volume.

1979, 146; Smith 1988, 28), says that al-Habūdī, a rich merchant who had gained the sympathy of the prince of Mirbāt and was invested by him with the office of *wazīr*, at the death of the sovereign took power and in 1222 destroyed Mirbāt and Zafār. Moreover, according to Ibn Khaldūn, a new Zafār was rebuilt in place of the old city because the latter had no anchorage. Costa (1979, 146) argues that the new city of al-Ahmadiyya could be identified with Mirbāt or another site nearby.

More likely would be for Smith (1988, 28), the testimony of Ibn al-Mujāwir (13<sup>th</sup> c.) who reports that al-Habūdī destroyed Zafār in 1221 and built a new city called al-Manṣūra, or al-Qāhira, although it continued to be called Zafār. In the same years of the city's destruction and re-foundation, the Chinese Zhao Rugua (1170-1231) in his *Zhufan zhi* (ca. 1225) mentions Nufa – identified as Zafār – among the main centres of incense production along with Mirbāt and al-Shiḥr (Hirth, Rockhill 1911, 195; Wang 2018, 204). According to Zhao Rugua, Zafār would have trafficked with China through the mediation of other ports in the Indian Ocean, including that of the island of Socotra (see also Visconti in this volume).

The origins, therefore, of Zafār are still obscure. Apart from the singular mention of al-Bukhārī, the sources seem to attest to a presence of the site/town not before the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Costa (1979, 146) argues that Zafār was not founded before the year 1000 since the Yemeni writer al-Hamdānī mentions only the towns of Mirbāt, Hāsik and Rāysūt in the region. According to Guest (1935, 406-407) the absence of Zafār from the accounts that narrate the events of the first Islamic expansion, could suggest a slow occupation of the region with the creation of centres and fortresses such as Rāysūt that later the Minjuids would have unified in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This fact seems to be confirmed by the archaeological evidence documenting the presence of some Minjuids tombs, dating back to the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, in the suburb of al-Ribāt, just north of the present site of al-Balīd (Miles 1919, 510). Certainly, when Marco Polo visited the city at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Zafār was close to the sea and with a good harbour (Frampton 1971).

#### CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES AND THE REDISCOVERY OF AL-BALĪD

The oldest cartographic evidence on Zafār could be in the works of Chinese, Portuguese and Italian navigators who arrived on the Omani coasts in periods when the site was a key point in the routes that developed along the West Indian Ocean.<sup>2</sup> The toponym Nufa is found in the Da Ming Hunyi Tu, drawn up during the great Ming Empire, the original of which would be dated 1389 and would be based on an earlier world map now lost; in this cartography, the placename may have been mistakenly placed on an island south of the Indian continent and not on the Omani coast.

Much later is the portolano known as *Atlas Miller*, the work of various Portuguese cartographers who drew the atlas in 1519; in sheet 3r ("Océan Indien Nord avec l'Arabie et l'Inde") it is mentioned the toponym Diufar. In the map, preserved at the Bibliothèque nationale de France,<sup>3</sup> the sites of Fartaca (Rā's Fartak) to the west and Marbato (Mirbāt) to the east are identified as well.

Dated about 35 years later are two other interesting Italian maps included in the work *Delle navigationi et viaggi* of the Venetian Giovanni Battista Ramusio. In one map the placename Dulfar is found to the west of the Khuriya Muriya Islands, while in the second one finds, instead, the identifier in the spelling Dufar to the east of the same islands. The two maps, which show the south at the top characteristic of the cartography of Arab tradition, are probably copied from different previous cartographic sources. Of these maps a replica of 1565 made by Niccolò Nelli is also known. It is interesting to note that Dufar or Dulfar is the only known centre of the whole region reported on the southern coast of Arabia unlike the oldest Portuguese map which lists instead a long list of names of coastal cities.

There are also numerous subsequent Turkish cartographic sources that, starting from the representation of the boundaries of the empire by the Flemish Abraham Ortelius in 1570, mention the city of Dolfar,<sup>4</sup> sometimes also identified in other maps as Tdhafar.

The cartography examined so far depicts al-Balīd as the main centre of the region, an obligatory point of passage within the rich traffic that passed through the western Indian Ocean. The site is always represented

<sup>2</sup> The publication online of many reports, manuscripts and simple notes written by the crews that explored the Omani coasts undoubtedly increases the *corpus* of information available for the study of the Dhofar. However, given the extent of the information published, it is not always possible to have – at least for the 18<sup>th</sup> century – an exact picture of the itineraries, the lands explored and, above all, the maps that were circulating at that time. Numerous historical maps of the Arabian Peninsula (1500 to 1800) are available online through the World Digital Library website ([wdl.org.en](http://wdl.org.en)).

<sup>3</sup> <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55002605w/f1.item.r=btv1b55002605w>.

<sup>4</sup> Map Collection, G7430\_1570\_O7l available at <https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:25570729>.

in a punctiform form, without any further data that could provide any information on the organization of the urban space, of the surroundings and on the location of the port. However, since many of the maps considered are portolans intended to guarantee navigation, the attestation of the toponym since the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century confirms the importance of Zafār in the exchanges between east and west.

In the final years of 1700, as part of the strengthening of trade routes from India and the Far East transported goods to Europe, the British East India Company began the survey of the South Arabian coasts of the Indian Ocean, the Red Sea, and the Gulf of Suez.

The mapping of coastal profiles was accompanied by a work of exploration and discovery of settlements, bays, and landing points, as well as an activity of observation and knowledge of the customs of indigenous peoples, climate, and local products. The main objective of the cartographic intervention, which required many years and above all the involvement of many experts, consisted in the need to develop detailed portolans; knowledge of the coast was, in fact, of great importance to ensure the safe transit of ships that provided the maritime links between the Sub-Indian continent, China and Europe. One of the main protagonists of the survey of the coasts of the Indian Ocean was the crew of the brig *Palinurus* commanded between 1829 and 1833 by R. Moresby and later by S.B. Haines who was assigned the task of surveying the southern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century this area had been visited by European travellers, navigators, and cartographers, to whom one owes partial descriptions and maps often inaccurate. Of these expeditions there are various reports that also outline the region of Dhofar, while the plans locate approximately at the centre of the plain, in the immediate vicinity of the coast, a town named with multiple place names (Dofar, Dosar, Dafer, Doffar, Dolfar, Dulfar, Dhofar, Dhafar, Dhufar) in which could be recognized the current site of al-Balīd.

