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Tomb 1 at Ras Al-Jinz RJ-1 and Associated Bone Pits

Hervé Guy, Olivia Munoz

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Window 17

Tomb 1 at Ras Al-Jinz RJ-1 and Associated Bone Pits

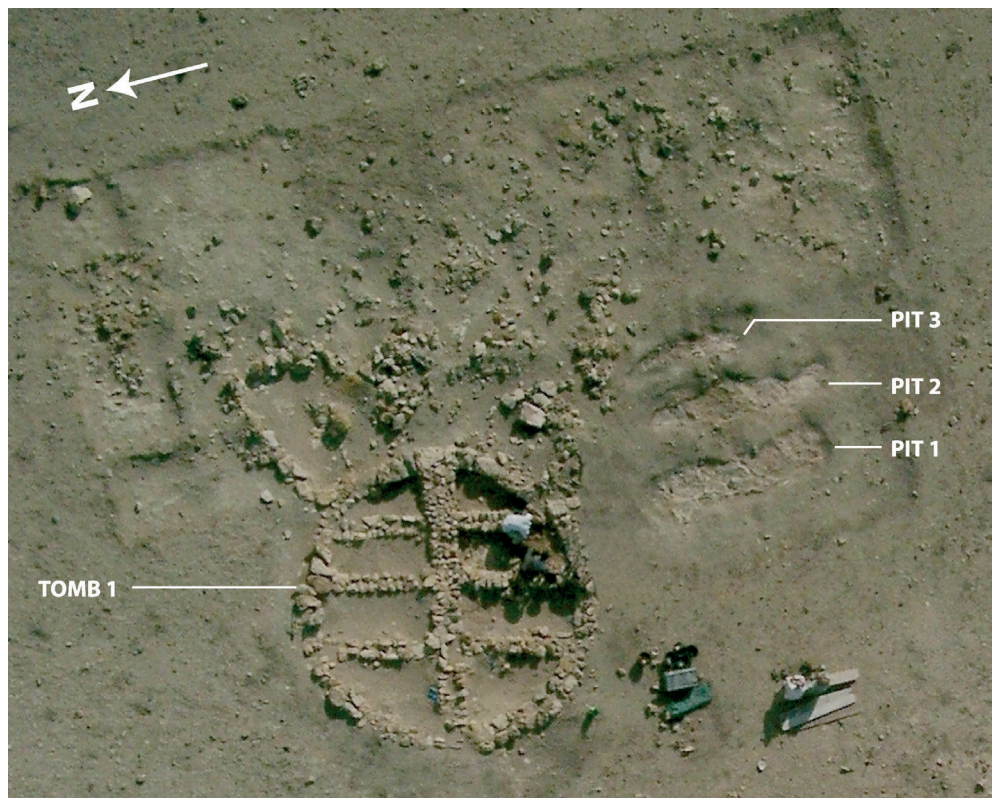
Hervé Guy & Olivia Munoz

Tomb 1 at RJ-1 was excavated during three seasons by the Joint Hadd Project, between 2002 and 2004. Only the underground part of the monument remained, built in a round excavation, 30 to 40 cm deep, cut down to the bedrock through the sediment of the early 3rd millennium settlement. It was 8 metres in diameter and divided into two sectors by a partition wall running more or less east-west across the diameter. Each part was then divided into four chambers by three walls, making eight compartments in all. Over this preserved part, one can imagine a pavement of large flat slabs, of which only one remained. The elevation of the upper part is

unknown, but one may hypothesize that it consisted of only four chambers, as part of the dividing walls were only meant to support the pavement slabs. According to the material found, the use of the tomb may have lasted two to three centuries, around 2550-2350 BC. There is evidence that the tomb was then dismantled, levelled to the ground. The stones of the upper part and the large slabs covering the lower part were recovered, probably to build another tomb nearby, and the lower part was filled with clean yellow clay from the plain, that had to be transported half a kilometer to the top of the mesa where RJ-1 is located (Figure 17.1).

FIGURE 17.1.

A kite view of tomb 1 at RJ-1 and three associated pits (photograph Joint Hadd Project, Y. Guichard).



