

AN EARLY REFERENCE TO THE 3rd MILLENNIUM GRAVES AT OMAN. QUESTIONS ON A SPANISH MANUSCRIPT OF THE 17th CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

In the account of his voyage to Iran at the beginning of the 17th century, García de Silva y Figueroa wrote a paragraph that appears to be the first-known mention of the funeral constructions of the 3rd Millennium in the Oman Peninsula. This interesting reference once again shows how valuable the information found in maps, navigation logs and travel books of the past is for the modern historical and archaeological investigations being made about the Near East.

RESUMEN

En el relato de su viaje a Irán a comienzos del siglo XVII, García de Silva y Figueroa escribió un párrafo que parece ser la primera mención conocida de las construcciones funerarias del III milenio en la Península de Omán. Tan interesante referencia muestra una vez más el valor informativo que la cartografía, los derroteros de navegación y los libros de viaje del pasado prestan a la moderna investigación arqueológica e histórica sobre el Oriente Próximo.

KEYWORDS

Ancient Arabia, Archaeology of the Oman Peninsula, Hafit/Beehive Graves, Silva y Figueroa, travellers and archaeology in the Near East.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Arabia antigua, Arqueología de la Península de Omán, tumbas Hafit/Colmena, Silva y Figueroa, viajeros y arqueología en Oriente Próximo.

We are convinced that ancient cartography and travel books are an invaluable source of information for the archaeologist and the historian. Although this idea has not always been accepted in the past, today it is evident that by making use of the extensive information contained, for instance, in excavation reports, travel stories and maps of the 19th century, more and more studies are being published that give us information of an unexpected value¹. We even believe that those testimonies prior to the Orientalist boom preserve decisive information that can help solve secular enigmas and open up unexpected avenues for the resolution of problems latent in the scientific debate². But not all regions in the Near East have been given the same attention. If we consider the Arabic and Oman

¹ B. Ooghe.- "Felix Jones and the Land Behind Baghdad: Site-Centered Study of the 19th Century Narrative", *Akkadica* 127 (2207), 137-154.

² For instance, thanks to a better knowledge of the travel literature of the 17th century, the debate about who was the first person to identify Chirminara as Persepolis and the cuneiform signs as true writing, has been correctly solved. See A. Intervenizzi.- *Il Genio Vagante. Viaggatori alla scoperta dell'antico Oriente (sec. XII- XVIII)*. Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2005, 204-221; J. M^a Córdoba.- "Don García de Silva y Figueroa and the Rediscovery of Iran" in J. M^a Córdoba and M^a Carmen Pérez (ed.).- *The Spanish Near Eastern Adventure (1166-2006)*, Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid 2006, 51-56.

Peninsulas located at a distance from the Biblical and Mesopotamian landscapes which first aroused the cultural and religious curiosity of Europe, we could think that if they were rarely visited in the 19th century, then there would have been even less travellers during the previous centuries³. However in fact, during the 16th and 17th centuries, sailors and travellers mainly from Portugal, but also from Spain and Germany among other countries, got to know the seas and the inner lands of Arabia and



Fig. 1. Arabia Felix, Paris 1683 (R. Bidwell Travellers in Arabia, London 1995, p. 7)

Oman. So it is often forgotten that at the end of the 16th century, the Spanish Jesuits Pedro Páez and Antonio de Montserrat were the first to become aware of the importance of the ruins of Marib and of the peculiarity of the Sabean script⁴. Indeed, the European culture of those times produced important works about Arabia and Oman, and which are ideal for the lines of investigation we are proposing. Not long ago, G. Weisberger redeemed the value of the writings and engravings of Engelbert Kaempfer in the reconstruction of the history of Muscat⁵. And even more recently, D.T. Potts recognized the accuracy of the place names along the coasts of Arabia and Oman used in the magnificent plates of the Portuguese Atlas by Lopo Homen and Pedro Reinel⁶. Potts' writings brought to mind those done by García de Silva in the 17th century during his voyage along the coasts of Arabia where his

place names and commentaries about a particular point of the Omani coast served as reference for the Portuguese log. Having both been involved in the archaeology of the

³ M. Mañé.- "La península de Omán y las costas árabes del Golfo Pérsico en los viajeros europeos del siglo XIX", in J. M^a Córdoba, R. Ramírez and C. Sevilla (eds.).- *El redescubrimiento de Oriente Próximo y Egipto. Viajes, hallazgos e investigaciones*. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid 2001, 17-30.

