

The Archaeological Heritage of Oman

# LANDSCAPES OF DEATH

*Early Bronze Age Tombs and Mortuary Rituals on the Oman Peninsula*

KIMBERLY D. WILLIAMS



Sultanate of Oman سلطنة عُمان  
**وزارة التراث والسياحة**  
Ministry of Heritage and Tourism



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD  
Summertown Pavilion  
18-24 Middle Way  
Summertown  
Oxford OX2 7LG  
www.archaeopress.com

© Kimberly D. Williams 2023

Landscapes of Death: Tombs and Mortuary Rituals in Early Bronze Age Oman  
(Includes bibliographical references and index).

1. Arabia. 2. Oman 3. Mortuary Rituals. 4. Antiquities 5. Bronze Age.

This edition is published by Archaeopress Publishing Ltd in association with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman.

ISBN 978-1-80327-529-1

ISBN 978-1-80327-530-7 (e-Pdf)

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman.

Ministry of Heritage and Tourism  
Sultanate of Oman, Muscat  
P.O. Box 200, Postal Code 115  
Thaqafah Street  
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman

Cover: Umm an-Nar type tomb at Shir, Sultanate of Oman (photograph by Oriol Alamany)

# Contents

<i>List of figures, tables and spotlights</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	xv
<b>1 Mortuary Ritual as a Reflection of Life</b>	1
<b>2 Mortuary Monuments: Cairns (3200–2700 BC)</b>	10
<b>3 Mortuary Monuments: Umm an-Nar Period Communal Tombs (2700–2000 BC)</b>	55
<b>4 Evidence of Transitions</b>	85
<b>5 Early Bronze Age Death Practices and Bioarchaeological Analyses (3200–2000 BC)</b>	104
<b>6 Future Research and Recommendations</b>	142
<i>Bibliography</i>	155
<i>Appendices</i>	175
<i>Index</i>	251



## List of figures, tables and spotlights

\* All photographs by Kimberly D. Williams unless otherwise noted.

### FIGURES

0.1.	Early Bronze Age cairns at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Al-Ayn	xvi
2.1.	Early Bronze Age cairns at Al-Khubayb necropolis, Dhank	10
2.2.	Early Bronze Age cairns (a) Mudhai, Dhofar (photo courtesy of Joy McCorriston, RASA team); (b) Al-Khubayb necropolis; (c) Zukayt necropolis	11
2.3.	Map of key Early Bronze Age Cairn sites of the Oman Peninsula	12
2.4.	Examples of Jemdet Nasr vessels (after Cleuziou and Tosi 2020: fig. 93)	13
2.5.	(a) Beads and (b) shell pendant recovered from excavation of Hafit-type cairns at the Al-Khubayb necropolis	13
2.6.	Examples of (a) dagger commonly recovered during excavation of Hafit-type cairns and (b) bronze awl/needle	13
2.7.	Early Bronze Age cairns at the site Abu Silah, Dhank	15
2.8.	Tomb D001-001 before excavation (after Williams <i>et al.</i> 2014)	16
2.9.	Neolithic interment under floor in tomb D001-001 (after Williams <i>et al.</i> 2014)	17
2.10.	Closeup of exterior of wall of D001-001 (after Williams <i>et al.</i> 2014)	17
2.11.	Plan of the necropolis of KJ1 (C. Sévin-Allouet)	18
2.12.	Tomb 1 of the KJ1 necropolis (C. Sévin-Allouet)	19
2.13.	Tomb 2 of the KJ1 necropolis and the associated dwelling (C. Sévin-Allouet)	19
2.14.	Architectural evolution of tomb 2 of KJ1 (C. Sévin-Allouet)	19
2.15.	Examples of variation in building materials used to construct Early Bronze Age cairns (a) Zukayt; (b) Halban; (c) Halban; (d) Al-Khubayb; (e) Dhofar (photographs a-d: K.D. Williams; photographs and courtesy of RASA project, Joy McCorriston)	22
2.16.	Sample of large-scale surveys that reported on Early Bronze Age cairn distribution (survey areas are estimated for illustration purposes)	23
2.17.	View of portion of the Abu Silah necropolis, Dhank	24
2.18.	Schematic drawings of cairn plans from Jebel Hafit showing each of the five directions that entrances faced	25
2.19.	Satellite view of the Ras Al-Jinz bay, with the location of sites RJ-6 and RJ-1 (O. Munoz, Google Earth Image)	26
2.20.	The Ras Al-Jinz bay view from the Jebel as-Saffran, with the location of sites RJ-6 and RJ-1 (O. Munoz)	27
2.21.	Plan of the southern group of tombs at RJ-6 (O. Munoz, after G. Santini's excavation notebook, tombs layouts from Santini 1992, and 3D model of Tomb 2 from San Basilio 2017)	27
2.22.	View of the Tomb 5 at RJ-6 at the end of the excavation showing the wall structure and the preparation of the floor of the chamber with small stones (Joint Hadd Project)	28