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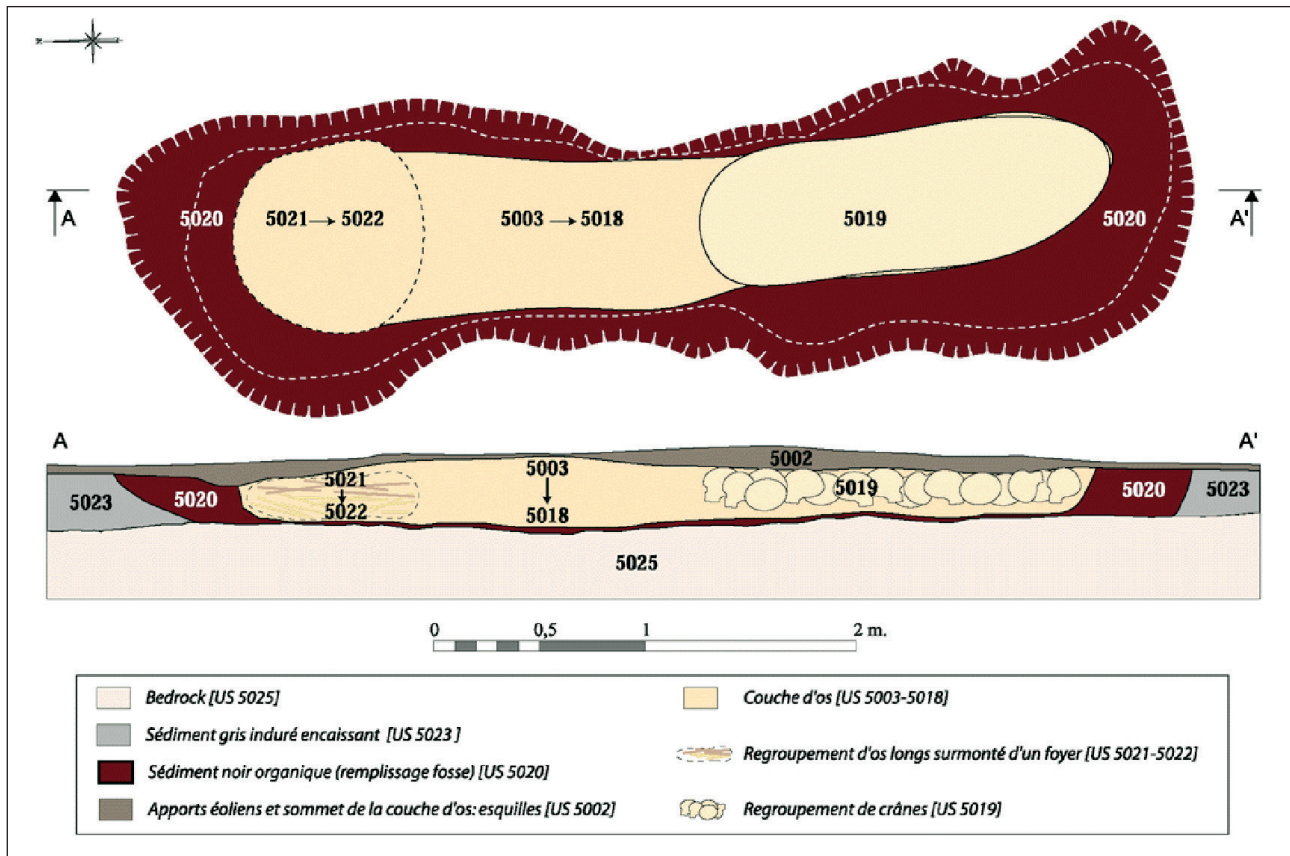


FIGURE 17.2. Plan and longitudinal section of Pit 1 (Joint Hadd Project, O. Munoz).