⁴ M. Mañé.- "Pedro Páez (1564-1622): From Hadramaut to the source of the Blue Nile", in J. M^a Córdoba and M^a Carmen Pérez (eds.). Op. cit. 2006, 59-60.

⁵ G. Weisberger.- "Muscat in 1688: Engelbert Kaempfer's Report and Engravings". *The Journal of Oman Studies* 5, (1979), 95-101. This work has led us to undertake another to compare the views on Muscat between the just mentioned Engelbert Kaempfer and the Spanish travellers García de Silva and Pedro Cubero in the same century. See M. Mañé and J. M^a Córdoba.- "Muscat in the Spanish and German Travellers' Narrative of the 17th century" (*studium in itinere*).

⁶ D.T. Potts.- "The Gulf Coast of the United Arab Emirates in the Homem-Reinels Atlas of 1519", *Arabian archaeology and epigraphy* 7 (1996), 119-123.

peninsula for years, what at first seemed to us to be only a possibility, today we propose as clear evidence for the history of the archaeology of the Near East: this is that the manuscript of the Spanish traveller offers the first-known mention of the Early Bronze Age graves in Oman.

1.- GARCÍA DE SILVA Y FIGUEROA. THE TRAVELLER AND HIS CIRCUMSTANCES

Among the many accounts of the European travellers of the 17th century who went to the Near East and Iran, and when considering both their personalities and their circumstances⁷, few are so interesting, prolific and dramatic as the ambassador of Philip the 3rd of Spain, García de Silva. Not much is known about the life of García de Silva y Figueroa (1550-1624)⁸: born among the nobility, his first biographers presumed he was a pageboy to Philip the 2nd, a student of the Law at Salamanca, and later served several years in Flanders. During his voyage he proved to be an excellent geographer and a good sailor, as well as a brave man with evident military talent. The historic biographical sketches⁹ say he also served in the Foreign Ministry and that in 1609 the Principal Chairman of the Council of State consulted him as an specialist on the alleged geographical discoveries of Lorenzo Ferrer Maldonado. In our opinion, these facts show that at that time, he was personally, administratively and politically very close to the Council of State and that his geographical knowledge was valued to the point of being considered that of an expert. Certainly, his manuscript proves that besides being personally capable of using all kinds of geodesic and navigation instruments, his vision of the seas, the stars and the lands was that of a sailor, a geographer and a cosmographer.

At the end of the first decade of the 17th century, reports from the embassies of Anthony Sherley, the Augustin monks and Luis Pereira in Madrid, as well as the negotiations carried out by Fray Antonio Gouvea and Robert Sherley, all advised to strengthen diplomatic relations with the powerful Iran of those times, in order to restore the ancient alliance against the Turks and thus assure the Portuguese settlements along the

⁷ The monumental and erudite work of A. Invernizzi we have previously mentioned (2005) is an indispensable reference for everything concerning European travellers to Iran until the end of the 18th century and contains very valuable bio-bibliographical data as well as fragments of the works of more than sixty European voyagers of the 17th century.

⁸ Although not mentioning it specifically, this is what his Spanish publisher lets us assume by the tone and contents of his introduction: G. de Silva y Figueroa.- *Comentarios de ...* (ed. of M. Serrano y Sanz). Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles, Madrid 1903 and 1905. It is clearly said by L. Gil Fernández (ed.).- *Epistolario diplomático*. Institución Cultural El Brocense, Cáceres 1989, 25. And it is implicitly shown by C. Alonso.- *La embajada a Persia de D. García de Silva y Figueroa (1612-1624)*. Diputación Provincial de Badajoz, Badajoz 1993, 21-26.