2.23.	View of the Tomb 4 at RJ-6 during its excavation showing the wall structure with an external plinth and some articulated portions of skeletons in the chamber (G. Santini Joint Hadd Project)	28
2.24.	Axial deformation observed on a right tibia (right) and fibula (left) from Tomb 5 at RJ-6, which led to disability of the individual (O. Munoz)	29
2.25.	Map of the area with excavated (yellow dots) and surveyed tombs (red dots) (O. Munoz)	30
2.26.	Tombs of the Shiyā necropolis, on the cliff and in the wadi bed, near the modern houses (O. Munoz)	31
2.27.	Oblique and zenithal views of excavated tombs in Shiyā (O. Munoz)	32
2.28.	Grave goods from the tombs of Shiyā (O. Munoz)	33
2.29.	Localization of the site HD-7.3 and the other necropolises and main archaeological settlements in the area of Ras Al-Hadd (O. Munoz)	34
2.30.	The tombs at HD-7.3 view from west (O. Munoz, G. Seguin)	35
2.31.	Layout of the tombs in the necropolis HD-7.3 (O. Munoz)	35
2.32.	Zenithal views of the tombs from HD-7.3. Note the bedrock arrangement outside of the Tomb 4 (O. Munoz, G. Seguin)	36
2.33.	Objects associated to the individual A of tomb 5 of Ras Al-Hadd HD-7.3: “razor” or “spatula” in copper alloy, decorated compartmentalized box in soft stone, and stick in copper alloy; and restitution of the position of the deposited individual (O. Munoz)	39
2.34.	Early Bronze Age cairns at the UNESCO World Heritage site Al-Ayn (P. Yule)	40
2.35.	Early Bronze Age cairns at the UNESCO World Heritage site Al-Ayn (P. Yule)	41
2.36.	Example of Early Bronze Age cairn in Dhofar (courtesy RASA project, Joy McCorriston)	44
2.37.	Example of cairn in Hadramawt, Yemen	44
2.38.	Early Bronze Age cairns at the UNESCO World Heritage site Al-Ayn (P. Yule)	46
2.39.	Early Bronze Age cairn at the UNESCO World Heritage site Al-Ayn (P. Yule)	46
2.40.	Schematic overheads of the cairns excavated at Tawi Silaim (after de Cardi <i>et al.</i> 1977)	47
2.41.	Early Bronze Age cairn from the site of Shenah (photo: Y. Al-Rahbi; courtesy Mohamed Al-Belushi, Sultan Qaboos University)	49
2.42.	Map of necropoles in the Dhank region	50
2.43.	Distribution of cairns at the Al-Khubayb necropolis	51
2.44.	(a) Example of Hafit-type cairn at Al-Khubayb necropolis; (b) Example of Hafit/Umm an-Nar transitional cairn at Al-Khubayb necropolis (S007-001; Williams and Gregoricka 2013, 2019); (c) Example of tumulus at Al-Khubayb necropolis (S007-169; Williams and Gregoricka 2020)	52
2.45.	Hafit-type cairns at the Al-Khubayb necropolis	52
2.46.	Example of Hafit/Umm an-Nar transitional cairn surrounded by Hafit-type cairns at Al-Khubayb necropolis	53
3.1.	Umm an-Nar tomb A at UNESCO World Heritage site of Bat (C. Schmidt)	55
3.2.	Location of published Umm an-Nar sites	56
3.3.	Examples of white ashlar stones that formed the façade of most Umm an-Nar circular tombs from the site of Shokur, Dhank	57

