

THE ORGANIZATION OF FUNERARY SPACE AND ARRANGEMENT OF BURIALS
WITHIN THE *CORRIDOR-SHAPED* TOMB LCG-2 AT DIBBĀ AL-BAYAH,
MUSANDAM, SULTANATE OF OMAN

Francesco Genchi - Marco Ramazzotti - Sapienza University of Rome
Nunzia Larosa - University of New England, Armidale

The paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the primary burial patterns identified at the bottom of the collective tomb LCG-2 at Dibbā, showing homogeneous features and common customs. The burials are often accompanied by conspicuous grave goods dating to the final stages of the Early Iron Age.*

Keywords: Oman; corridor-shaped tomb; burial; collective graves; Iron Age

1. INTRODUCTION: DIBBĀ AL-BAYAH GRAVEYARD AND THE LCG-2 TOMB

The Daba al Bayah burial complex is located on the east coast of the Musandam Peninsula (Sultanate of Oman), near the border between the Oman Musandam region and the United Arab Emirates. The site was discovered in the summer of 2012 during work for a sports centre. It consists of numerous large collective graves, containing hundreds of individuals accompanied by thousands of valuable artefacts. Large Collective Grave 2 (LCG2) is a corridor-shaped structure and dated from the Iron Age II (1100-600 BC) to the PIR (Pré-Islamique Récente) period (250 BC-400 AD).

It has a long rectangular chamber about 24 metres long and 4 metres wide, consisting of thick perimeter walls composed of rows of wadi boulders in the lower levels and limestones and beach rocks in the upper ones (fig. 1:a). The inner masonry is slightly projecting, resembling a bell-shaped profile. The funerary chamber is semi-subterranean, and the long axis-oriented north-south. The corridor could have originally been roofed with flat slabs over corbelled stones. Some roofing slabs were found inside the corridor, while others may have been removed during subsequent structural modifications and looting.

Excavation data and radiocarbon dating indicated a prolonged use of this burial structure. Its original building seems to date back to the Iron Age II, based on two dates coming from the construction plan on which the stones of the eastern perimeter wall rest (1016-916 BC cal. 2 α 98%; 1130-1014 BC cal. 2 α 83%).¹ Additionally on the massive presence of diagnostic pottery, stone vessels, and metals attributable to the first half of the 1st millennium BC. The latter usage indicates instead a reuse of the entire structure in phases between the end of the Early and the beginning of the Late Iron Age, based on two radiocarbon dates (356-278 BC cal. 2 α 96%; 328-198 BC cal. 2 α 92%).² The last use of the tomb is attested to the so-called P.I.R. phase, exemplified by a rich grave goods burial chamber in the western

* Paragraphs 1 and 3 are by Francesco Genchi, Marco Ramazzotti and Nunzia Larosa; paragraph 2 and plates are by Francesco Genchi.

¹ Circe Laboratory, Caserta (Italy). Lab Codes: DSH10398_HA; DSH10386_CH.

² Circe Laboratory, Caserta (Italy). Lab Codes: DSH10397_HA; DSH10394_HA.

perimeter wall and datable between the 1st century BC and the 4th century AD. The period is based on two radiometric dates (277-338 AD cal. 2 α 96%; 54 BC-120 AD cal. 2 α 98%).³

From the moment of the discovery to the present day, six excavation campaigns were undertaken, leading to the almost complete exploration of the funerary structure. It brought to light the burials at the base of the chamber and reached the beaten floor along the corridor central axis. At least three phases of the structure were identified, some of which had already been described in previous publications.⁴ The most recent is characterised by the presence of secondary or strongly reduced burials organised in clusters of selected human remains⁵ (fig. 1:b-c). It was followed by the creation of circular burial chambers set on the perimeter walls housing multiple burials (fig. 1:d-j). Structural arrangements within the central chamber represent the earliest use within the long perimetral walls. These are stone structures designed to house several burials built during the last stages of the collapsed walls (fig. 1:k-q).

2. FUNERAL DEPOSITION PRACTICES AT THE BASE OF THE CORRIDOR

A uniform use of the tomb involved the construction of small burial chambers resting along the inner face of the eastern wall. This use was identified after documenting a series of interventions to restore the space inside the chamber. The chambers were a series of small sub-rectangular spaces delimited by stones on the inner surface. In some cases, they were sealed by vertical slabs leaning against the wall, or by a single large slab. Burials lying in a simple pit or on long slabs originally part of the structural elements were also attested. In both chambers and pits, several burials were often identified overlapping each other.

2.1. Chamber J

The best-preserved chamber was certainly Chamber J, located in the middle section of the tomb and sealed by three long slabs placed side by side. They were resting on the wall face and welded together with the insertion of smaller stones. It is a sub-rectangular chamber, bordered by a semicircle of slabs in two rows. A primary deposition of a 2-2.5-year-old sub-adult was identified in the south/west corner of the chamber (Burial 29). The individual was in supine position with upper limbs extended along the body orientated N-S. Just below it, a primary deposition of a 19-25-year-old female was found (Burial 32). The individual had been buried in a flexed position, on her right side, with a N-S orientation and facing W. The lower limbs were partially covered by an accumulation of goat bones, likely remains of a ritual offering (fig. 2:a.1). The grave goods accompanying this burial included: a ribbed bronze bowl behind the head (fig. 2:a.2), a ceramic dish at pelvis level (fig. 2:a.9), a copper alloy arrowhead (fig. 2:a.4) and three small iron tools (fig. 2:a.3). Personal ornaments included two gold granulated earrings (fig. 2:a.6), three rings of various workmanship (fig. 2:a.7), a bracelet of small cylindrical seals (fig. 2:a.8), and a pyramidal moulded seal with a hole at its apex (fig. 2:a.5). A small bottle made of fine orange ware was among the animal remains (fig. 2:a.10).

³ Circe Laboratory, Caserta (Italy). Lab Codes: DSH10395_HA; DSH10396_HA.

⁴ Genchi *et al.* 2018, 99-117; Genchi 2020, 463-469.