⁹ "Silva y Figueroa, Don García", *Enciclopedia Ilustrada Hispano-Americana Espasa*, Vol. 56, p. 263. The data concerning his condition as a pageboy to Philip the 2nd and his serving in the wars in Flanders that appear in this article, are those considered by C. Alonso as coming from "not controlled informers" ("*informadores incontrolados*", op. cit., 22). Although it is true that at least until this moment they have not been confirmed by any further information, the author of the article of such a prestigious encyclopedia as is the *Espasa*, must have had something to base the information on or must have been following rightful historical deductions. His stay at Salamanca is recorded by M. Serrano y Sanz in his note 4 (op. cit., Vol. I., V-VI), referring to the bibliographer Vicente Barrantes and to Vivas Tabero; but the humanistic and political education, the knowledge of several languages and the other virtues that the ambassador shows during his voyage, his correspondence and his work, do not match the portrait that, according to the critics, would be the only one possible: a provincial nobleman, not very cunning at the exploitation of his estate, and when he was 46 years old found himself named *corregidor* in Jaen. In spite of the scarce information, we think that the evidence we have for judgement and our common sense as historians, allow us to go a bit further in the reconstruction of his biographical image.

Persian Gulf¹⁰. It was urgent to send a high ranking, experienced ambassador, and so in October 1612, the Council chose García de Silva y Figueroa for the mission. He accepted out of his spirit of duty in a missive in his own hand on the 19th of the same month¹¹, as he was sixty two years old and the embassy seemed excessively long to him. National ambitions and problems of competency with the Council of Portugal, delayed his parting and he did not set sail until April 1614.

From that moment on, the ambassador began to write an extensive manuscript that is today preserved in the National Library of Spain and which includes a series of outstanding drawings.

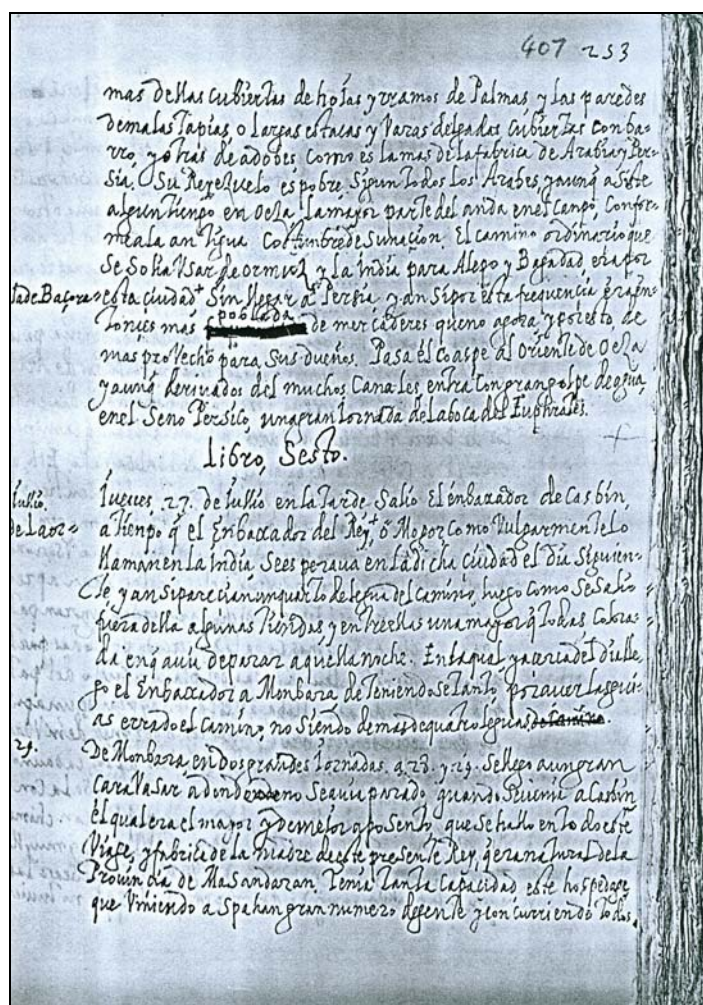


Fig. 2. The Spanish National Library preserves two manuscripts connected to the voyage to Iran of García de Silva y Figueroa. This page belongs to the one that is held to be written by the ambassador himself (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, Mss 18217).