3.4.	Rounded wadi cobbles from Iron Age cairns built on top of Umm an-Nar Tomb 1 at DH7 (Dahwa). These stones covered the earlier Umm an-Nar tomb and helped to protect the Early Bronze Age context. Roof stones and ringwall from the Umm an-Nar tomb were visible as the remains of the cairn stones were removed	58
3.5.	Umm an-Nar Island tombs excavated by Danish Archaeological Expedition (after Thorvildsen 1962)	59
3.6.	Example of Umm an-Nar tomb roof slabs from Dahwa site: (a) Tomb 1, DH7 roof stones circled, (b) close up of roof stone from Tomb 1, DH7	60
3.7.	Umm an-Nar Island tombs excavated by Iraqi Archaeological Expedition (after Al-Tikriti 1981)	61
3.8.	Tomb 1001 at Adam (G. Gernez)	62
3.9.	Tomb 2000 at Adam (after Gernez and Giraud 2019)	62
3.10.	Sample of tombs at Bat (Tombs 53, 54, 55B, 84, and 87 after Frifelt 1975; rest after Schmidt and Döpfer 2014)	64
3.11.	Sample of tombs at the Hili site (after Al-Tikriti 1981; Cleuziou and Vogt 1985)	65
3.12.	Schematic plan of Hili, Tomb A (after Cleuziou and Vogt 1985)	66
3.13.	Hili, Tomb E and N (after Al-Tikriti and Méry 2000)	67
3.14.	Umm an-Nar tomb at Mleiha (after Jasim 2003)	70
3.15.	Mowaihat, Tomb A and B (after Al-Tikriti 1989)	72
3.16.	Tomb QA 1-1 at site of Qumairah (after Rutkowski 2018)	74
3.17.	Ras Al-Jinz, Tomb 1 and bone pits (after Al-Tikriti 1989)	75
3.18.	Al-Sufouh Tombs I-IV (after Benton 1996)	79
3.19.	Schematic overhead plan of Tomb Unar 2 (after Blau 2001b)	79
3.20.	Tell Abraq (after Martin <i>et al.</i> 2019)	81
3.21.	Overhead view of DH7-T1 and bone pit (photograph M. Al-Mamari)	83
3.22.	Row of white ashlar façade stones found face down	83
3.23.	DH7-001 facing west. From this view one can see the position of DH7-001 on a low hill	83
3.24.	One example of Indus ivory hair comb found in DH7-001 under a poorly preserved skull	83
3.25.	Detail of chambers and corridor of DH7-001	83
4.1.	Tomb at site of Zukayt	85
4.2.	Hypothesized general differences between Hafit-type cairns and transitional cairns	87
4.3.	Cairn use during Umm an-Nar period	88
4.4.	Example of reconstructed transitional cairn from the UNESCO World Heritage site of Bat/Al-Ayn (Suliaman Al-Jabri)	90
4.5.	Schematic plans of transitional period cairns with internal architecture (Bat Tomb 1138 after Frifelt 1975b; Jebel Emalah Tomb I after Benton and Potts 1994; Al-Khubayb S007-001 and S007-012 after Williams and Gregoricka 2019; Jebel Buhais BHS 57, BHS 88, and BHS 89 after Jasim 2012)	91
4.6.	Shi1 at the Shir site (Paul Yule)	93
4.7.	Tomb SG 82 at the Shenah site (Yaqoub Al-Rahbi, courtesy of Mohamed Al-Belushi, Sultan Qaboos University)	94