⁵ De Cataldo *et al.* 2020, 13-14; Fattore *et al.* 2018, 375-385.

Some grave goods indicate a Late Iron Age cultural horizon, with parallels to be found in the Samad necropolis in central Oman, e.g.: the gold granulated earring,⁶ the small globular-bodied bottle found in the grave goods of Samad,⁷ also present at Wa'ab,⁸ Asimah,⁹ Mleiha,¹⁰ and later also at Ed-Dur.¹¹ Like the small bottle, the ceramic bowl (fig. 2:a.9), typical of the Iron Age III phase, also recurs extensively in corridor burials, alongside the Ar2 type arrowhead widespread from the Wadi Suq phase and throughout the Iron Age.

In addition to the Samad specimens, in south-east Arabia large examples of granulated gold jewellery already appear in the LCG-2 tomb¹² and Sārūq al-Ḥadīd.¹³ According to technology, these differ from those from Samad. In fact, the most elaborate granulated gold jewellery in this region is that of the LCG-2 tomb A published selection shows a granulated gold earring, granulated tube-shaped beads and a complex granulated wheel-shaped bead.¹⁴ Several gold granulated crescent earrings were found in the 1st millennium royal tombs excavated at Nimrud.¹⁵ Also numerous are the examples from the six tombs at Tillya Tepe in Afghanistan dated to the 1st century AD.¹⁶ The gold beads at issue might have an Iranian origin on the basis of comparisons.¹⁷ These include the tomb of a rich princess at Ġubaġi dated to the first half of the 6th century BC.¹⁸

In contrast, the ribbed bowl with distinct rim finds parallels outside the South-Arabian area. The main comparisons are with Iranian contexts, in particular from the Luristan region, such as the wide and shallow bowl found in tomb 2 of area J7 in Chigha Sabz,¹⁹ or those recovered by Vanden Berghe at the late eighth- to seventh-century BC sites of War Kabud²⁰ and Chamzhi-Mumah²¹ in Luristan. It is therefore probable that this bowl originated in Luristan, from the late 8th or 7th century BC. Similar metal cups are attested in Mediterranean contexts, particularly in Cyprus.²²

Of the three seals that made up the bracelet, only the one made of black softstone was well preserved and clearly depicted a quadruped, almost certainly a camel. The engraved line was very thin indeed and depicted the animal in motion. A very close comparison came from the seal collection found at Saruq al Hadid, which included a pyramid stamp seal depicting a

⁶ Yule 2001, 340, pl. 327:15.

⁷ Yule 2001, 370, pl. 357:7; 430, pl. 417:1; 446, pl. 433:1, 2.

⁸ Mouton 2008, 449, fig. 123:1-3.

⁹ Vogt 1994, 74, fig. 35:6.

¹⁰ Mouton 2008, 342, fig. 16:5; 363, fig. 37:12.

¹¹ Mouton 2008, 439, fig. 113:7, 8.

¹² Genchi *et al.* 2018, 108, fig. 7:e, h.

¹³ Weeks *et al.* 2017, 54, fig. 22.

¹⁴ Genchi *et al.* 2018, 108, fig. 7:e, h.

¹⁵ Hussein 2014, 125-131.

¹⁶ Schiltz 2010, 152-227.

¹⁷ Bead granulation from Parthian/Sasanian Vešnveh (Stöllner - Slotta - Vatandoust 2004, 674, cat. no. 288b); Middle Elamite ring, Susa "Inšušinak depot" (Stöllner - Slotta - Vatandoust 2004, 750, cat. no. 435a); Iron Age rings, Marlik (Stöllner - Slotta - Vatandoust 2004, 751, cat. no. 435b, c); Iron Age earring, Marlik (Stöllner - Slotta - Vatandoust 2004, 754, cat. no. 437).

¹⁸ Shishegar 2017, 206, figs. 6-9.

¹⁹ Bellelli 2002, 63, pl. 15:63.

²⁰ Vanden Berghe 1968, pl. 33:b.

²¹ Vanden Berghe 1977, 60.

²² Matthäus 1985, pl. 30:409, pl. 31:412-413.

camel, engraved with the same technique.²³ More complex was the interpretation of the pyramid type stamp seal widespread in Iron Age contexts. Seals of this type were well known at Saruq al-Hadid, but also at Salut,²⁴ Rumeilah²⁵ and Tell Abraq.²⁶ The motif depicted can perhaps be associated with one from Qarn bint Sa'ud.²⁷

2.2. Chamber K

Chamber K was in the north-central area of the corridor, and it contained two primary burials of 9-12 months old subadults (Burials 47, 54). The individuals were laid with their upper bodies in supine position, between three slabs which formed a lytic space-like cyst. The chamber had been adapted from its original configuration to accommodate the two infants. Underneath, in fact, the original perimeter of the rectangular chamber was delimited by vertically placed slabs and boulders. A woman was deposited there (Burial 57) in a flexed position, on her right side, in a S-N orientation and facing E (fig. 2:b.1). There were numerous grave goods, all arranged around the skull, including a compartmented stone vase (fig. 2:b.2), two metal bowls (fig. 2:b.3-4), one pottery bowl (fig. 2:b.6), a copper pin (fig. 2:b.5), as well as a shell with mineral residues inside (fig. 2:b.7) and a stone file, first associated with a primary burial (fig. 2:b.8). Between the vessels located in the south area of the chamber and inside the bronze vessel near the skull there were several animal bones (probably goat) representing a ritual offering.

Undoubtedly the most significant find among the grave goods was the softstone vase in view of the original decorative motif. It was a compartmented box with an engraved decoration on its surface consisting of a quadruped with a very long neck recognizable as being intent on eating from a tree. This was a rare decorative motif representing a life scene or telling a story. Phytomorphic motifs were quite common in stone vessel assemblages from the region and were also present on some vessels from the LCG-1 and LCG-2 tombs at Daba. Close comparisons based on this design were not present among contemporary sites in the region.²⁸ Many specimens containing phytomorphic features were found in other tombs, such as Fashgha,²⁹ Dibba 76/1,³⁰ Jebel al-Buhais,³¹ settlements such as Husn Salut³² and Rumeilah.³³ Zoomorphic features were rare and often associated with phytomorphic designs. A decoration depicting a fish and a bird was found on a beaker from BHS 31 at the Jebel al-

²³ Boraik *et al.* 2017, JM6305.