¹⁰ The circumstances of Spanish politics in the region, as well as the nature and objectives of the successive embassies on both sides, and anterior to that of Silva y Figueroa can be examined in L. Gil Fernández.- *El imperio luso-español y la Persia safávida*. Vol. I (1582-1605). Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid 2006.

¹¹ L. Gil Fernández.- Op. cit. 1989, 154. The document where he expresses his acceptance and the following writings preparing his trip, are themselves patent evidence of the deep understanding that the recently designated ambassador had of the political importance of his mission and the attention to detail its preparation needed: see op. cit., 181 and 182, Docs. No. 11 and No. 12.

In its dense pages the author displays his deep humanistic education¹², his wide knowledge of natural history, geography, cosmography and history, his surprising love for animals, his respect for the customs of the people he visited, as well as a tireless curiosity, interlaced by a keen observant spirit, which makes his narrative a gold mine of extraordinary information, such as his observation about the coast of Oman, the comment that has motivated our study. After a long, interesting, voyage over sea and land, in 1618 Silva obtained an interview with the *sha* Abbas and, after staying several months in Iran, returned to Goa. In 1624, during his often delayed and sabotaged return trip to Spain, as the ship was sailing on the Atlantic bound for Lisbon, Silva and Figueroa died at sea. His manuscripts and the collection of objects that is said he was bringing with him, were lost and forgotten –except the one used by De Wicqfort in his incomplete edition of 1667. However, this should not have prevented the specialists from recognizing his merits, at least not after his long manuscript was published in Madrid at the beginning of the 20th century¹³.

Fig. 3. It was bad luck having him die at sea during his trip back to Spain thus preventing our ambassador from publishing the commentaries on his long adventure. In 1667, when European supremacy was already in French hands, a Parisian editor translated and published at least part of the voyage, although his edition showed a good deal of omissions, as well as biographical errors and mistaken appraisals.



¹² His notable culture is showed by the contents of his *Commentaries* (*Comentarios*), as well as by his correspondence and reports. C. Alonso mentions the esteem for Silva shown by the famous Antonio Bocarro in his note 8 (op. cit. 22), that we quote here: "(8) Antonio Bocarro, *Década 13 da Historia da India*, ed. de Rodrigo José de Lima, Felner, vol. I, Lisboa 1876, p. 370".

¹³ For example it is quite puzzling that in an excellent study about the European travellers and their views on the Persian monuments, the French edition is quoted and there is a commentary that says that nothing is known about the drawings mentioned in the book. See H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg.- "Introduction. Through Travellers' Eyes: the Persian Monuments as seen by European Visitors", in H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, J. W. Drijvers (eds.).- *Achaemenid History VII. Through Travellers' Eyes*. Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, Leiden 1991, 1-35. See 5.