In a map of 1747, engraved by Em. Bowen and then annotated in 1769 by the Dutch geographer W.A. Bachiene, there is evidence of the presence of a Gulf of Dhofar that recalls the existence of a place, perhaps an anchorage, which could serve as a landing place for boats in transit.<sup>5</sup>

Before the *Palinurus* enterprise, there had been many attempts to survey and explore the lands behind the coastline. Among these, one recalls that of the Captain of the British Navy St. Charles J.S. Smith (d. 1796), who in 1781 visited the area and made a map of the coast projected in geographical coordinates. The survey, published in 1783 and commented by A. Dalrymple (1737-1808) the following year, shows the city of Dofar in the centre of the region at a point of anchorage.<sup>6</sup> Still in those years M. D'Après (1707-1780), navigating along the coast between Rā's Fartarsh and Dhofar, recorded in 40 leagues the distance between the two points and then described the city of Dhofar as small, surrounded by trees with a narrow road and with the highest building positioned in the direction east/north-east. Republishing some manuscripts of the first travellers, J. Horsburgh (1762-1836) in 1801 corrected the distance between Rā's Fartarsh and Dhofar in 52 leagues and provided some further interesting information about the places; in particular, the author paused to describe the coastline of the region noting that between the city and the sea one can see a land that, seen at a considerable distance, looks like an island. It is certainly strong the suggestion to identify in this virtual island the area of the current settlement of al-Balīd.

## THE PALINURUS

The activity of exploring the sites was accompanied, as already mentioned, by intense cartographic work. However, it seems that the first travellers came across the ruins of al-Balīd, without, however, providing any significant account beyond the simple location of the site. The area was probably still inhabited; we do not know what the extent of the 18<sup>th</sup> century habit was, but certainly the site no longer exhibited the richness that had characterized the city in previous centuries. The road to a more careful investigation and knowledge of the South-Arabian coast had been opened, however, and 50 years later about the mid of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the crew of the brig *Palinurus*, we will have a detailed description of al-Balīd, and a first detailed map made by the assistant surgeon, Doctor H.J. Carter (1844-46; 1846).

Captain S.B. Haines (1845), publishing "...useful information to the mariner and to the geographer..." provides a long list of sites inspected in his enterprise started in October 1833 by order of the government of Bombay. Haines, going up north, also describes the Dhofar plain that extends for 40 miles of coastline from Bander Risūt to Morbat. After the identification of the first anchorage point for small boats, located at the

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/18898/view/1/1/>.

<sup>6</sup> <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8593005s>. The map contains many errors as noted by Captain W.F.W. Owen (*Narrative* 1833, 349).

western end of the cape, at the present site of Ràs el Ahmar, several villages are recorded such as "Audàd, Sallàlah, Haffer, Robat, Diriz and Thaàkah". Two and a half miles east/north-east of Haffer, to be identified with the modern quarter of Hāfa, in the south-eastern part of Ṣalālah, Haines observes a lake formed by numerous springs near which the captain locates an extensive scattering of ruins. All this information is accurately reported on a map projected in geographic coordinates. Later, in an account of the activities carried out between 1836 and 1838, Ch. Cruttenden (1844) tells of having visited the ancient city of El Bellut located between El Hafah and Dyreez. The officer recorded the presence, at the rear of the site, of a lagoon bordered by a stone quay on which cannon platforms were still visible. When Cruttenden explored the area, the lagoon was no longer connected to the sea due to the silting up of its eastern side. The lieutenant, citing local sources, recalls that El Bellut was a port of great importance. Cruttenden saw in the mosque of Dyreez (Dahrīz) several pillars stolen from El Bellut; these pillars were about seven feet high, made of stone and regularly cut and polished.

Also, in those years Commander J.P. Saunders (1846) published an account in which he illustrates the trigonometric survey work carried out in the Dhofar region. The officer remembers how the supply of water was possible thanks to the resources of the lagoon and the springs around the ruins of El Balad, an ancient site recognizable by a high mound formed by the remains of a castle located: "... at the east end of the long grove of cocoa-nut trees". Also, Saunders, like Haines, provides a map of the coastline indicating, for the first time, the location of the remains of El Balad.

Saunders and Haines will then publish together in 1850 the complete trigonometric survey of the southern coast of Oman from Rā's Sukra to Palinurus Shoal in Hadramawt; it is a very detailed map that shows the depths of the seabed, necessary for landing, and the indication of the main centres located along the coast. On the sea, in the centre of the Dhofar plain, is located the settlement of al-Balīd (ruins).

#### THE MAPS OF IBN AL-MUJĀWIR AND CARTER

A few years before the publication of the surveys carried out by Saunders and Haines, the physician's assistant Carter had drawn a detailed description of the ruins, including a map (1844-46) of the structures still visible, in two largely identical contributions published in two separate journals (1844-46 and 1846). Although both the reconstruction and the map contain some obvious errors in comparison with more recent studies, the contribution of Carter remains the oldest description of the ruins with a planimetric indication of the main elements of the urban fabric.

P. Costa (1979, fig. 2) also attributed to Carter another more schematic map<sup>7</sup> that presents some inaccuracies, such as the shape of the site being more rectangular and less elongated, and an error in the orientation of the great mosque that appears parallel to the coastline on the East-West axis and not oriented towards Mecca. The map mentioned by Costa has been published by the English geologist C.S. Fox (1947)<sup>8</sup> in a contribution on geological and mineral deposits in Dhofar that contains, among other things, a section devoted to the archaeology of the region. The plan of the remains of al-Balīd is, as stated by Fox, a reworking of that of Carter with the already mentioned different orientation of the main structure, identified as a temple; the author, assuming that the foundation of El Balad was to be referred back to Phoenician times, argues that Carter was induced in the error of orientation by the belief that the city was built in the Islamic period and that therefore all buildings were oriented towards Mecca.

Returning to the plan published in 1844-46, Carter provides an accurate examination of the remains by recording in yards the length and width and in feet the heights; verifying the dimensions of the mosque reported in the description (45×36 yards) and the real ones, it is possible to ascertain the reliability of the measurements that allows to assume the execution of a direct survey of the structures. Since the Palinurus had the task of surveying the southern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, it is very likely that specific cartographic skills were also made available to the doctor for the study of the remains of al-Balīd. Although Carter's descriptions may not always be considered correct, the map of the ruins of al-Balīd remains the earliest and most valuable evidence of what the site looked like in the mid-nineteenth century. Some details recorded by the doctor are of great importance for the understanding of the reconstruction of the topography of al-Balīd; even in the absence

<sup>7</sup> This map was not published by Carter, nor it is mentioned in major writings on the site published in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The plan, with added pencil annotations, is referred to Carter in *Al Baleed Archaeological Park* 2015, 13; the caption bears the following description: "Carter's first sketch of the city of Al Baleed, executed in 1846".

<sup>8</sup> The map is erroneously cited as Carter 1847.

of information about the chronology of the various findings, the elements that emerge from Carter's illustration provide a general picture of the organization of the urban space.

Carter identified an area ( $3 \times 0.5$  km) characterized by piles of blackened ruins, worn by exposure to wind and sun, often topped by groups of columns with capitals, shafts, pedestals and fragments of ornamental sculptures. The refinement of the remains testified to the importance in the past of the site that contrasted with the state of abandonment and destruction of the places. The description of the ruins is topographically organized: the settlement is divided into an unfortified area to the west, characterized mainly by the presence of the necropolis and sumptuous buildings, and a fortified area to the east, elongated rectangular in shape ( $1.1 \times 0.5$  km), and including the citadel, the Great Mosque, and some residential areas. Carter also records the presence of some inscriptions and several ornamental sculptures and provides a history of the site elaborated based on oral traditions learned at the court of the Shaykh of Dahrīz.