²⁴ Degli Esposti 2014, 145, fig. 5:c.

²⁵ Lombard 1998, 151-164, fig. 2:2-3.

²⁶ Potts 1991, 95, fig. 135.

²⁷ Stevens 1992, 174, fig. 1:3.

²⁸ Based on the recent revision of stone vessels by E. Olijdam, the two specimens with phytomorphic motifs from Fashgha 1 and Rumeilah are ascribed to the Iron Age I assemblage (Düring - Olijdam - Botan 2017, fig. 9). However, it should be emphasized that in the first case the vessel belonged to an assemblage that also included typical materials from Iron Age II (Phillips 1987, figs. 24/5, 28/18, 33/35, 35/39, 40), whereas in the second case the authors included the vessel among the materials of Rumeilah II phase (600-300 BC) (Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, 60). Furthermore, the specimen from Dibba 76/1 was retrieved from a multi-period tomb (Pellegrino *et al.* 2019).

²⁹ Phillips 1987, fig. 27:15.

³⁰ Pellegrino *et al.* 2019, 21, fig. 20:4.

³¹ Jasim 2012, 134, fig. 162:11.

³² Tagliamonte 2018, 297, pl. 79:31.

³³ Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, pl. 61:10.

Buhais cemetery,³⁴ whereas another probably zoomorphic element was attested on a suspension vessel from the settlement of Rumeilah.³⁵ A close comparison could be made with a cylindrical beaker portraying a complete quadruped figure next to a tree recovered from the upper layers of LCG-2.³⁶

Also worth mentioning were two metal vessels, one of which was a simple open bowl with a hemispherical profile and round base attested between the end of the Early Iron Age and the beginning of the Late Iron Age (type MeOB13 in P. Yule's classification).³⁷ The other one was similar with a flat base and a slightly everted, rounded rim attested to the end of the Early Iron Age (type MeOB6).³⁸ This burial was also accompanied by a bowl with an incurved rim burnished in dark red, which could be ascribed to the Iron Age III and could be defined as a common burial aspect of this phase of tomb use.

2.3. Chamber I

Located in the southern border of the corridor, was one of those chambers that were used several times, due to the presence of four primary adult depositions with funerary equipment. It consisted of large slabs which delimited a sub-rectangular chamber against a wall. It was probably re-lined several times with the addition of further perimeter stones to introduce other individuals buried on top of each other. The chamber was about one meter deep. The most recent burial belonged to a 30-35-year-old female buried in a flexed position on her left side, in a N-S orientation and facing E (Burial 36). The upper part of the body was placed on a slab that ran along the north-western side of the chamber (fig. 3:d.1). The grave goods consisted of three softstone lids, all typologically very similar, showing a biconical handle with a flat top, deep incisions reminiscent of flower petals and a surface decorated with a radial motif (fig. 3:d.6-8). This type was common in the Iron Age II/III phases as seen from numerous finds, especially in funerary contexts.³⁹ Of the three arrowheads found near the hands, two belonged to the classic Ar2 type, which was widespread from the Wadi Suq period to the Early Iron Age⁴⁰ (fig. 3:d.2-3). The third was rarer and belonged to the Ar8.1 type also datable to the Early Iron Age (fig. 3:d.4).⁴¹

A second burial was found below, belonging to an adult male who died between the ages of 50 and 70 (Burial 38). The individual had been buried in a flexed position on his left side, in a N-S orientation and facing E (fig. 3:b.1). In this case as well the burial was accompanied by an animal offering, probably a goat, laid partially on the feet of the individual. A distinctive feature of this burial was an iron blade which pierced the skull and was the first real evidence of a likely fatal blow to the individual buried in grave LCG-2. The personal finds accompanying the burial were: a compartmented softstone open vessel decorated with two thin bands filled with a saw-teeth motif laid behind the skull (fig. 3:b.3); a small Samad type orange ware bottle as described above (fig. 3:b.4). In addition to these two finds, an

³⁴ Jasim 2012, 104, fig. 130:1.

³⁵ Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, pl. 61:10.

³⁶ Genchi 2015, 85, fig. 83.

³⁷ Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 67, 72, fig. 4.23:MeOB13.

³⁸ Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 67, 71, fig. 4.23:MeOB6.

³⁹ Ziolkowsky 2001, 71, fig. 81; Jasim 2012, 59, fig. 72:3; 101, fig. 126; Phillips 1987, fig. 33:35.

⁴⁰ Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 30, 32, figs. 4.11, 4.13:29.

⁴¹ Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 30, 32, figs. 4.11, 4.13:180.

orange ware plate was found in association with faunal remains according to a well attested burial practice (fig. 3:b.2). Among the diagnostic finds, which allowed us to chronologically date the burial was the orange ware plate widely attested to the Iron Age III phase. The Iron Age III Period was first identified at Rumeilah,⁴² as represented by settlement layers including new pottery types, made in a fine wheel made fabric, which could be compared to Iranian pottery shapes dated from the 6th-3rd centuries BC. They included carinated bowls with a whitish outer surface, and cups with an incurved rim burnished in dark red.⁴³ In addition, the compartmented vase was an almost exact parallel to a specimen from the settlement of Rumeilah,⁴⁴ period II levels that could be assigned to the Iron Age II/III phases (1000/950-350/300 BC).⁴⁵