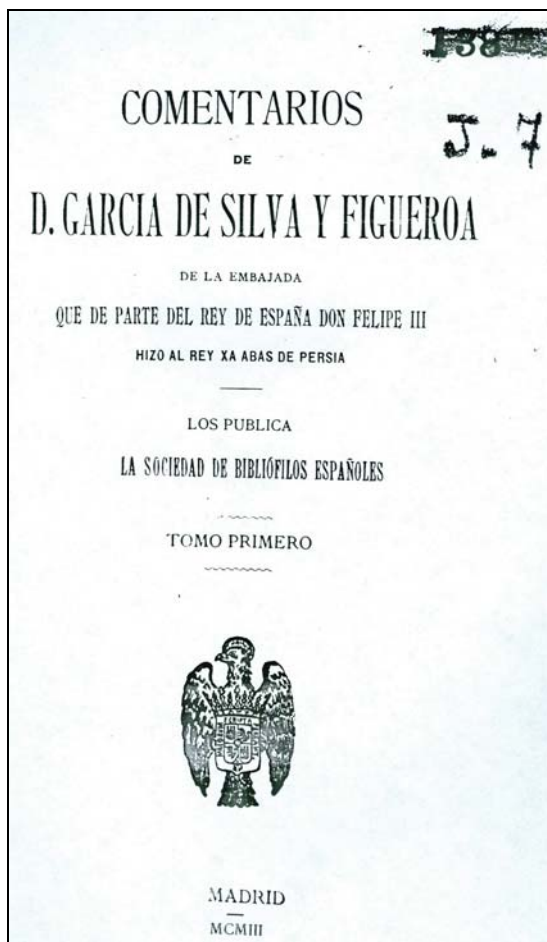


Fig. 4. At the beginning of the 20th century, M. Serrano y Sanz finally published in Spain the complete manuscript of Don García de Silva. The two large volumes containing the transcription of the complete manuscript saw the light thanks to the Society of Spanish Bibliophiles (Sociedad de Bibliófilos Españoles) in 1903 and 1905.

Because, in addition to many other varied and interesting comments, such as the one we are studying here, it must be remembered that when he was on his way to the *sha*, he expressed the wish to see the famous ruins of *chihil minar* or *chihil sutun*. After a thorough visit in company of his retinue -that he later described with great detail in his manuscript- and after having a painter draw some of the reliefs and copy several fragments of the inscriptions, he ended with two sensational contributions to the history of the rediscovery of the ancient Orient: that the site of *chihil minar* or *chihil sutun* was the ancient Persepolis and that those signs carved in stone in form of wedges were the writing of the ancient Persians and not ornamentation, as had been sustained by some in the past¹⁴. His visit was prior to the one made by Pietro Della Valle and only his death and astonishing prejudices have caused history not to recognize until recently his precedence in such important discoveries.

2.- ABOUT HIS NAVIGATION ALONG THE COASTS OF ARABIA AND AN ASTUTE OBSERVATION

Navigation on the Indian Ocean in those times adjusted itself to the pattern of the monsoons. So, to travel from Goa to Arabia and Iran, Africa or the Iberian Peninsula, the best time was from mid February to the end of April. Fearing that the year would be lost as had happened before because of the lack of cooperation from the viceroy to provide him

¹⁴ J. M^a Córdoba.- Op. cit., 2006, 51-56. Also G. de Silva y Figueroa.- *Comentarios* (ed. J. M^a Córdoba). Miraguano Ediciones, Madrid (in press).

with a ship, Silva y Figueroa decided to contract his trip with a merchant from Baçain. After reaching an agreement, merchants, Arab sailors and the envoys of the king set sail on the night of the 21st of March. After an uneventful voyage, they reached the coast of Arabia on the 8th of April and, on the 29th of the same month, the island of Ormuz. Finally, on the 12th of October of that very year, the ambassador landed in Iran and began his march to the *safavi* court. As this voyage is not the object of our study, we will omit the details just as we will ignore the vicissitudes of the navigation from Goa to Iran and back, though both are extremely interesting topics¹⁵. We will limit ourselves to our subject matter.

On the dawn of the 8th of April, the crew and the passengers picked out the Mountains of Arabia and, near the coast, the islands Silva calls “*Curia*” and “*Muria*”. The pilot guided the ship to the N/NW in order to pass the cape “*Matraca*”. On the 9th, the coast seemed to the ambassador to be mountainous and of the colour of “*red sand*” (*arena bermeja*), without any signs of settlements or agriculture. On the 13th, after dead calms and little navigation, they were careful not to be pushed into the inlet “*Maçeira*” during the night as its coast was dangerous and full of shallow areas. As dawn broke on the 14th, they saw they had passed “*the cape further on from that inlet*” (“*el cabo, más delante de dicha ensenada*”) and in the evening, the “*cape of Saint Peter*” (“*el cabo de San Pedro*”) came into view. And on the 15th, they saw the object that has led to our study: “*we discovered when it was day the “palleiros”, as the Portuguese sailors call certain hills that appear on the peaks of the mountains, in the form that in Spain are normally the haystacks of wheat or barley when, after having been threshed, have been heaped up before cleaning to separate the straw from the wheat, and these little hills are three or four, very visible to those who sail there and to all who make this trip they discover these “palleiros” first, before seeing anything else on the coast of Arabia*”¹⁶.