4.8.	Tomb SG 269 at the Shenah site (Yaqoub Al-Rahbi, courtesy of Mohamed Al-Belushi, Sultan Qaboos University)	94
4.9.	View from inside cairn of corbelled walls and capstone roof (Yaqoub Al-Rahbi, courtesy of Mohamed Al-Belushi, Sultan Qaboos University)	94
4.10.	Example of square entrance, Tomb SG 277, Shenah (Yaqoub Al-Rahbi, courtesy of Mohamed Al-Belushi, Sultan Qaboos University)	95
4.11.	Example of triangular entrance, Tomb SG 271, Shenah (Yaqoub Al-Rahbi, courtesy of Mohamed Al-Belushi, Sultan Qaboos University)	95
4.12.	Map of the study region with name and location of the sites that have been sampled for obtaining evidence of structural change in monumental tombs and design variability in ceramic materials	97
4.13.	Map of the study region showing pairwise inter-site similarity as a measure of interaction. Opacity of the edges connecting sites is scaled according to the Horn overlap obtained for each pair of sites (Horn 1966). Since the index is standardised, high similarity (1) corresponds to total opacity (full colour) and 0 (absolute diversity) corresponds to a completely transparent line	97
4.14.	Diachronic density estimation of (from top left): 1) Hafit and Umm an-Nar types; 2) Dressing types; 3) Inner structural articulation; 4) Entrance types	99
4.15.	Average values of intra-site diversity ( $tF$ ), inter-site Jaccard distance and inter-site squared Euclidean distance measured for tomb dressing in each 100-year time-step	100
4.16.	Average values of intra-site diversity ( $tF$ ), inter-site Jaccard distance and inter-site squared Euclidean distance measured for tomb entrance in each 100-year time-step	100
4.17.	Average values of intra-site diversity ( $tF$ ), inter-site Jaccard distance and inter-site squared Euclidean distance measured for tomb inner articulation in each 100-year time-step	100
4.18.	Schematic of Al-Khubayb tomb (after Döpfer 2017)	102
5.1.	Early Bronze Age death practices on the Oman Peninsula (3200-2000 BC)	104
5.2.	(a) Early Bronze Age cairns on high ridge of Abu Silah necropolis, Dhank, Oman; (b) Early Bronze Age cairns on Abu Silah necropolis with view of Aflaj necropolis in the distance. On clear days some cairns are visible to viewers standing on either necropolis; (c) Early Bronze Age cairns facing south toward the open desert; (d) Example of Early Bronze Age cairn necropolis where cairns are not organized in lines on a ridge, Al-Khubayb necropolis, Dhank; (e) Example of Early Bronze Age cairns organized in lines at Al-Khubayb necropolis, Dhank	105
5.3.	Early Bronze Age “Haluf tomb” (facing south) in Dhofar (after McCorrison <i>et al.</i> 2014)	113
5.4.	(a) View of cairn entrances at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Bat/Al-Ayn; (b) Close-up of cairn entrance at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Bat/Al-Ayn	114
5.5.	(a) Erosion of exterior wall of this Early Bronze Age cairn reveals the inner wall, UNESCO World Heritage site of Bat/Al-Ayn; (b) View of corbelled walls and roof of an Early Bronze Age cairn from inside the chamber, UNESCO World Heritage site of Bat/Al-Ayn, (c) Example of erosion and deflation of cairn at the Al-Khubayb necropolis; (d) Detail of the stone used to construct the cairns at the Al-Khubayb necropolis. These stones have suffered significant erosion which lead to a more “ruined” appearance. This cairn, however, was not disturbed and contained an intact burial chamber; (e) Detail of stone used to construct the cairns at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Bat/Al-Ayn. This stone suffered less erosion as a result the cairn more closely resembles its original appearance; (f) Example of erosion at the site of Zukayt	115