The iron blade found near the skull raised the question of the metalworking introduction in the second half of the first millennium BC (fig. 3:b.7). The common lack of iron working indications in Southeast Arabia, until the late second half of the first millennium BC, is well known. A circumstance originates from the occurrence of copper ores in the al-Hajjar mountains and the long-established practice of copper-working. The sporadic incidence of iron objects and the recovery of such items in precise contexts led us to consider them as likely high-status items often deposited as grave goods. However, this scarcity may only reflect the context of an earlier stage of the Iron Age period. The latest discoveries at Saruq al-Hadid, a multi-layered site in the Rub al-Khali desert, are proving. There, in fact, a significant quantity of ferrous remains was unearthed, the majority of which appeared to be related to the Iron Age II and later contexts, and less abundant in Iron Age I and earlier Iron Age II layers.⁴⁶ It may be of some significance that most of the ferrous objects from Saruq al-Hadid consisted in weapons, double-edged or single edged fragments were also considerably numerous.⁴⁷ In general, the main comparisons for iron objects such as blades and knives came from later contexts such as Mleiha dated to the 2nd-1st century BC and to the 3rd-4th century AD⁴⁸ and Ed-Dur.⁴⁹

A further two burials were housed in Chamber I but these were separated from the two closest to the surface by a layer of gravelly sediment that suggests a major discontinuity in the use of this chamber. This appears to have been an alluvial event which partially deteriorated the human remains.

The third individual buried was a primary deposition of an 18-40-year-old male that had been deposited, flexed, on his left side, in a N-S orientation and facing W (Burial 68). Different animal bones were discovered near and around the cranium, as well as above the ribs (fig. 3:a.1). The burial was accompanied by notable grave goods consisting of two bronze bowls (fig. 3:a.7), one deep and fitted with a spout placed inside a shallower one with a convex profile. The deposition of two metal vessels inside each other was widely attested in tombs and are often found overturned as in this case. They were placed near the flexed lower limbs.

⁴² Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, 53-62.

⁴³ Benoist 2002, 50, fig. 5.

⁴⁴ Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, pl. 60:2.

⁴⁵ Boucharlat - Lombard 1991, 307-313.

⁴⁶ Weeks *et al.* 2017, 46, tab. 1.

⁴⁷ Weeks *et al.* 2017, 46-48.

⁴⁸ Mouton 2008, 366, fig. 40:1-5; 367, fig. 41:1-7.

⁴⁹ Mouton 2008, 442, fig. 116:6-9.

The most significant container was a slightly shouldered bowl with long channel spout and broad and rounded carinated rim. Several precise parallels exist in the Ibrī-Selme hoard assemblage (Class MeGB1),⁵⁰ at Al-Buḥayṣ Bhs78⁵¹ and at ‘Uqdat al-Bakra.⁵² A third hemispherical metal bowl with convex walls, plain rim and roundish foot was placed near the pelvis (fig. 3: a.2). It too had its main parallels in the Ibrī-Selme hoard collection (Class MeOB7),⁵³ at ‘Uqdat al-Bakra,⁵⁴ at Al-Quṣayṣ, area C, V⁵⁵ and lastly at Al-Buḥayṣ Bhs2.⁵⁶ This was a common manufacture in Early Iron Age contexts, particularly in the Iron Age II/III phases based on sites where they were attested, although in some cases tombs were reused on several occasions. Radiocarbon dating was lacking except for the recently published radiocarbon dates for the metallurgical site of ‘Uqdat al-Bakra.⁵⁷

A very significant object was a miniature softstone bowl with a suspension hole on one edge (fig. 3: a.4). It was probably a small beaker (less than 4 cm in diameter) used as a pendant in view of its being found close to the individual’s neck. Softstone vases can occur with a hole pierced vertically on one side, perhaps to help to fix a lid with a string. The stone used to make it appeared to be a translucent grey/light brown calcite. Precise comparisons were not found in literature, particularly from contexts of south-eastern Arabia. Although the latest finds of miniature objects lead us to believe that they were placed in ritual or ceremonial contexts such as at Mudhmar.⁵⁸

The ceramic plate was instead placed between the skull of the individual and that of the goat and it covered the rest of the animal (spine and ribs). The association between the animal offering and the dish placed nearby is thus once again apparent. The large and shallow dish had an orange-brown slip exterior and interior and was wheel-made (fig. 3:a.3). Its shape reflected that of the typical Iron Age III tradition, as did almost all dishes found in burials accompanied by animal offerings. The most accurate comparisons were from the above-mentioned Rumeilah settlement, but also from the Burnt Building at Husn Salut⁵⁹ and the Dibba 76 tomb at Fujeirah.⁶⁰ A long thin iron point (fig. 3:a.5), one bronze rings (fig. 3:a.6) and two carnelian beads made up the rest of the grave goods.

Just below this burial there was a primary deposition of a 25-50-year-old, probably a female, individual (Burial 75) who had been buried flexed, on her right side, in a N-S orientation and facing W. The burial was, once again, accompanied by an accumulation of animal bones, in this case, located next to the flexed lower limbs (fig. 3:c.1).

Two weapons were found, a small iron blade near the right hand (fig. 3:c.5) and an iron dagger at the height of the lumbar vertebrae and the pelvic girdle (fig. 3:c.3). Eleven bronze arrowheads belonging to the remains of a quiver were found near the dagger (fig. 3:c.6-15).

⁵⁰ Yule - Weisgerber 2001, pls. 28:278, 280; 31:299; 33:303.

⁵¹ Jasim 2012, 226, fig. 272:1, 2; dating: Yule - Weisgerber 2015, 24, tab. 6.

⁵² Yule 2018, 33-146, cat. no. 289.

⁵³ Yule - Weisgerber 2001, 57, pl. 25:259-266.

⁵⁴ Yule 2018, 33-146, cat. nos. 304-306.

⁵⁵ Lombard 1985, 214, fig. 110:389.

⁵⁶ Jasim 2012, 32, fig. 30:5.

⁵⁷ Genchi - Giardino 2018, figs. 3:20-3:23.

⁵⁸ Gernez - Jean - Benoist 2017, 110, figs. 9, 10.

⁵⁹ Condoluci - Degli Esposti - Phillips 2018, 169, 171, pls. 47:3; 48:11.