The city was protected to the west by a wide moat, dry in the years of Palinurus' exploration, to the north and east by the lagoon, and to the south by mighty walls that separated the site from the ocean. The description of the lagoon is of particular interest because Carter observes a main northern side from which three secondary branches depart: the first originates in the same northern part and continues in a northerly direction; the second goes South forming the eastern side of the lagoon, while the third continues according to the orientation of the main arm towards Dahrīz. Since the current conformation of the lagoon has numerous secondary branches to the north and east, it can be assumed that the section of the channel around al-Balīd was different from that visible today with a more regular course – as Carter himself observes (1844-46, 227) – probably due to the constant maintenance of the banks.<sup>9</sup>

The description of the defensive circuit is very accurate.<sup>10</sup> Carter records the presence of walls to the south (g)<sup>11</sup> and east (h), a moat to the west (p) and the lagoon (l) which enclosed the area of the fortified city along the north and east sides. A quay or bastion (t) protected the northern part of the site, sparing, in correspondence of the north-eastern corner, a roughly square area occasionally flooded by fresh water from the lagoon; after this point, marked by the presence of a tower, the quay ran parallel to the canal as far as the south-eastern corner. Two landing places (e) were in the central part of the west side and about halfway along the east side. Two large towers (m) were located at the outer north and south vertices of the western moat. The citadel (a) was in the north-western corner, while, a little further south, Carter reports the Great Mosque (b) and a tower (d). On the southern side the author reports some structures that protrude from the line of fortifications which, like the tower (f), appear to be piers for docking small boats. The only gates identified are located to the west of the south-east tower and near the landing on the west side.

In the final pages of his contribution, Carter (1844-46, 233-234) tells of having visited the Shaykh of Dahrīz from whom he learned interesting information about the history of al-Balīd. Among the events heard, the news that recalls the foundation of a city where the sultan of the Manjū family, coming from Hadramawt, established his political power in the region, appears of great importance. The remains of this city would be distributed according to the shaykh's account in a large area located about 1 mile from the coast and in front of the ruins of al-Balīd.<sup>12</sup> It is very likely that in the remains identified by Carter could be recognized into the ancient al-Ribāt, which was uninhabited at the time of Saunders, but of which were still visible the remains of a mosque and other monuments, including some tomb slabs decorated with inscriptions.<sup>13</sup> The Bents, who visited Dhofar at the end of the century (1895, 115-116; 1900, 240-243), speculate that the ruins of al-Balīd and al-Ribāt were part of one large city, capital of the district, which had its most impressive structures in the part near the sea.<sup>14</sup> Bent records at al-Ribāt an area of scattered ruins covering many acres and he identifies large cisterns, water supplies cut into the rock and numerous columns still standing.

<sup>9</sup> To confirm this hypothesis, one can quote Cruttenden (1844, 187) who, reporting a local source, recalls the existence of a stone wall that delimited the lagoon.

<sup>10</sup> In this paragraph, the bracketed letters describing buildings and structures echo the indications on the Carter map.

<sup>11</sup> The southern walls, preserved only at the foundation level for about half of the original path, included numerous towers of rectangular shape – at least 17 – that projected beyond the line of the fortification forming a very powerful bastion.

<sup>12</sup> Carter (1844-46, 237) reports other six settlements whose remains would resemble those of al-Balīd. The information is confirmed by Bent (1895, 115) who mentions remains of cities identified in at least seven places.

<sup>13</sup> Saunders 1846, 174. The ruins were also visited in 1883 by Miles (547) who noted the presence of tombs dated to 1020 and related to the Minjui dynasty (Newton, Zarins 2017, 42).

<sup>14</sup> Costa (1979, 111-112) argues, consistent with the reconstruction provided by Bent, that Robat was a suburban neighbourhood of al-Balīd in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The foundation of two cities, almost connected, is found in the accounts of some Arab authors already mentioned above. Ibn al-Mujāwir, who lived between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, recalls that the city of Zafār was razed to the ground in 1221 by Ahmād al-Habūdī out of fear of the Ayyūbid ruler al-Mas‘ūd (1215-1229). The new monarch rebuilt the city in 1223, calling it al-Qāhira. The settlement, known as Zafār, was located on the sea and it was protected by a stone and mortar wall with four gates. Ibn al-Mujāwir describes the three gates that would maintain the names of the oldest ones.<sup>15</sup>

- 1) Bāb al-Sāhil, which allowed access south to the beach;
- 2) Bāb Ḥarqa, that led to the east in the direction of ‘Ayn Fard, an unidentified place or a spring;<sup>16</sup>
- 3) Bāb al-Harjā‘, which connected Zafār to the west to the site of al-Harjā‘.

Ibn al-Mujāwir in addition to briefly sketching the site and its history, provides a schematic representation of the settlement,<sup>17</sup> which raises some important questions not yet fully clarified by the historical (Smith 2008) and archaeological (Newton, Zarins 2017) research. The plate depicts a series of rectangles sampled in black or on a white background. These bear within them very short, but explanatory texts: in the top one appears the words “the ancient original town”; in the bottom right one “al-Harjā‘”; and, finally, in the bottom left “al-Manṣūrah, the building of Ahmād al-Habūdī”. Since al-Harjā‘ is described in the text as a settlement placed to the west of Zafār, the map must be flipped to place the north at the top. The drawing, which depicts the two settlements of Ibn al-Mujāwir, has been interpreted differently by scholars. Smith (2008, 259, fig. 11) believes that the table contains a single map that would depict the new city of al-Habūdī positioned north of the older.<sup>18</sup> In Newton and Zarins (2017, 56-57), on the contrary, it is argued that these are two maps representing distinct phases of the city: the one destroyed in 1221 and the one rebuilt two years later. In confirmation of this hypothesis, the two scholars, analysing the rectangles depicted in black, conclude that the one to the north, relating to the most recent settlement, depicts the lagoon, the works of managing it should be attributed to al-Habūdī. For Newton and Zarins, although the map is schematic, the extension of the rectangles could indeed testify to a contraction of the new city that would occupy a smaller area.

To Ibn al-Mujāwir are attributed other maps that could help us to clarify some conventions used by the author and so far, little examined. Particularly interesting among these is one that reproduces the site of Qalhāt (Smith 2008, 271). The map, in this case oriented with the west at the top, depicts a trapezoidal site surrounded by a wall with towers and protected to the north by a lagoon represented by a black rectangle. Although the city is on the sea, no graphic indication is provided for this element of the territory, while Ibn al-Mujāwir, on the contrary, is very careful in the description of the landscape with the drawing of two hills at the foot of which flows the lagoon. Comparing the map of Qalhāt with that of the older Zafār, one notices an element that characterizes both and that had not been taken into consideration until now. The representation published by Smith reproduces in the south-western corner a circle filled with some not easily decipherable lines that, however, are found in the drawing of Qalhāt to clearly identify the towers of the curtain wall and those protecting the territory. Unfortunately, the description provided by Ibn al-Mujāwir lacks any reference to buildings or divisions of the urban space; however, there is a strong suggestion that it might be a tower to watch over a probable landing place in the lagoon rather than to control maritime traffic considering that Zafār did not have a real port.