Some two meters south of the monument, directly below the surface, were discovered three elongated parallel pits full of dislocated human bones and dug through the previous sediment to the bedrock. It is unclear whether they were dug simultaneously or at different times, although the latter seems likely (Figure 17.2). More than 22,000 bone fragments were collected between the tomb (ca. 2500) and the pits, allowing a partial understanding of the buried population and the funerary practices. With a few exceptions, the bones found inside the tomb were not connected with one another. This can probably be explained by the fact that no complete bodies were deposited in the subterranean part of the grave, and that the bones and bone fragments found there fell from the upper part at the time the monument was destroyed.

Inside the pits, the bones were always separated from the inner surface of the excavations by a black sediment rich in organic components, suggesting that they were deposited in a container,

perhaps made of wooden planks, that had since long disappeared. At first sight, the bones found in bone pit 1 appeared dislocated and disorganised, until a group of 28 skulls was uncovered when excavating the southern part. To the north, many long bones of lower and upper limbs, well preserved, were arranged as a polygon around a possible hearth. A grouping of long bones was also detected in pit 2. On various occasions, some bones were still anatomically connected, mainly fragments of hands, feet and rachis. In two cases foetal bones were discovered together. It is impossible to tell if these were still grouped together when the bones were moved from the grave to the pit or if the stillborn babies were directly deposited in the pit.

Half of the bones found in pit 1 were burnt. These were mainly located in the upper part of the filling while deeper only some areas appear to have been in contact with combustion heat. It ranges from traces of rapid stoking (40%) to long burning at high temperature (60%).

Almost all were burnt when the flesh was gone, with a few exceptions, as for instance four vertebrae which were still connected and appear to have been burnt fresh. North of the pit, a hearth was probably set in the upper part of the filling and all the bones were deeply burnt. A few burnt bones here were also found in pits 2 and 3, usually burnt at low temperature, and almost none in the tomb itself (Figure 17.3).

This leads us to conclude that the corpses were first deposited in the upper part of the tomb. When the flesh was gone the bones were removed

and deposited in pits. One may imagine that the pits were dug on the occasion of such activities, which occurred at least twice during the use of the grave until it was eventually emptied and destroyed. On this occasion, the operators did not hesitate to remove some corpses that were not completely fleshless, probably the last ones deposited in the tomb, as demonstrated by the persistence of some anatomical connections in the pit. The bones were not simply thrown into the pits but often reorganized according to categories, a practice common in all collective burials across the world.