⁶⁰ Pellegrino *et al.* 2019, 15, fig. 13:5, 6.

A bronze bowl, placed, as usual, upside down, partially covered the skull (fig. 3:c.2) and a small bottle of the typical Samad type vase was placed near the right hand (fig. 3:c.4).

The bronze bowl had a hemispherical profile with a slightly flanged rim below which there were four thin parallel horizontal grooves. The type is widespread in the Ibrī-Selme hoard (Class MeOB1)⁶¹ and finds precise parallels in two recently published specimens from the Al-Khawd hoard.⁶² The spread of this type of metal vessel in south-eastern Arabia is generally found in the final stages of the Early Iron Age.⁶³ The dagger had a simple tang on which was fixed a finely worked bone handle and a biconvex iron blade thick in cross section. Iron daggers with tang of this size (27 cm) belong to class D16, according to the recent classification elaborated by P. Yule, on the basis of recent findings and is generally attributable to the Late Iron Age phases.⁶⁴

The eleven arrowheads attached to each other were probably clustered in a perishable quiver. Prior to the Late Iron Age arrowhead were seldom preserved together in quivers.⁶⁵ Exceptions occur in the LCG-1 tomb at Daba in which at least 15 quivers,⁶⁶ consisting of numerous copper arrowheads (up to 25), were recovered. In the tombs of Sharm,⁶⁷ Nizwa⁶⁸ and the settlement of Rumeilah⁶⁹ a remarkable number of grouped arrowheads suggested the presence of a decomposed quiver.

2.4. Chamber M

In this phase of tomb use, the custom of building burial chambers against the eastern perimeter wall in the southern part of the corridor was also attested. A burial accompanied by remarkable grave goods was placed in a pit bordered by large slabs that were not completely preserved and formed. Its primary deposition was of a 35-50-year-old female who had been buried in a flexed position, on her right side, in a S-N orientation and facing downwards (Burial 48). The cranium appeared to have been wedged, or to have slipped during the early phases of decomposition, in the space between two large stone slabs. The upper limbs were flexed; the left hand was uncovered, palm down, near the mandible whereas the right was uncovered with the palm facing upwards. Both the upper limbs were covered by three vessels (one bronze vessel, one pottery vessels and one softstone vessel). Behind the knees were located two further softstone vessels. The burial was accompanied by an animal offering consisting of the remains of a goat, deposited between the individual and the wall (fig. 4:a.1).

Certainly, the most significant find among those mentioned was a rectangular stone vessel with a decoration typical of the Late Bronze Age phase.⁷⁰ It consisted of four panels bordered by horizontal lines respectively filled with a net pattern, two rows of dots in a circle without

⁶¹ Yule - Weisgerber 2001, 51-52, pls. 16:158-159, 17:160-165.

⁶² Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 302, pl. 10:324-325.

⁶³ Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 63, 70.

⁶⁴ Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 52, 56, fig. 4.18: D16.

⁶⁵ Yule 2018, 52.

⁶⁶ Genchi 2013, fig. 34.

⁶⁷ Weeks 2000, 186-187.

⁶⁸ Yule - Weisgerber 2015, 13, 58-59, pls. 2-3.

⁶⁹ Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, 60, pl. 62:1-8.

⁷⁰ Velde 2003.

separation lines. The two lower panels had sets of oblique lines forming a chevron motif (fig. 4:a.4). It is a decorative pattern found on vessels of different shapes and the main parallels come from: the settlement of Rumeilah;⁷¹ from the tomb of Nizwa;⁷² from Shimal, SH102;⁷³ as well as from LCG1 at Daba on a globular vessel.⁷⁴ The stone vessels of Late Bronze Age tradition represent a so-called *heirloom* quite common regionally among the burials of this period including the two graves at Daba. A few specimens from earlier phases persist in the tombs as if they were antiques. In general, probable heirlooms in grave inventories were difficult to identify and may weaken the chronology. In this context a narrow range of shapes, syntactic schemes and motive combinations indicate few heirloom pieces.

Another stone vessel located near the skull, on the other hand, refers to the typical shapes and decorations of the mature Iron Age phase (Iron Age II/III). It was a low conical vessel consisting in a series of horizontal and parallel incised lines enclosing a single decorated panel. It included a series of triangles framed by a double saw-tooth linear motif (fig. 4: a.6). The pattern displaying saw-teeth linear motifs to form a series of triangles was also found on a conical vessel at Dibba 76/1,⁷⁵ on another conical at the Al-Bustan cemetery⁷⁶ and lastly on a compartmented box at Jebel al-Buhais.⁷⁷

Of particular interest was the pottery bowl with a vertically offset rim and brown burnished slip (fig. 4:a.2). Similar examples were discovered in Period II contexts at Rumeilah;⁷⁸ in Phase 3 contexts at Tell Abraq;⁷⁹ as well as from HSIII layers at Husn Salut.⁸⁰ The presence of typical Burnished Maroon Slip Ware (BMSW) was indicative of external influences from Iran at a date between the 7th and the 4th century BC, although an earlier start could not be ruled out. BMSW was defined by its technology, decoration, and form. It was invariably wheel-made, seemingly on a fast wheel; decorated with a brown to maroon slip commonly burnished; and found in a limited series of bowl forms. It was first defined in the excavations undertaken by the French Archaeological Mission at Rumeilah in the al-Ain oasis where the existence of BMSW was identified in Period II corresponding to the end of the Iron Age (i.e., the Iron Age III period). The bowl accompanying the burial reflected the typical forms of BMSW production found in the region at Rumeilah, Tell Abraq and in Iran at Tepe Yahya, Intermediate Period.⁸¹

Next to the skull was a metal bowl, probably made of pure copper (fig. 4:a.3). It was a convex bowl with a flanged rim, and it could be grouped outwards of type MeOB06 of the classification recently worked out by P. Yule.⁸² The type was datable to the later stages of

⁷¹ Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, 59, pl. 60:6.

⁷² al-Shanfari - Weisgerber 1989, 24, fig. 4:1.