5.6.	Example of cairn at site of Halban. Rubble fill between the outer and inner walls of the cairn can be seen	116
5.7.	Summary of Umm an-Nar mortuary ritual involving the communal tomb and burial pit	126
5.8.	(a) Early Bronze Age cairns high on the landscape at the Abu Silah site in Dhank, and (b) an Umm an-Nar communal tomb at the Qumairah site	135
6.1.	Use and reuse of tumulus S021-001, Aflaj necropolis, Dhank (adapted from Williams and Gregoricka 2020)	145
6.2.	Use of transitional cairn S007-003, Al-Khubayb necropolis, Dhank (after Williams and Gregoricka 2019)	146
6.3.	An Early Bronze Age mortuary landscape at the site of Abu Silah, Dhank.	147
6.4.	Some Umm an-Nar period sites with evidence of burning as part of the mortuary ritual	148
6.5.	Detail of burned and unburned, commingled, and fragmented deposit in bone pit at Dahwa (DH7-001, bone pit)	150
6.6.	Burned and unburned hamate bone of the hand. These bones are not from the same individual, but they were from the same archaeological context and demonstrate different levels of exposure to fire (Dahwa site, DH7-001, bone pit)	151
6.7.	Long bone fragment with differential burning (Dahwa site, DH7-001, bone pit)	151
6.8.	Proximal ulna fragment showing cracking due to heat and color change (Dahwa site, DH7-001, bone pit)	151
6.9.	Long bone fragment showing cracking, warping, and color changes (Dahwa site, DH7-001, bone pit)	151
6.10.	Cranial fragments showing differential exposure to heat (a) exterior surface, (b) interior surface (Dahwa site, DH7-001, bone pit)	151
6.11.	Heated/burned fragment of ivory comb (Dahwa site, DH7-001, bone pit)	151

## TABLES

2.1.	Terminology used for Early Bronze Age cairn tombs	20
2.2.	Radiocarbon dates from Shiyā	32
2.3.	Published dates for Dhank area cairns	35
2.4.	Characteristics of necropoles from Ja'alan survey (after Giraud 2010)	42
2.5.	Radiocarbon dates from Ras Al-Hadd HD-7.3	53
3.1.	Published radiocarbon dates from Umm an-Nar tombs	69
4.1.	Pairwise inter-site similarity for tomb entrance type. Values are measured as Morisita-Horn indices of overlap (Horn 1966). Mean regional value = 0.63	98
5.1.	Published radiocarbon dates for Early Bronze Age cairns. Calibrations calculated with OxCal 4.3 (Bronk Ramsey 2009) with IntCal13 Atmospheric Curve (Reimer <i>et al.</i> 2013)	112
5.2.	Summary of features of “Haluf tombs”	113
5.3.	Published data on health and demography of individuals interred in Early Bronze Age cairns	118
6.1.	Summary of evidence of fire in Umm an-Nar tombs and bone pits	150

## SPOTLIGHTS

1.	Mudhai, Dhofar	16
2.	Necropolis KJ1, Ash-Sharqiyah, by C. Sévin-Allouet, A. Thomas and N. Gautier	18
3.	Jebel Hafit, U.A.E.	25
4.	Ras Al-Jinz RJ-6 necropolis, Ash-Sharqiyah Governorate, Oman, by O. Munoz, G. Santini and K. Rointru	26
5.	Shiyā necropolis, Ash-Sharqiyah Governorate, Oman, by O. Munoz	30
6.	Ras Al-Hadd HD-7.3 necropolis, Ash Sharqiyah Governorate, Oman, by O. Munoz and G. Seguin	34
7.	Al-Khubayb, Dhank	50
8.	Hili Tomb A, U.A.E.	66
9.	Hili Tomb N, U.A.E.	67
10.	Mowaihat (Ajman) Tomb A and B, U.A.E.	72
11.	Ras Al-Jinz RJ-1, Ash-Sharqiyah	75
12.	Al-Sufouh Tombs I–IV, U.A.E	78
13.	Tell Abraq, U.A.E	81
14.	Dahwa, Al-Batinah	82
15.	Shenah, Al-Qabil	94
16.	Trait-Based Analysis of Early Bronze Age Tombs, by E. Bortolini	96
17.	Dating Early Bronze Age Mortuary Monuments	110
18.	Haluf, Dhofar	113
19.	Tomb Reuse: An Example From Al-Khubayb Necropolis, Al-Dhahirah	146
20.	Umm an-Nar Mortuary Ritual and Use of Fire	148