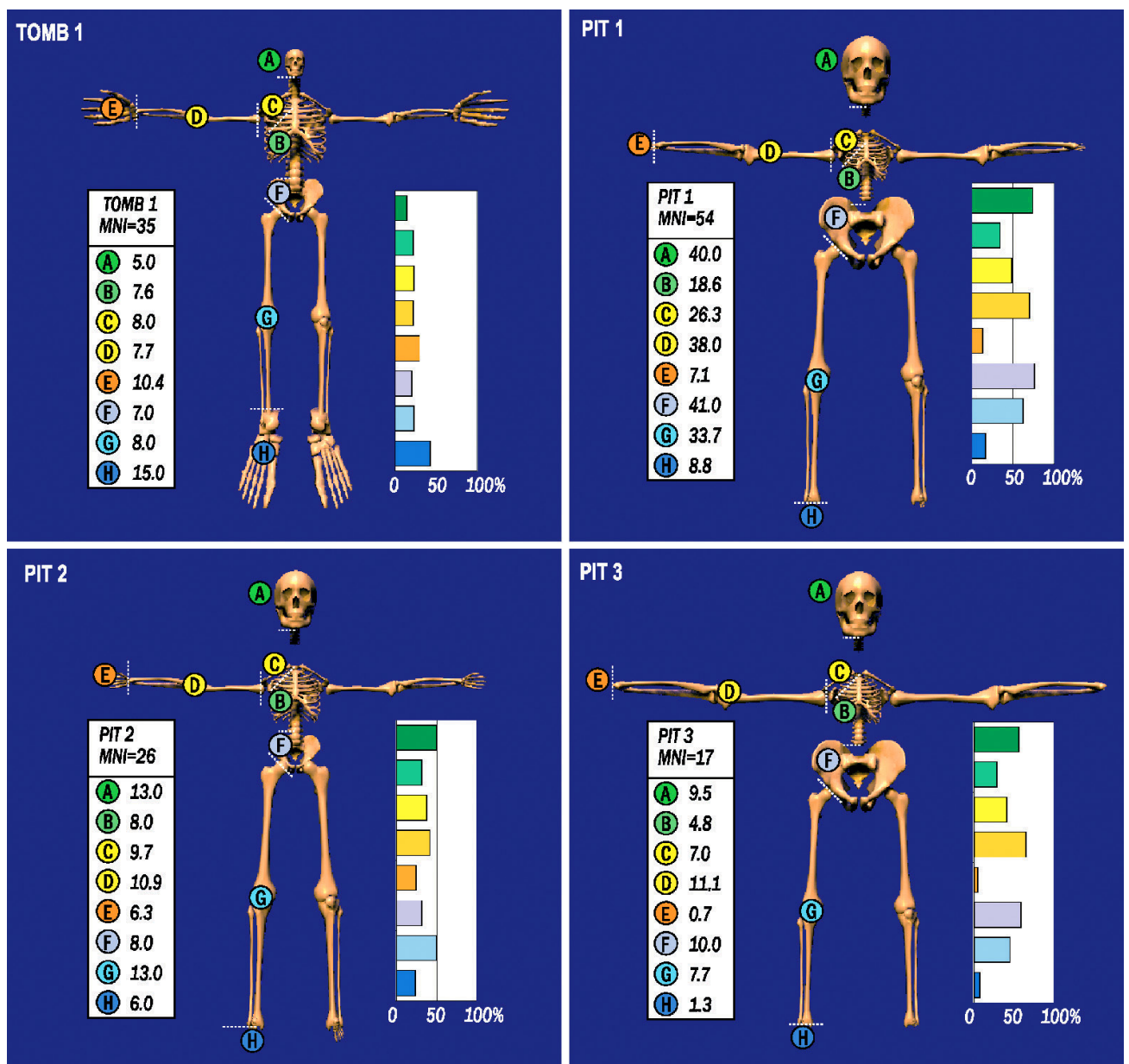


FIGURE 17.3. Anamorphic representation of the bones found in Grave 1 and the three pits. The size of each one is determined by its frequency in the tomb or the pit. (Olivia Munoz, using software Poser 3.0™).



FIGURE 17.4. The age of the dead found in Tomb 1 compared with the average date of mortality in an archaic population. To the left of the diagram, the lack of young infants and of children below 5 years is obvious, leading to the conclusion that most of them were buried elsewhere.

The bones found in such burials are also an important source of information about the population of that time. Despite the high fragmentation of the bones and the fact that they were mixed, it was established that at least 74 individuals were buried in tomb 1 and the pits, although the figure could be much higher, up to over 100 (Figure 17.4). Tomb 1 contained the remains of at least 20 women, 16 men, and 15 children below 15 years of age, whose sex could not be determined. A comparison of the number of young children with the average rate of death in an archaic population indicates that children below 5 were much fewer than expected, thus indicating that at least some of them were buried elsewhere, as indicated by the discovery of five tombs of babies or young children in buildings I and II at RJ-2 that are contemporaneous with the grave. The average size of adult individuals was

around 1.6 m, men being taller than women. The pathologies that could be observed on the bones may partly be due to occasional food stress, and repetitive physical activity or working accidents, but do not attest to systematic violence.

These excavations clearly demonstrate the complexity of funerary rituals and practices in Umm an-Nar burials. They complement the observations already made at Al-Sufouh, Hili North A, Hili N or Al-Abraq. The dead bodies went through complicated processes that ended with mixing all of them in the community of ancestors. On the other hand, it also confirms that the monuments in which such process partly took place were dismantled after two or three centuries of use, when new ones, usually larger, were built, confirming the importance of these funerary rituals in social and kinship politics ■

Serge Cleuziou & Maurizio Tosi

**IN THE SHADOW OF
THE ANCESTORS**

**THE PREHISTORIC FOUNDATIONS OF THE
EARLY ARABIAN CIVILIZATION IN OMAN**

second expanded edition

Edited by

Dennys Frenez & Roman Garba

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Front cover: Alignment of Hafit type tombs at Al-Ayn © Roman Garba

Back cover: Hafit type tombs at Shihr Jaylah © Roman Garba

Note: The maps in this book are historical and cannot be modified as they are specifically drawn for that period only and they do not reflect political, geographical and administrative boundaries. The Geographical Place Names (GPN) in these maps are not written by the Arabic Standardized Romanization System applied in the National Survey Authority of Oman (NSA).