⁷³ Vogt - Kästner 1987, 29, fig. 15:8.

⁷⁴ Genchi - Tursi 2022, 8, fig. 6:3.

⁷⁵ Pellegrino *et al.* 2019, 22, fig. 21.

⁷⁶ Yule 2001, 497, pl. 484:4.

⁷⁷ Jasim 2012, 84, fig. 103:1.

⁷⁸ Benoist 1998, figs. 1:6; 10:19, 20.

⁷⁹ Magee 1996, 244, fig. 3.

⁸⁰ Degli Esposti - Condoluci 2018, 75, pl. 9:2, 9, 11, 13.

⁸¹ Magee 2005, 84, fig. 6:a-c.

⁸² Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 67, 71, fig. 4.23.

the Iron Age (Iron Age II/III) and again found precise parallels in the Ibri-Selme hoard,⁸³ and in the Bawšar B42 tombs.⁸⁴

It seemed plausible that the stone perimeter of the burial described above was rearranged as the burials identified underneath had a different configuration, even though located in the same burial pit. In fact, one burial was laid on a large slab which served as a cover for another one laid in a large pit. Both had no boundary stones. Primary deposition of a 20-30-year-old female that had been buried, flexed, on the left side, with a N-S orientation and facing E (fig. 4:d.1) on a large slab (Burial 66). The skeleton was incomplete in its lower portions and had, in part, been altered in its arrangement by post depositional processes. Associated with the burial were: a copper/bronze vessel (fig. 4:d.2), under the right elbow; near the pelvic girdle, a softstone beaker (fig. 4: d.3), two shell containers (fig. 4:d.4-5) and a bronze pin (fig. 4:d.6). A beaded necklace was part of the grave goods and was found near the cervical vertebra.

The metal bowl was almost identical to the one that accompanied the most recent burial attributable to the well-known Iron Age type MeOB6, while the softstone beaker was quite original. This was a shallow chlorite beaker with a rounded base, slightly curved sides, and flat everted rim. It was decorated with two horizontal lines under the rim and a band of three parallel diagonal lines forming a zig-zag motif across the upper part of the vessel. An accurate comparison for both glass shape and partly the decoration came from the BHS 77 tomb at the Jebel al-Buhais necropolis,⁸⁵ in association with ceramic and stone objects typical of the Iron Age II/III. The decoration was also found in some specimens from the BHS 78 tomb,⁸⁶ from BHS 84,⁸⁷ from Bithnah, tomb 4⁸⁸ and from Dibba 76/1.⁸⁹

The copper pin was 12 cm long and reflected the average size of pins discovered in the area, although small pins reaching a length of 6-8 cm were attested. The top end was thicker and rounded, instead the opposite end was slightly sharply pointed, as already observed for other specimens. Pins were generally used for fastening together pieces of cloth but also for and many other functions. They were widespread in the settlement areas as tool of everyday usage, in tombs they were associated with clothes or as ornaments among the grave goods in female burials. Pins were unheated at settlements of Rumeilah,⁹⁰ Tell Abraq,⁹¹ Husn Salut;⁹² and in the tombs of Dibba 76/1,⁹³ Bidya 1,⁹⁴ and Sharm⁹⁵ just to mention a few well-known Iron Age sites.

In addition to the copper pin and a necklace made of small carnelian and onyx beads, other personal items accompanying the burial were two specimens of *Acrosterigma Lacunosa* containing concentrations and/or traces of green matter adhering to their interior surfaces. It

⁸³ Yule - Weisgerber 2001, 56-57, pl. 23:235-239.

⁸⁴ Yule 1999, 69, fig. 23:149.

⁸⁵ Jasim 2012, 217, fig. 261:2.

⁸⁶ Jasim 2012, 221, fig. 265:1; 222, fig. 267:4, 6.

⁸⁷ Jasim 2012, 244, fig. 294:7.

⁸⁸ Corboud *et al.* 1996, 145, pl. 19:4.

⁸⁹ Pellegrino *et al.* 2019, 18, fig. 16:7.

⁹⁰ Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, 61, pl. 62:12.

⁹¹ Weeks 1997, 43.

⁹² Sasso 2018, 329, pl. 87:111-115.

⁹³ Pellegrino *et al.* 2019, 27, fig. 27:28.

⁹⁴ Al-Tikriti 1989, pl. 77:k.

⁹⁵ Weeks 2000, 188, fig. 10.

looked as though these shells were utilized as containers to hold raw material placed in their interior recesses. Tomb LCG2 returned numerous specimens of shell containers,⁹⁶ both directly associated with the burials and in deposits that filled the burial chamber, although their content was not analysed. These pigment shells were comparable to many examples from Tell Abraq⁹⁷ and Sharm, Tomb 1⁹⁸ dated to the Iron Age. Analysis showed that the material contained in the shell from Tell Abraq was atacamite. Potts suggests that atacamite was used for cosmetic purposes. Similar cosmetic shells containing pigments were known from sites in southern Mesopotamia such as Ur;⁹⁹ from Early Dynastic graves at Kish¹⁰⁰ and in the Diyala region.¹⁰¹

The large slab on which the individual was laid served as a cover for a further burial deposited in a rather deep pit (Burial 73). It was a primary deposition of an adult individual that had been laid down flexed, on his left side, with a N-S orientation and facing east (fig. 4:b.1). The skull rested on a stone, the upper limbs were flexed, and the left hand was placed in front of the face. The lower limbs were also flexed with the feet tucked beneath the pelvis. According to the usual pattern of deposition in this case as well there was an accumulation of animal bones above the individual's feet, and partly on the skull. A copper axe (fig. 4:b.3), a shell container (fig. 4:b.4) and a pottery plate (fig. 4:b.2) composed the grave goods.