## APPENDICES

A.1.	Published surveys that document cairns (the term “cairn” may have been used for structures that are not Early Bronze Age cairns)	176
A.2.	Published excavated Early Bronze Age Cairns: Architecture Summary (does not include Jebel Hafit cairns)	195
A.3.	Published excavated Early Bronze Age Cairns: Interments	202
A.4.	Published excavated Early Bronze Age Cairns: Material Culture (does not include Jebel Hafit cairns)	208
A.5.	Summary of architectural features and interments at Jebel Hafit	217
A.6.	Summary of interred material culture at Jebel Hafit	220
A.7.	Excavated Umm an-Nar tombs: Architecture Summary	228
A.8.	Excavated Umm an-Nar burial pits	233
A.9.	Excavated Umm an-Nar communal tombs and bone pits: Interments	234
A.10.	Excavated Umm an-Nar communal tombs and bone pits: Material Culture	237

## Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the support of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism. I am very grateful to His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said, the Sultan of Oman (former Minister of Heritage and Culture when I began my research career in the Sultanate of Oman). Deepest gratitude to His Excellency Salim Mohammed Almahruqi, Minister of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman. Additionally, I thank His Excellency Eng. Ibrahim Said Al-Kharusi, Undersecretary of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism for the Heritage Sector, Mr. Sultan Saif Al-Bakri, Advisor to the Minister of Heritage and Tourism for Heritage, Mr. Khamis Al-Asmi and Mr. Ali Hamood Al-Mahrooqi, respectively former and present Director of the Department of Excavations and Archaeological Studies.

I am also very indebted all staff at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism that I have worked with, most recently, Ms. Sumaya Al-Busaidi, Mr. Sulieman Al-Jabri, Ms. Ibtisam Al-Mamari, Mr. Khalil Al-Nadabi, Ms. Shaikha Al-Rasbi, Ms. Maryam Al-Shabibi, Ms. Samiya Al-Shaqsi, Mr. Khalid Al-Swafi, and Mr. Mohammed Al-Waili. Special thanks to Mr. Khalid Habib Al-Lawati, Director of the Journal of Omani Studies Department, and Ms. Azza Abdul Aziz Al-Hinai, Translator in the Journal of Omani Studies Department, for their valuable support and advice throughout the whole editorial process.

This book is the direct result of support from the Fulbright US Scholar Program (Grant #48150626), which allowed me to live in Oman 2015-2017. During this time, I was in residence at Sultan Qaboos University. I am indebted to faculty (Dr. Mohammed Al-Belushi, Dr. Khalid Douglas, Dr. Mohammed Hesein, and Dr. Nasser Al-Jahwari) and staff (Mr. Yaqoub Al-Bahri, Mr. Nasser Al-Hinai, and Mr. Yaqoub Al-Rahbi) in the Department of Archaeology at Sultan Qaboos University who have been good colleagues and friends over the years. I am also indebted to Dr. Walid Al-Tikriti for permission to reproduce tomb plans from his unpublished dissertation.

This work has been improved with photographs provided by Dr. Mohammed Al-Belushi, H el ene David-Cuny, Dr. Stephanie D opper, Dr. Guillaume Gernez, Dr. Conrad Schmidt, and Dr. Paul Yule. Three additional colleagues contributed “spotlights” on their work: Dr. Christophe S evin-Allouet (Chapter 2: Spotlight 2), Dr. Olivia Munoz (Chapter 2: Spotlights 4, 5 and 6), and Dr. Eugenio Bortolini (Chapter 4: Spotlight 15).

I thank my many friends and colleagues who work and live in the Sultanate of Oman. I would not have started work in Oman if not for the mentorship of Dr. Joy McCorriston. By inviting me to be a part of her field project (first in Yemen and then in Oman), she provided a space for me to develop skills that made me a more skilled archaeologist and scholar in general. I can never repay this opportunity or express the extent of my gratitude, but I can pay this kindness and generosity forward by providing opportunities for future students and supporting my fellow colleagues so that we can all learn more about the spectacular history of this region. Oman is a special place for me and helping to share information about the history of the region is a great honor.

Finally, I thank Dr. Dennys Frenez for his indefatigable patience in the process of completing this work. I know I would not have been able to complete this work without his encouragement and expert support.