Table of Contents

Foreword	ix
<i>Cornerstones of Archaeological Research in Oman</i> , by H.H. Haitham bin Tariq Al-Said	
Editorial Note	xi
<i>A Posthumous Expanded Edition</i> , by D. Frenez & R. Garba	
Acknowledgements	xv
In Memoriam of Serge Cleuziou, 1945-2009	xix
<i>An Arabian Explorer in a Cartesian Mind</i> , by M. Tosi †	
In Memoriam of Maurizio Tosi, 1944-2017	xxv
<i>A Scientist of Curiosity</i> , by D. Frenez	
Chapter 1 • A Land of Many Landscapes for Greater Opportunities	1
Chapter 2 • The Search for the Earliest Humans in Oman	17
Window 1	32
<i>On the Trail of the First Humans in Oman</i> , by J. Rose	
Chapter 3 • From Early Hunters to the Last Foragers	37
Window 2	64
<i>Early Herders at A-Buhais 18</i> , by M. Uerpmann & H.-P. Uerpmann	
Window 3	66
<i>Earliest Cultures along the Coastlands of Oman</i> , by V. Charpentier	
Window 4	69
<i>Sea Mammals and Humans in the Oman Peninsula</i> , by V. Charpentier & S. Méry	
Chapter 4 • The Great Transformation	71
Window 5	109
<i>The Middle Holocene Fishermen Settlement of KHB-1</i> , by F. Cavulli & S. Scaruffi	
Window 6	117
<i>The Prehistoric Graveyard at Ras Al-Hamra RH-5</i> , by S. Salvatori	
Window 7	122
<i>Funerary Practices at Ras Al-Hamra RH-5. New Data from 2005/2009</i> , by O. Munoz	
Window 8	126
<i>Shell-Midden Economy in the Fourth millennium BC</i> , by M. Uerpmann & H.-P. Uerpmann	
Window 9	128
<i>Marine Turtles from Ras Al-Hamra RH-5</i> , by M. Delfino & J. Frazier	
Window 10	130
<i>Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Occupations at HD-5</i> , by F. Borgi & E. Maini	

Window 11	135
<i>Bead Production in the Late Neolithic Communities of Coastal Oman</i> , by M. Buta, D. Frenez, E. Bortolini, V. Charpentier & J.M. Kenoyer	
Window 12	142
<i>Jabal Al-Aluya. An Inland Neolithic Settlement</i> , by M. Lemée & G. Gernez	
Window 13	146
<i>The Hafit Settlement HD-6 at Ras Al-Hadd</i> , by V.M. Azzarà & M. Cattani	
Window 14	151
<i>The Early Metallurgy of the Oman Peninsula</i> , by C. Giardino	
Window 15	160
<i>Analysis of Stone and Metal Artifacts from HD-6, HD-10 and HD-1</i> , by R.W. Law	
Window 16	189
<i>The Earliest Camel Remains of Oman from Ras Al-Hadd HD-6</i> , by A. Curci & M. Carletti	
Chapter 5 • A Great Society Emerges under the Eyes of the Ancestors	195
Window 17	225
<i>Tomb 1 at Ras Al-Jinz RJ-1 and Associated Bone Pits</i> , by H. Guy & O. Munoz	
Window 18	229
<i>Zukayt and the Burial Fields of Wadi Halfayin</i> , by E. Bortolini	
Chapter 6 • Taming the Desert with Oases and Herds	233
Window 19	254
<i>Animal Economy in an Early Oasis Settlement</i> , by M. Uerpmann & H.-P. Uerpmann	
Window 20	256
<i>Earliest Potteries in the Oman Peninsula</i> , by S. Méry	
Window 21	259
<i>An Early Third Millennium BC Madbassa?</i> , by S. Cleuziou †	
Window 22	261
<i>The Early Oasis Settlements of the Hajar Region</i> , by J. Orchard & J. Orchard †	
Chapter 7 • Trade and the Beginnings of Seafaring in the Indian Ocean	267
Window 23	301
<i>Copper from Magan for the Mesopotamian Cities</i> , by G. Weisgerber †	
Window 24	303
<i>From Green to Red. Smelting Red Copper from the Green Ore</i> , by G. Weisgerber †	
Window 25	306
<i>Indus Pottery in the Oman Peninsula</i> , by S. Méry	
Window 26	309
<i>Reconstructing an Early Bronze Age Boat</i> , by T. Vosmer	
Window 27	314
<i>Early Bronze Age Navigation and Trade Routes</i> , by T. Vosmer	
Window 28	317
<i>Bitumen from Ras Al-Jinz RJ-2</i> , by E. Badel	
Window 29	323
<i>The Manufacture of Conus sp. Shell Rings at the Site of HD-60</i> , by L.G. Marcucci	
Chapter 8 • The Early Arabian Civilization at its Zenith	329