The orange ware bowl with walls straight outwards and a vertically offset rim followed the already mentioned types of Rumeilah settlement period II, identifiable with the Iron Age III horizon. The period II comparison with Rumeilah was also relevant for the copper axe placed near the individual's head. It was a shaft-hole axe with wide and long blade flaring upward, and its casting fin was not trimmed off. Lombard considered this object as "a traditional and purely local product",¹⁰² typical of the metallurgy of Oman. Due to its peculiar features (including thin blade, narrowness of the joint between shaft and blade) it was determined it to be a votive object with a ceremonial purpose.¹⁰³ This type of axe, classified as A5 in the catalogue compiled by P. Yule,¹⁰⁴ was widespread in tombs, with eight examples, not always associated with primary burials. Precise comparisons in addition to Rumeilah came from several Early Iron Age contexts, such as: the 'Ibrī/Selme hoard,¹⁰⁵ 'Uqdat al-Bakra,¹⁰⁶ Al-Qusais;¹⁰⁷ Qarn Bint Saud¹⁰⁸ and Hili 8.¹⁰⁹

⁹⁶ Genchi *et al.* 2018, 111, fig. 9:d.

⁹⁷ Thomas - Potts 1996, 13-16, fig. 2.

⁹⁸ Masia 2000, 22-23, fig. 1.

⁹⁹ Thomas - Potts 1996, 15, fig. 4.

¹⁰⁰ Moorey 1978, 113.

¹⁰¹ Delougaz - Hill - Lloyd 1967, tab. 1.

¹⁰² Lombard 1985, 213.

¹⁰³ Boucharlat - Lombard 1985, 61, pl. 62:16.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 42, fig. 4.15.

¹⁰⁵ Yule - Weisgerber 2001, 41, pl. 1.1; Weisgerber - al-Shanfari 2014, 128, fig. 245:2.

¹⁰⁶ Yule 2018, cat. nos. 75-85.

¹⁰⁷ Salles 1981, 44.

¹⁰⁸ Lombard 1984, fig. 1:2.

¹⁰⁹ Cleuziou 1978-1979, fig. 40.

2.5. Chamber N

It was pointed out that the western wall face suffered numerous collapses, especially in the tomb's middle and southern portions, and in some places restorations and rearrangements had been carried out. However, the western side of the tomb was also originally affected by the construction of small burial chambers, as demonstrated by Chamber N, which was leaning against what remained of the facing last rows. Only two large stones remained to mark the chamber's perimeter towards the inner side (fig. 4:c.1).

Inside was a primary deposition of an adult who had been laid down flexed, on the left side, with a N-S orientation and facing E (Burial 70). The upper limbs were flexed showing the individual had been buried with the right hand under the cheek and the left to the head. The lower limbs were flexed and the feet positioned close to the pelvis. Several grave goods were recovered including two softstone vessels (fig. 4:c.3-4) and a lid, a pottery bowl (fig. 4:c.5), a spouted copper bowl (fig. 4:c.6) and a rare metal ladle (fig. 4:c.2).

The two stone vessels, one at the level of the right scapula, the other on the knees, were both typical conical vessels of the classical Iron Age tradition. The larger of the two presented a decoration consisting of a band filled with a herringbone pattern followed by a panel composed of a band of a radiating triangular composition alternating with horizontal and parallel saw-tooth lines. This pattern was quite common in the mature phases of the Iron Age when the triangular composition characterized mostly conical vessels as attested in tomb 4 of Bithnah;¹¹⁰ in those BHS78,¹¹¹ BHS 84¹¹² and BHS 85¹¹³ of Jebel al-Buhais; and at Qarn Bint Sa'ud.¹¹⁴ The smaller conical vessel, on the other hand, bore the same band below the rim filled with a herringbone motif and three parallel lines at the base, while the main panel had a triangular composition formed by two faint parallel incised lines. Although the roughly executed decorative motif led us to think of an unfinished object, there were regional parallels, namely from tomb BHS23 in Jebel Buhais,¹¹⁵ and similarly from tomb 1 in Sharm;¹¹⁶ and 4 in Bithnah.¹¹⁷

As with most of the burials analyzed so far, Burial 70 was accompanied by a typical orange ware bowl with red slip characterized by straight outwards sides and vertically offset rim, commonly associated with the Iron Age III phase.

Certainly, the most interesting object in the grave goods was the copper-base ladle, intentionally placed under the larger stone vessel and perhaps functionally connected to the container. It had a hemispherical cup and a long handle bent at the end with a rounded profile (mould cast; length, 15 cm; cup diameter 5 cm). Such objects were found at Husn Salut and are considered as "ritual" based on their context of origin, which had been interpreted as a foundation deposit given the rich and characteristic material collected. According to the

¹¹⁰ Corboud *et al.* 1996, 139, fig. 16/2.

¹¹¹ Jasim 2012, 224, fig. 269.

¹¹² Jasim 2012, 243, fig. 293:5, 6.

¹¹³ Jasim 2012, 256, fig. 305:2.

¹¹⁴ Zutterman 2004, 109, fig. 9:3, 4.

¹¹⁵ Jasim 2012, 84, fig. 103:5.

¹¹⁶ Ziolkowski 2001, 63, fig. 64.

¹¹⁷ Corboud *et al.* 1996, 143, pl. 18/2.

finds' analysis and partly based on radiocarbon dating, this context could be attributed to the beginning of the Iron Age III phase.¹¹⁸

Ladles from Iron Age contexts are known from Muweila, one coming from the floor of Building II's columned hall,¹¹⁹ and from Saruq al-Hadid.¹²⁰ Later, they were documented at Mleiha, in funerary and settlement contexts of the 3rd-2nd century BC and of the 1st-2nd century AD;¹²¹ and in Samad period burials, such as at Sumail.¹²²

To conclude, the copper bowl with a long spout with a squared section fits perfectly into the MeOB02 category of P. Yule's classification, thus ascribable to the Early Iron Age from precise comparisons from Ibri/Selme and Al-Hawd hoards.¹²³

Within the corridor a series of primary burials also belonged to this phase, which were not deposited in small chambers delimited by slabs and stones, but simply lying along the perimeter walls (Burials 22, 33, 34, 40, 41, 42, 49, 50, 51, 53, 55, 59, 60). Most of these were infant burials in precarious preservation and almost always without grave goods, often laid in small recesses at the base of foundation walls. Among these, the only ones with grave goods, who emulated those in the chambers, were Burials 34, 53, 60, all lying along the western wall. It is important to underline again how the western wall had undergone several collapses with subsequent adaptations which conditioned deposition practices. Likely the presence of numerous collapsed stones impeded the construction of real chambers, prompting depositions in shallow pits or simply laying the individuals along the inner wall.