Kimberly D. Williams  
kimberwilliams@temple.edu



# Introduction

Death is a universal experience for all people, in all periods of human existence. Perhaps because witnessing the death of friends and family is one of a few life experiences that all people can relate to, or perhaps because the question of what becomes of a person when they die has been asked by every generation, people have long been fascinated with death practices. Travelers and antiquarians who observed the cultures of far-away places and ancient ruins of tombs, settlements, and other residues of the ancient past both close to home and abroad, provided the earliest accounts about variation in death practices. Throughout the world, these observations intrigued those who read or heard about how other cultures, contemporaneous and ancient, lived and died. Surely, over the course of history, many accounts have been lost, but some of the earliest recorded demonstrate the power of death practice narratives. These accounts range from the works of history's earliest recorded historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides to medieval travelers (e.g. Ibn Battuta, Abu Zayd Al-Sirafi) to Western travelers/explorers to Arabia (e.g., Philby, Thesiger, etc.) and elsewhere.

As an archaeologist observing just these physical remains, the material culture that may be associated with the remains, and the vessel (e.g., urn, grave, tomb, etc.) where these remains are interred, it is not possible to gain a full picture of the rituals surrounding the death and interment of these people. Thus, we must remember that there are aspects of death practices that can never be fully preserved in the archaeological record. Nonetheless, these are vital aspects of the ritual(s) performed by the living. This awareness should temper our interpretations past practices by heightening awareness of the events the archaeological record bears witness to and openly acknowledging the aspects of these practices that are lost. It should also inspire us to responsibly consider ethnographic analogy to generate insight into aspects of the human past that we often cannot know: intention, emotions, and memory.

## Early Bronze Age Landscapes of Death on the Oman Peninsula

This volume considers death practices of the ancient inhabitants of the Oman Peninsula during the Early Bronze Age (3200-2000 BC). It was this time that the earliest widespread construction of monuments to inter the dead occurred. The death practices of the preceding Neolithic period are known from comparatively fewer sites (see Munoz 2019 for a review), most of which were coastal sites such as Ras Al-Hamra (RH-5; e.g., Biagi *et al.* 1984; Maggi 1984; Coppa *et al.* 1985; Maggi *et al.* 1985; Macchiarelli 1989; Coppa *et al.* 1990; Biagi 1994; Santini 2002; Biagi and Nisbet 2006; Salvatori 2007; Charpentier and Mery 2010; Marcucci *et al.* 2011; Zazzo *et al.* 2014). The dead were interred in oval graves or occasionally in middens (Durante and Tosi 1977; Maggi *et al.* 1985).

There were exceptions during the Neolithic period, such as the inland site of Al-Buhais 18 (BHS18; Kiesewetter *et al.* 2000; Uerpmann *et al.* 2000, 2013; de Beauclair *et al.* 2006; de Beauclair 2008; Kutterer and De Beauclair 2008; Kutterer *et al.* 2012). Here, there is strong evidence for a seasonally used cemetery, and the mortuary practices of primary versus secondary interments varied significantly. The repatriation of those who died away from Jebel Buhais strongly suggests the importance of place for these Neolithic people.

**Figure 0.1. Early Bronze Age cairns at the UNESCO World Heritage site of Al-Ayn.**





Other evidence from both inland (Dhank, Williams and Gregoricka 2021) and the Ja'alan (Jarama, Sevin-Allouet, this volume) provides important evidence of more isolated Neolithic era mortuary monuments rather than pit graves. Still, despite these data suggesting ties to places and seemingly occasional mortuary monument construction, the Early Bronze Age was the first time that the use of monuments to the dead became a widespread practice across the expanse of Arabia.

This volume presents the evidence for how the dead were treated during the Early Bronze Age and explores hypotheses for why these ritual practices emerged, became universally practiced, and how they changed over time. Central to this inquiry is a consideration of the previously mentioned unknowable aspects of the past, which permeate all human experience of death and death practices: intention, emotion, and memory. This volume considers individual treatments of the dead (e.g., construction of individual tombs, placement of individual bodies), as well as the communal act of engaging in common funerary rituals. It seeks to present what we know about events in the past, and how we can understand what they meant for those who witnessed and practiced them, as well as for those who lived afterwards with the monuments that remained.