Returning to the map, a third hypothesis cannot be ruled out, which appears equally problematic, namely that it is indeed two distinct plans, as Smith claims, but that they are not spatially connected to each other, as suggested by Newton and Zarins. The hypothesis of the northward displacement of the city of al-Habūdī, proposed by Smith, contrasts with what is claimed by Ibn al-Mujāwir, who speaks of the new Zafār built on the sea. Flipping the map upside down, the rectangle below the oldest city could represent the lagoon; in this way the settlement of al-Habūdī would be closer to the sea. This hypothesis, although complex, could be confirmed by the account of Ibn Khaldūn, who lived in the fourteenth century, who recalls that the new Zafār was rebuilt on the coast because the old settlement did not have an anchorage (Sprenger 1864, 144; Sprenger 1875, 96; Kay 1892, 182 n. 121; Guest 1935, 403). Zarins himself, in a contribution published in 2007, had argued, in opposition to Costa's thesis (1979), that Robat should be identified as a site distinct from al-Balīd;

<sup>15</sup> The gates 2 and 3 would reprise the names of the accesses from the previous settlement.

<sup>16</sup> In the Omani dialect, the word *harqa* means oven (Smith 2008, 259). Harkem is the name the *Jibbāli* give to the site of al-Balīd.

<sup>17</sup> The map is reproduced in Newton, Zarins 2017, fig. 4.1 and Smith 2008, fig. 11 who reproduces the illustrations from the Turkish manuscript (Smith 2008, xv).

<sup>18</sup> This hypothesis does not clarify the nature of the two black rectangles that delineate the new city.

considering that the pre-1222 material found at al-Balīd is rather insignificant, Zarins believes that Robat was the control center of the region at least until the construction of the new city of al-Ḥabūdī.

Unfortunately, the available historical sources and the map of Ibn al-Mujāwir do not allow to propose a conclusive reconstruction; the hypothesis of the two cities remains however of great interest especially if one considers that the explorations carried out so far at al-Balīd do not seem to confirm the existence of a city prior to the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Archaeological field research has been conducted at al-Balīd since the middle of the last century with the main objective of investigating the most ancient occupation period of the town, which according to most of the scholars could date back to the pre-Islamic phase. Phillips, followed by other scholars, was the first to argue that the city occupation started when Khor Rori fell into ruin (Phillips 1972, 113; Albright 1982, 51-52; Costa 1979, 147; Jansen 2002, 3). Zarins is of the same opinion as he suggests that that there was no gap in the occupational history between the establishment of Khor Rori (ca. 300 BC) and the rise of al-Balīd (ca. 400/500 AD). To date, the traces related to a presence in the site linked to an ‘Abbāsid phase are few and all concentrated in the western area, while the Minjui period would be attested by two or three tombs dated shortly after the year 1000, identified in al-Ribāt.

Given the scarce historical information available on this early period and the state of abandonment of the monuments, the study of the site has been carried out by means of in-depth trenches aimed at bringing to light any layers of frequentation of pre-Islamic age and, eventually, Late Antiquity. This approach strongly conditioned any topographical study aimed at understanding the development of the site, concentrating research on specific buildings or areas. Furthermore, the wide extension of the site made a systematic and extensive excavation impossible.

A brief history of the excavations carried out at al-Balīd was recently published (D'Andrea 2021): here an overview of the current knowledge on the organization of the site will be provided, highlighting how, in the absence of certain stratigraphic data and accurate absolute chronologies, the overview that emerges still appears in many points to be incomplete and obscure. Unfortunately, the account provided by Carter cannot always help us to resolve certain doubts since, as Costa (1979, 115) pointed out "... much of what [Carter] observed has now disappeared and his notes are in any case more an interpretation than a faithful description". Particularly serious is also the destruction of the archaeological evidence of al-Ribāt, an area which was certainly crucial – as has been attempted to demonstrate above – in the early phases of occupation of what would later be the territory of Ẓafār. The absence, finally, of an adequate documentation of the previous excavations and, above all, of an accurate description of the interventions and of an analysis of the archaeological materials found makes any hypothesis partial. Therefore, the overview, presented here, is largely based on the summary of previous excavations published by Newton and Zarins (2017) and some observations that arise mainly from the comparison between the existing archaeological structures and the ruins described by Carter.

#### *The Rampart*

The site appears today to be bounded on three sides by a complex 3 km long walled circuit enclosing an area of approximately 38 hectares.

At the north-west corner there is a circular tower, and about 15 metres further on another semi-circular one, possibly protecting a large quadrangular space that allowed communication between the citadel and the bridge – identified on an aerial photo by Costa (1979, 130) – to cross the lagoon. The wall had a thick of 2 or 2.5 m and was preserved up to the height of 2.5 m (“Area C” in Philipps 1972, 116). About 250 m east of the north-west corner, the rampart was reinforced by buttresses placed every 3 metres. About halfway along the route another gate opened, probably on a north-south road. The gate, probably near a bridge, was protected to the west by an elongated semi-circular tower. Continuing eastwards, the traces of the fortification are less evident.

On the northern side that bent towards the sea, the circuit of the city wall is more uncertain. Carter had recognised the north-east corner of the circuit in a stretch still rich in vegetation that could probably have been marshy in antiquity. From this point Carter marks a straight path to south to the south-eastern gate. Albright also agrees with the reconstruction proposed by Carter. On the contrary, Zarins proposed a different path mainly by assuming a change of the course of the modern lagoon to the east of the large south-eastern gate.

The American archaeologist recognised on the eastern side a watchtower nearest the lagoon. The enclosed area between the north and east arms formed a strange rectangular zone visible to cartographers but brought to light only after 2009 (Newton, Zarins 2017, 79-80).<sup>19</sup> Zarins identified four semi-circular towers bordering the area and a gate. The area to the east was enclosed by the walled way used as a breakwater. To the west Zarins traces a north-south path that ends to the south, beyond the wall, with another breakwater that extended some forty metres towards the sea. The discovery south of the breakwater of a structure made of stone blocks and wooden posts suggests the existence of port facilities for the supply of boats, perhaps a slipway with a dry dock. The present shoreline runs about 80 metres to the south and it is difficult to speculate how this system might have functioned: perhaps boats were hauled out dry at this point and then propped up to keep them standing. Certainly, the presence just to the north of the gateway, also seen by Carter, which opens onto the quay, suggests that at this point the water approached the wall allowing small boats to land. The hypothesis was also made by Carter who mentions a landing place close to the gate.