Window 30	366
<i>Al-Ayn. A Small Settlement and Palm Tree Garden in Eastern Oman</i> , by O. Blin	
Window 31	369
<i>Copper Production as Seen from Al-Moyassar I</i> , by G. Weisgerber †	
Window 32	373
<i>Bat. A Leading Centre of Early Civilization in Oman</i> , by C.M. Cable & C.P. Thornton	
Window 33	377
<i>The Umm an-Nar Burial Pits of the Necropolis of Bat</i> , by S. Döpfer & C. Schmidt	
Window 34	381
<i>The Umm an-Nar Settlement of Al-Zebah</i> , by S. Döpfer & C. Schmidt	
Window 35	385
<i>The Indus Civilization Trade with the Oman Peninsula</i> , by D. Frenez	
Window 36	397
<i>Carnelian and Agate Beads in the Oman Peninsula during the Third to Second millennia BC</i> , by J.M. Kenoyer & D. Frenez	
Chapter 9 • The Wadi Suq Period. Collapse and Transformation	411
Window 37	434
<i>Copper in the Wadi Suq Period (Second millennium BC)</i> , by G. Weisgerber †	
Window 38	436
<i>Adam North Graveyard in Central Oman</i> , by G. Gernez & J. Giraud	
Chapter 10 • The Iron Age. New Developments on the Eve of History	441
Window 39	463
<i>Long Collective Graves LCG-1 and LCG-2 at Daba, Musandam (Oman)</i> , by F. Genchi	
Window 40	470
<i>Mudhmar East. An Iron Age Ritual Site at the Desert Margin</i> , by G. Gernez & M. Jean	
Window 41	473
<i>Iron Age Buildings with a Pillared Room in the Oman Peninsula</i> , by A. Benoist	
Window 42	475
<i>Iron Age Mining and Smelting in the Lizq Period</i> , by G. Weisgerber †	
Window 43	477
<i>The Early Iron Age in the Sultanate of Oman</i> , by P.A. Yule	
Window 44	480
<i>'Uqdat Al-Bakrah. An Early Iron Age Metal-Working Atelier just inside the Empty Quarter in Oman</i> , by F. Genchi, C. Giardino & P.A. Yule	
Window 45	488
<i>The Fish-Eaters – Ichthyophagoi</i> , by O. Nalesini	
Window 46	490
<i>Ichthyophagoi their Culture and Economy during the Iron Age in Coastal Oman</i> , by R. Loreto	
Window 47	492
<i>Rock Art of Al-Hajar Mountains. A Review and Update</i> , by A.E. Fossati	
Window 48	500
<i>Triliths. Hinterland Monuments of Ancient Nomads</i> , by R. Garba	
Chapter 11 • Dhofar. The Land of Frankincense	511
Bibliography • Journals / Books / Papers	529