3. CONCLUSION

The corridor tomb necropolis of Dibbā is in a regional context where this type of structure is widespread, and above all used for very long periods of time. This led to obvious internal transformations resulting in the dispersion of the original contexts. Several tombs were investigated in the region, but we cannot consider the arrangement identified within LCG-2 as representative of the practices prevalent in the region in the Iron Age considering absence of data on burial practices in a corridor tomb of this type. However, the corridor feature seems peculiar to the northern region, since in the Iron Age of Central Oman different choices were made and the most common tombs were mounds or lithic cists, as in the Samad area.

All the burials described had several features in common, starting with their emplacement in small chambers set against perimeter walls, mainly the eastern one. Another common trait was the presence of animal offerings, mainly goats, found near the feet or legs of individuals, and frequently accompanied by a bowl. As emerged from the analysis of the materials, the burials seem to pertain overall to the transitional phase between the Early and Late Iron Age, based upon the horizon of the Iron Age III and the period known as Samad, equivalent to the Late Iron Age. In addition, this phase is coherent with the two radiocarbon dates from these levels that indicate the late Iron Age III (356-278 BC cal. 2 α 96%; 328-198 BC cal. 2 α

¹¹⁸ A radiocarbon date coming from US75 (calibrated at 784-542 BC; 95.4% accuracy) considered together with the associated materials which include possible Iron Age III items, placed its deposition between the HSII and HSIII phases (Degli Esposti - Condoluci 2018, 46).

¹¹⁹ Magee 2003, 186, fig. 7.

¹²⁰ Herrmann - Casana - Qandil 2012, 61.

¹²¹ Mouton 2008, 55, figs. 24:4; 88:4.

¹²² Yule - Weisgerber 1988, 33, 40, fig. 8:4.

¹²³ Al-Jahwari *et al.* 2021, 70, fig. 4.22.

92%). The existence of guiding artefacts such as bowls, bronze axes, some stone vessels, and trihedral arrowheads lead us to assign this phase to the so-called Rumeilah II phase, commonly dated to Iron Age III. The presence, on the other hand, of numerous small bottles associated with the iron points and tools harked back to contexts known in central Oman as Samad and ascribable to the early phases of the Late Iron Age. In fact, the P.I.R. period, which corresponded to the last phase of the structure reuse, identified in chamber A, did not yet seem ascribable to this phase of the tomb use. The question of the presence of iron artefacts, alongside material typical of the final phases of the Early Iron Age, confronted us with the possible circulation of the first iron artefacts already from this period, as confirmed by the results of recent research at the nearby Saruq al-Hadid site.

The Iron Age III period is very poorly known throughout south-eastern Arabia and the recovery of evidence of this period represents a turning point. Although production of typical Iron Age II ceramics appears to have continued into the Iron Age III period, a new range of fast wheel-made ceramics, corresponding to the forms described above, make their appearance. These include ceramics that appear to be local in origin, but which exhibit changes in the technology behind their production. Alongside these ceramics are many examples which may represent imports. One such group has been defined as Burnished Maroon Slipped Ware. Made with a fast wheel, it is decorated with a distinctive burnished surface. It can include a wide variety of forms made up of bowls and handled jars. Iron Age III contexts in which metal, ceramic and stone artefacts similar to the described objects have been identified mainly at Rumeilah (period 2) and Tell Abraq for the northern region and at Husn Salut for Central Oman.¹²⁴

The data presented here provided us with an accurate picture of the burial patterns within a typical *corridor-shaped* tomb widespread in the northern region of the Oman Peninsula. Primary burials were rarely found in an excellent state of preservation, being tombs that were reused several times, often disturbed or despoiled. In this case, a uniform and coherent burial phase gave us a detailed picture of one of the phases of grave use, certainly not the oldest nor the most recent, which allowed us to shed light on an aspect of the funerary customs of Iron Age communities, which although not representative of the totality of graves from this phase, represents one of the rare, documented cases.

¹²⁴ Following the three-fold division of the Iron Age period in Southeast Arabia proposed more than twenty years ago by P. Magee (Magee 1996; Phillips 2010), the burial phase described could be considered broadly to correspond to the Iron Age III period (c. 600-300 BC), although several elements refer significantly to the Late Iron Age phase (c. 300 BC- 300 AD). During this phase two different main archaeological features can be distinguished in south-east Arabia: the Pré-Islamique Récente assemblage (LIA PIR) in the north of the Oman peninsula, and the Samad assemblage (LIA Samad) in its central and southern part (Yule 2016, 32, fig. 1). The chronological range includes both features, although the initial evidence for the LIA Samad has most recently been dated to the final part of the first millennium BC, roughly the mid-third century BC (Yule 2016, 34, tab. 1), while the LIA PIR has been divided into four main phases (A-D) that date from the mid- to late third century BC to the mid-third century AD (Mouton 2008). Elements related to both aspects coexist at Dibbā, although the chronological data they can provide do not, so far, cover this whole-time span.

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Fig. 1 - a. The LCG-2 tomb and the location of chambers; b-c. Examples of human bone clusters; d-j. Late multiple burial chambers, k-q. Burials arranged inside and outside the corridor.



Fig. 2 - a. Chamber J, Burial 32; b. Chamber K, Burial 57.



Fig. 3 - Chamber I: a. Burial 68; b. Burial 38; c. Burial 75; d. Burial 36.



Fig. 4 - Chamber M: a. Burial 48; d. Burial 66; b. Burial 73; Chamber N: c. Burial 70.