At the south-eastern corner of the fortification there is a circular tower; from here going westwards there are another 17 semi-circular towers every 50 metres. Zarins identified in this section a gate (2) at the corner of the southern circuit with the breakwater, another gate (3) almost in the middle and at least two other gates (4-5) going westwards. Another semi-circular tower was built between towers 10 and 11, which was later incorporated into another breakwater. Philipps (1972, 123) had already noted that towards the western end of the southern wall, several distinct buildings adjacent to the fortification and several newer buildings extended over the old defensive structures. In this area Zarins found other four breakwaters (2 of them identified also by Carter) whose relation to the houses, apparently outside the walled circuit, is unclear. The western side of the southern rampart is not entirely clear due to the overlapping of the so-called Indian quarter. On the southern side Zarins recognised a wall, 2 m wide, for 1,100 m, preserved up to a height of 3 m. Up to Gate 5, the course of the southern wall seems to follow a straight course, which is abruptly interrupted by a right-angle bend to the south and then finally to the west and to the south-west corner. The reconstruction proposed by Newton and Zarins (2017, 9) in which the semi-circular towers can be seen from the south-western corner of the walls and the piers towards the sea in the distance is quite impressive. The strip of sand between the sea and the walls was used by light boats used for transport and fishing.

The western boundary of the fortification also had a straight line joining the circular tower to the north-west with the quadrangular tower to the south-west. In this section, only four semi-circular walls were found, which are further apart than those on the south side. In the centre of the system there was a gate, already observed by Carter, leading to a bridge that served to cross the moat. The reconstruction of this side of the defence system is not entirely clear as we have no trace of how the lagoon developed in this section. We know that to the west, beyond the moat, Carter had identified two towers that have now unfortunately disappeared. The presence of a wharf at the quadrangular tower at the south-west corner, already identified by Carter as a landing place, suggests that the coastline in this part too is far back, causing the west arm of the lagoon to be silted up.

The walls were therefore built following the natural course of the lagoon and the coast. They belong to a single building project, including towers, gates, and piers, designed to delimit the city. Albright and Philipps (1972, 117) doubt the protective nature of the defence system since the height of the walls is modest. However, only a few points of the scheme have been modified over time; in the southern section, for example, breakwaters 2, 3 are built on previous semi-circular towers. Unfortunately, there is no precise data on the chronology; for the northern section of the fortification, Zarins recognises 5 phases without giving any further stratigraphic information. Finally, we are unable to argue that the settlement was defended by this complex fortification from the time of its foundation. Since the excavations in the western sector have shown that the walls cut through pre-existing buildings, it is plausible to assume that the defence system was put in place at a later stage than the occupation of the area. Costa (1979, 133) found a structure in area B that he interpreted as part of a surrounding wall that would testify to the existence of an earlier, smaller town whose eastern limit was defined by these remains (Costa 1983, 265).

### *The urban space*

The analysis of the urban space is strongly influenced by the different interventions that have taken place over the years and, above all, by the different research objectives that have guided the work of the teams. If

<sup>19</sup> The area identified as the “Custom area” should not be confused with the Custom House described by Miles (1919, 545-546) and commented by Costa (1979, 129-139).

we exclude the citadel, systematically investigated in recent years (see Pavan in this volume), and the Great Mosque, the other visible structures are known in a partial and fragmentary way. Also in this case, as for the defensive system, the information available is discontinuous and, for the most part, the result of hypotheses rather than archaeological evidence.

Al-Balid area appears to be predominantly characterized by the presence of mosques. Philipps (1972, 127 and fig. 21) had identified at least two dozen of them and others in ruins, while Zarins (2007, fig. 5) had recorded over 50. They are generally square buildings with four internal columns to support the roof. There are usually two open doors on the north and south walls with the main entrance in the centre of the east wall. Ablution wells were usually located on the outside of the east wall. Phillips (1972, 132) mentions a larger mosque with six columns in two rows that may be the sixteen-column mosque later described by Costa (1979, 116-128). Continuing eastwards, one recognises large open areas whose function is unclear.

Almost abutting the western limit of the city, at the western wall was the Great Mosque whose excavation was begun by Costa in 1978. The Italian archaeologist produced the first accurate plan of the mosque (Costa 1979, fig. 25) and deepened three points: 1) the western wall and gallery; 2) the eastern wall and the ablution area; and 3) the centre of the mosque. Costa also conducted small surveys to determine the chronology of the mosque (Costa 1979, 146). Some areas appear to have been added later, as evidenced by more recent wall partitions showing a different style of construction. Investigations were resumed in 1996 by Jansen, who explored a considerably larger area, highlighting three main structural phases compared to the two identified by Costa (1979, 145). The Great Mosque, the citadel and the western fortification defined the limits of a large open square (*maydān*); from the square through the western gate, one could cross the moat.

The only urban cemetery, found inside al-Balid, is circumscribed by a wall, and connected to a funerary mosque located in the western part of the city; the area was intended for the burial of about 300 deceased. Particularly interesting, but not entirely clear, is the Area B found by Costa that shows a quadrangular tower or gate with rounded corners, later incorporated in a structure with a different orientation. The tower/gate was in correspondence of a probable north-south axis that allowed to reach the median gate of the northern city wall. Previously it has been mentioned that Costa put this structure in relation to a more ancient city wall section. Roads are completely missing although the analysis of satellite images seems to detect the existence of an east-west route that crossed the entire urban area.

## CONCLUSION

In the absence of published stratigraphic excavations, it is not possible to clarify the chronology of the various construction phases, except for the citadel, the only monument systematically investigated. At present, we do not know to what period the other various buildings can be dated, nor can we assume, as the sources seem to suggest for the city of al-Habūdī, the emergence of a coherent and innovative urban project. For these reasons, it is problematic to propose a settlement model for al-Balid. However, some aspects can be highlighted to try to better understand the type of site that the visible structures seem to suggest.

The site, which appears as a virtual island surrounded on all four sides by water, developed thanks to the favourable conditions of the surrounding landscape: the availability of fresh water, easy landing/anchoring points, a large flat area that could be cultivated inland, easily tradable goods (incense, horses, etc.). These characteristics made the centre of al-Balid famous, placing it at the centre of the trade that developed in the Indian Ocean, as the historical and cartographic sources examined testify. When this flourishing period began and when it ended is still unclear. At the height of its development, the city included many important buildings and a suburban area extending beyond the limits of the walls. Apart from the western square, no public areas or streets are known, which makes it difficult to recognise the existence of an internal organisation of urban space, reflecting a functional division of areas.

The few scholars who have so far dealt with Omani settlement patterns in Islamic times (Wilkinson 1977; Costa 1983; Benkari 2017) have stressed the presence of coastal cities and inland caravan sites. According to Costa, coastal settlements would be of two types: continuous building structures distributed along the coast and intimately connected with inland areas dedicated to cultivation, and isolated centres located at the mouth of wadis. Al-Balid would belong to this first type.

While we await the completion of a systematic study of the masonry techniques, of the ceramics brought to light so far and of new excavations that can clarify the different phases of construction and occupation, the only suggestion regarding the original layout of the city comes from an old contribution by Costa (1983), who compared al-Balid with the city of Suhār, founded on the northern coast of the country and with a rich agricultural hinterland. A further element of comparison between the two sites is represented by the system of

the Fort, the Great Mosque, and the Square, which in Zafār is located at the western edge of the settlement, while in Ṣuhār it is more centrally located. The area, well described by Ibn Battūṭa, may represent the place where foreigners entering from west were received through the gate after crossing the moat, but also the place where they waited to be received by the governor. Signs of similarity are also found with Qalhāt which seems to be defended by the sea, the lagoon, and a wall. Used as an anchorage rather than a landing place for large ships that instead stopped offshore, Zafār never had a protected harbour, which could be found in the distant harbour of RAYSŪT to the west or Mirbāt to the east.

In conclusion, archaeological research will have to try to answer many questions: the date of the site's foundation, the events of the destruction and reconstruction of Zafār in Ḥabūdī's time, the Rasūlid conquest and the abandonment of the city. The mighty defence system, the presence of numerous piers for landing light vessels and a substantial strip of necropolis outside the city perimeter, suggest the idea of a planned intervention with a distinction between urban and extra-urban areas linked to trade, fishing and agriculture and non-cultivable areas intended, instead, for burial.

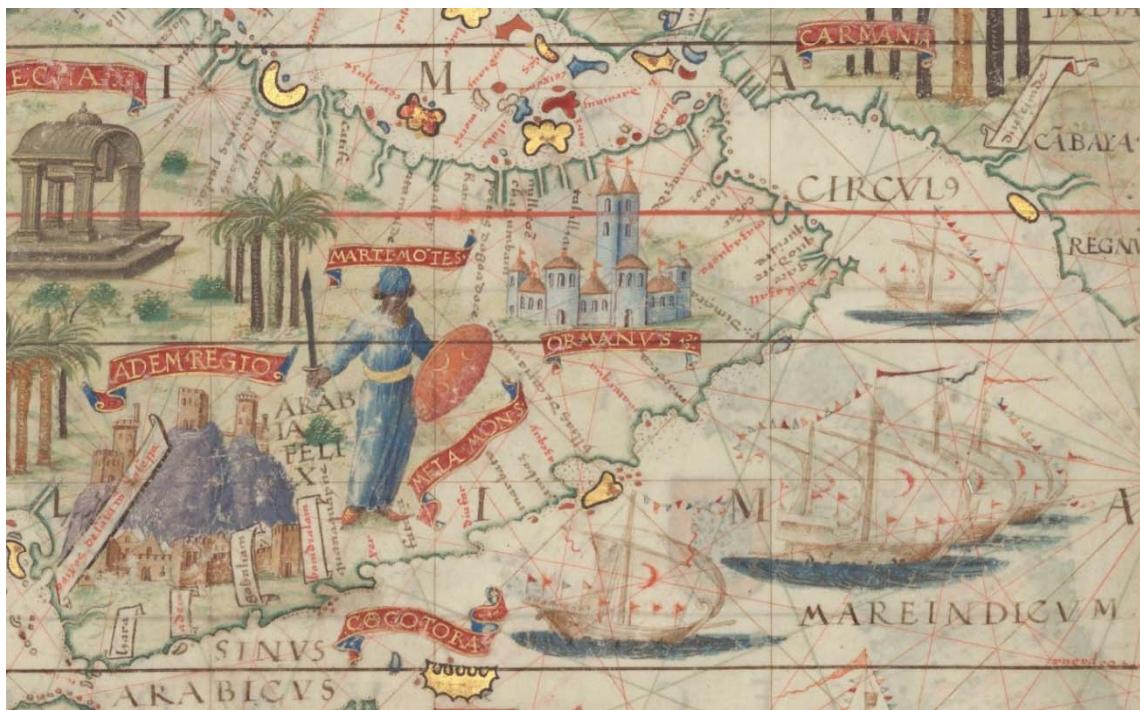


Fig. 1 - A detail showing in red the toponym Diufar between Marbato to the east and Fartaca to the west. Sheet 3 of the *portolano* known as Atlas Miller (1519). North on top. [<https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55002605w/f1.item>].

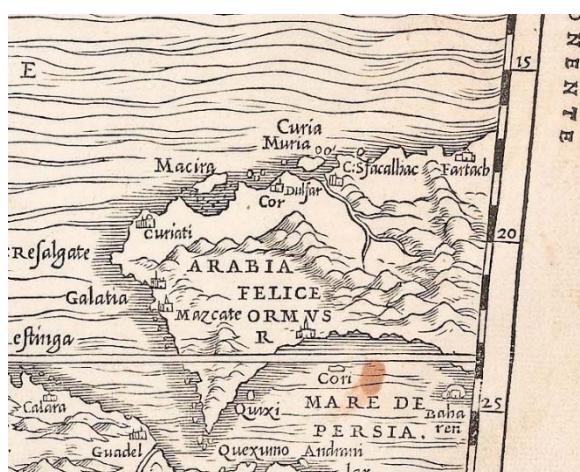


Fig. 2 - A detail showing the toponym Dulfar. Table II, by Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1554). South on top. [<https://doi.org/10.11588/digit.9380#0083>].

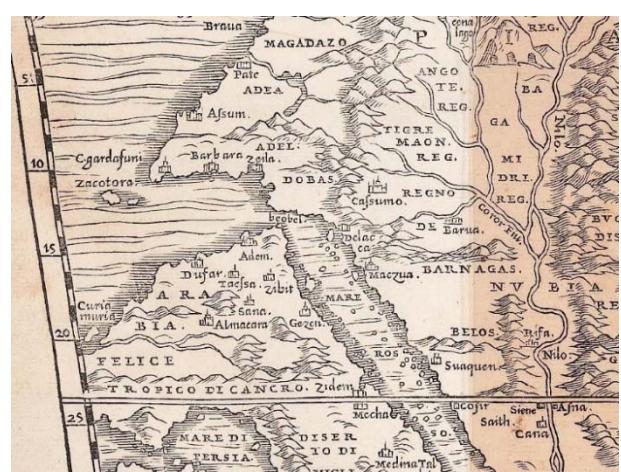


Fig. 3 - A detail showing the toponym Dulfar. Table I, by Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1554). South on top. [<https://doi.org/10.11588/digit.9380#0082>].



Fig. 4 – A detail showing the Gulf of Dhofar. Map by Em. Bowen (1747). North on top. [<https://www.wdl.org/en/item/18898/view/1/1>].

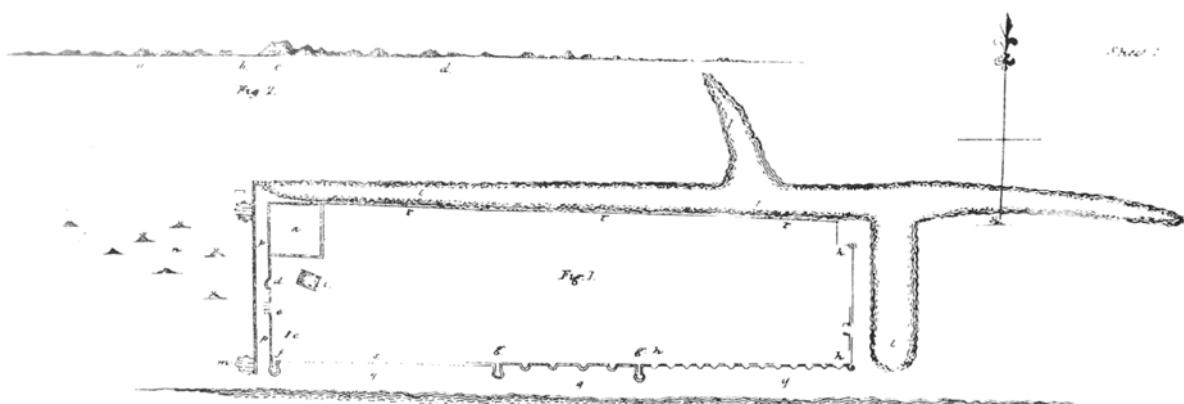


Fig. 5 - Al-Balid map by Carter (1844-46).

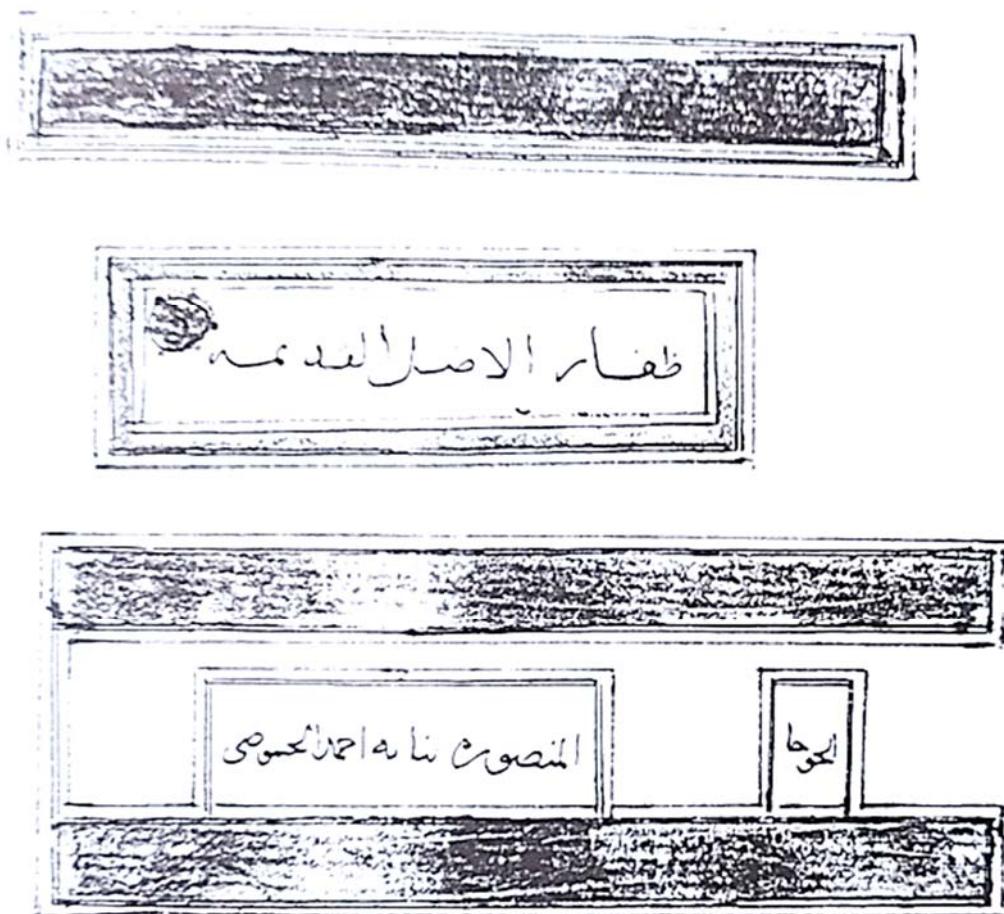


Fig. 6 – al-Balid sketch by Ibn al-Mujāwir (Smith 2008, 259, fig. 11).

## ANNEX

### Visits, archaeological surveys and excavations in Zafār/al-Balīd (1834-2019)

Andrea D'Andrea, Roberta Giunta, Alexia Pavan

<i>Years</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>References</i>
1834-36	First visit by Stafford Bettesworth Haines to ‘Awqad (lit. Audád), Salalah (lit. Ṣallálah), Hāfa (lit. Haffer) and the “extensive ruins located two miles and a half E.N.E. of Haffer, near a fresh-water lake”.	Haines 1845, 118
1836	Charles John Cruttenden visits Salalah (lit. Solahlah), Dahrīz (lit. Dyreez), Hāfa (lit. El Hafah), and the remains of an old town called El Bellut (i.e. al-Balīd) located between Hāfa and Dahrīz.	Cruttenden 1836, 187
1839	Henry John Carter draws the first schematic plan and provides a detailed description of the site, which was located between the towns of Salalah (lit. Silalah) and Hāfa (lit. El Hafa) on the west, and that of Dahrīz (lit. Dareez) on the east. He visits the citadel ruins (pp. 229-30) and the ruins of the great mosque (lit. Temple or Mosque), which originally contained one hundred and eighty-three pillars (p. 230). He points out that the site was divided into two parts, of which only the eastern one was fortified (p. 225).	Carter 1844-46 (The same information can be found in Carter 1846)
1883 and 1884	Samuel Barrett Miles draws a historical picture of the region (pp. 498-514), and gives a description of the site, which he locates between Hāfa (lit. Al-Hafa) and Dahrīz (lit. Dareez). He clearly identifies the city walls, the towers, the ditch, the citadel, the great mosque and the custom house (p. 544). He also provides information on the burial grounds at al-Ribāt (lit. Robat; p. 547).	Miles 1919; Marshall 1989, 74
1894	The Bents (James Theodore and his wife, Mabel) visit al-Balīd (lit. Al Balad) and al-Ribāt (lit. Robat), which were the ancient capital of Dhofar (p. 115). Based on Sprenger’s work (1864), Bent points out that the ancient name of al-Balīd was Zafār (lit. Zafar), which was destroyed in 618/1221-22, when al-Manṣūra (lit. Mansura) was built, “under which name the capital was known in early Mohammedan times” (p. 116).	Bent 1895
1895	The Bents visit Dhofar region for the second time. With regard to al-Balīd and al-Ribāt, they provide very similar information to that of the 1894 publication.	Bent Th. and M. 1900
1918	Charles Craufurd visits al-Balīd (lit. Al Bilad), which is in a state of complete ruin, and the graveyard located in the western area. He also takes the first photographs of the Great Mosque.	Craufurd 1919

Years	Activities	References
1930	Visit to the ruined city of al-Balīd (lit. Balid) by Bertram Thomas (p. 38), “the most extensive ruins of the Dhofar (lit. Dhufar) plain” (p. 8). He takes some photos on the site (see also Peyton 1983, p. 75).	Thomas 1932
1930 ca.	Sultan Said bin Taimur carries out some excavation works along the east end of the south side of the citadel.	(Quoted in Albright 1982, p. 59)
1945	Wilfred Thesiger arrives for the first time in Ṣalālah, “the capital of Dhaufar”, and visits the site and the numerous ruins scattered around the city and the plain (pp. 43-44).	Thesiger 1959 (ed. 2008)
1952-1960	First archaeological excavations (started in spring 1952) under the auspices of the American Foundation for the Study of Man (AFSM). Wendell Phillips was the sponsor of the expedition; Frank P. Albright the main archaeologist and responsible of the whole work. The AFSM works involved the city wall, the towers, the two city gates, the citadel (“Area A”), the great mosque, the western bridge, four habitations in the western side of the walled city (“Area H”), and a number of buildings and mosques scattered around the site which are shown on a map drawn by Phillips (fig. 21; see also Zarins 2007, fig. 2). However, a full account of the excavation work and a complete list of the finds are lacking. Albright (p. 106) provides only a list of 90 artefacts, summarily described and without graphic or photographic documentation. Unpublished materials are held by the AFSM in various locales in Virginia.	Phillips 1971; 1972; Albright 1955; 1982
1977-1981	Paolo Costa leads three seasons of work (started in spring 1978, following a first survey in winter 1977) on behalf of the Omani Ministry of National Heritage and Culture and in cooperation of the local authorities. Costa employs a large team of experts, analyses the site for the first time with a scientific approach, and provides a detailed site plan with a 50 m interval grid system. The main excavation activities concerned the great mosque, the western bridge and city gates (called “Area A”), and an area located in the centre of the walled city (called “Area B”). However, once again, a final analysis of the materials and a study of the ceramic fragments are lacking.	Costa 1979
1980	Giovanni Oman, upon invitation of Costa, carries out a preliminary study of the epigraphic material from the western cemetery of the site (1983), as well as from Ṣalālah and Mirbāṭ (1982).	Oman 1982; 1983; 1989
1994	At UNESCO’s request, Michael Jansen draws up an executive project for the development of cultural tourism in the Governorate of Dhofar.	Jansen 2015, p. VII
1995-2003	The German archaeological mission from Aachen University, directed by M. Jansen, in cooperation with the National Committee for the supervision of Archaeological Survey in the Sultanate, carries out numerous campaigns. The main activities carried out by the mission were: the first topographic surveying of the site (1995-1996; Jansen 2015, p. 31); the application of digital prospection and three-dimensional documentation in conservation of architectural remains (1997-2000; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 32-37); the documentation methodology for the archaeological activities (2001; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 37-40). The excavation activities involved the Great Mosque (Sept. 1995; Sept. 1996; March 1997; Aug.-Nov. 1997; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 49-92); the citadel (March 1997; Aug. 1998; March 1998; Febr.-April 1999; Oct.-Dec. 1999; spring 2000; Nov.-Dec. 2000; March-April 2001; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 161-208); the northern and western city wall (Sept. 1996; Sept. 1997; March-April 1998; Oct.-Dec. 1999; March	Powell, al-Salmi 1997; 1998; Jamme 1998; Koschick 1998; Powell 1998a; 1998b; Yule 1998b; 1999a; 1999b; Hermann 1999; Jansen 1999; Al Shamsi 1999; White 1999; 2000a; 2000b; White, Unterlechner 1999; 2000; Peshkov 2001; Peshkov, Voyakin 2001;

Years	Activities	References
	2000; Nov.-Dec. 2000; March-April 2001; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 93-160); the small mosques 655 and 940 (spring 2000; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 219-226); the House 803 (May-June 2000; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 231-232, 258-263); the courtyard 720 (May-June 2000; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 228-231, 237-257); the residential area south of the citadel (March 2000; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 232-233, 235-236). Seven soundings (1998; <i>Id.</i> , pp. 270-284) were moreover carried out with the aim of finding pre-Islamic evidences which, however, did not emerge. A number of conservation actions, such as the restoration of a number of columns, were performed as well.	Stevens 2001; Urban 2001; Franke-Vogt <i>et alii</i> 2003; Jansen 2001; 2002; 2003; 2015
1996-1997	Two excavation campaigns lead by an archaeological team of the Sultan Qaboos University focused on the so-called “funerary mosque” with its facilities and burial area.	Ibrahim, Al Tigani 1997; see also Jansen 2015, pp. 209-217.
1996-1998	Mauro Cremaschi conducted a number of geomorphological surveys within the works carried out by the Italian Mission to Oman (IMTO) in the coastal area of Dhofar and in the interior of the region. In 1997 a palynological study was carried out as well with the samples processed by the University of Amsterdam (Carina Hoorn). At al-Balīd tests were conducted on three different spots in order to collect palynological samples. The results confirm the idea of Costa that the settlement was a kind of virtual island and that the lagoon was connected to the sea until recent time.	Hoorn, Cremaschi 2004
1997-2004	First studies on ceramic material with proposals for typologies	Yule 1998a; Franke Vogt 2002; Yule <i>et alii</i> 2005; Yule, Muhammed 2006
1998	Within the frame of the Oman Maritime Heritage Project, Jana Owen made a short reconnaissance campaign in the lagoon of al-Balīd. <a href="https://museum.wa.gov.au/maritime-archaeology-db/maritime-reports/oman-maritime-heritage-project">https://museum.wa.gov.au/maritime-archaeology-db/maritime-reports/oman-maritime-heritage-project</a>	Owen 1998
2000	A first sedimentological study is conducted by the Canadian Edward Reinhardt who prepared a PhD thesis discussing the development of the site from a palinoligical, sedimentalological and micropalaeontological perspective.	Reinhardt 2000
2005-2012	Archaeological works are carried out by Juris Zarins and Lynne Newton under the auspices of the Office of the Adviser to H.M. the Sultan for Cultural Affairs, directed by Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed Al Rowas. Their work focused on the citadel, the western and south-eastern areas of the walled city, jetties, breakwaters, southern towers and gates, “Custom House”, a small mosque located to the east of the citadel and the building complex in the southwestern corner, outside the city wall. Most of the excavated material were cleaned, classified and placed in boxes.	Zarins 2007; Belfioretti, Vosmer 2010; Newton, Zarins 2010; 2014; 2017; Zarins, al-Jahfali 2012; Zarins, Newton 2006; 2012
2012-2018	Krista Lewis of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock directs new excavation works that lead to the discovery of a large multi-storey building, located in the south-western part of the site.	Lewis 2012; 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2014; 2015

<i>Years</i>	<i>Activities</i>	<i>References</i>
2015-2016	Excavation campaign by the Italian Mission to Oman (IMTO), University of Pisa, headed by A. Avanzini and directed by A. Pavan (October-December) and S. Lischi (February-March 2016). Works were carried out exclusively on the citadel following the request of HE Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed Al Rowas.	Pavan 2015; Lischi 2016; Pavan, Lischi 2016
2016-2019	The most recent archaeological work carried out at the site focused on the citadel and was conducted by Alexia Pavan under the auspices of the Office of the Adviser to H.M. the Sultan for Cultural Affairs, directed by Abdul Aziz bin Mohammed Al Rowas. New and important results have also been achieved through the study of ceramic and porcelain material, as well as ship timbers and coins.	Pavan 2017-18; 2019; 2021; Fusaro 2018; Pavan <i>et alii</i> 2018; 2020; Fusaro 2019; Pavan <i>et alii</i> 2019; Annucci 2020; Fusaro 2020a; 2020b; Ghidoni 2020; Pavan, Visconti 2020

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