The ship continued and on the night of the 16th they sailed around the “*Cape of Roçalgate*” (*cabo de Roçalgate*), but as they had gone too far away from the coast before daylight, they did not see it. Neither did they see the “*city of Calayate*” (*ciudad de Calayate*), which García de Silva says was further away from that cape, which was “*the most eastern part of all that big land and extensive region of Arabia*”¹⁷. As they approached the coast again, they observed the sites of *Calayate*, *Tebebe*, *Curiate*, *Thebe* -a place he describes with great interest- when on the 19th of April they sighted the mountains of “*Mascate*”, and where the following day, the ambassador and his retinue went ashore in order to rest and visit the fortress and the city.

In conclusion we think that a simple reading of the text shows the extreme importance of the place names mentioned by the ambassador and, although leaving for later a more detailed commentary¹⁸, we must at least stress that those “*montezillos*” were

¹⁵ The interesting prologue and introduction by Manuel Serrano y Sanz to the first Spanish edition of the manuscript of García de Silva (op. cit. 1903) does not discuss these details. Something is said in the work of C. Alonso (op. cit. 154-160). More attention to his virtues as a sailor and the comments of the ambassador during his ocean voyages can be found in the edition of J. M^a Córdoba (op. cit. In press).

¹⁶ G. de Silva y Figueroa.- *Comentarios...* Edition by M. Serrano y Sanz, vol. 1, 229. “*Descubrimos luego que fue de día los palleiros, que así le llaman los marineros portugueses á ciertos montes que parecen sobre las cumbres de las montañas, de la forma que suelen estar en España las paruas de trigo ó ceuada quando después de trilladas las tienen amontonadas antes de las limpiar para apartar la paja del trigo, y son estos montezillos tres ó quatro, muy á vista de los que por allí nauegan, y a todos los que tienen en este viage monçion se le descubren estos palleiros primero que ninguna otra tierra de la costa de Arabia*”.

¹⁷ “*La parte mas oriental de toda la gran tierra y estendida region de Arabia*” (T.N.)

¹⁸ M. Mañé and J. M^a Córdoba, op. cit., *studium in itinere*. But we must also draw your attention to the accuracy of place names like the island “*Curia*” and “*Muria*”, the cape “*Matraca*” or the inlet of “*Maçeira*”, where we can clearly see the present Jazā’ir Khurīyā Murīya, the cape of Ra’s al Madrakah or the gulf and island of Maṣīrah.

seen on the 15th near the coast of Oman and that on the night of the 16th, they sailed around the cape they called “*Roçalgate*”, easily identified as the present-day Cape of Ra's al Hadd, which is in fact the most eastern geographic point of the coast of Arabia, as the ambassador rightly said. So Silva gives us two very accurate pieces of information in his book: that certain structures could be seen that reminded him of others associated with agriculture in Spain and that those shapes appeared on elevated points of the terrain which was near the coast, on the part located at a one day's navigation from the Cape of Ra's al Hadd.

3.- IDENTIFICATION HYPOTHESIS AND PROPOSAL: ETHNOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

The description made by the ambassador leaves no room for doubt. The group of three or four little hills located at the highest point on a line of mountain peaks remind him of certain structures that the Portuguese call “*palleiros*”, that in turn, are similar to other structures found in Spain. This comparison, as well as the emplacement of the little hills mentioned, brought two things to our minds: the *almiares* or *pallizos* in Spain and the graves made of stone of the type called *Hafit* or *Beehive*. Once more, ethnology and archaeology go hand in hand. Let us see why.

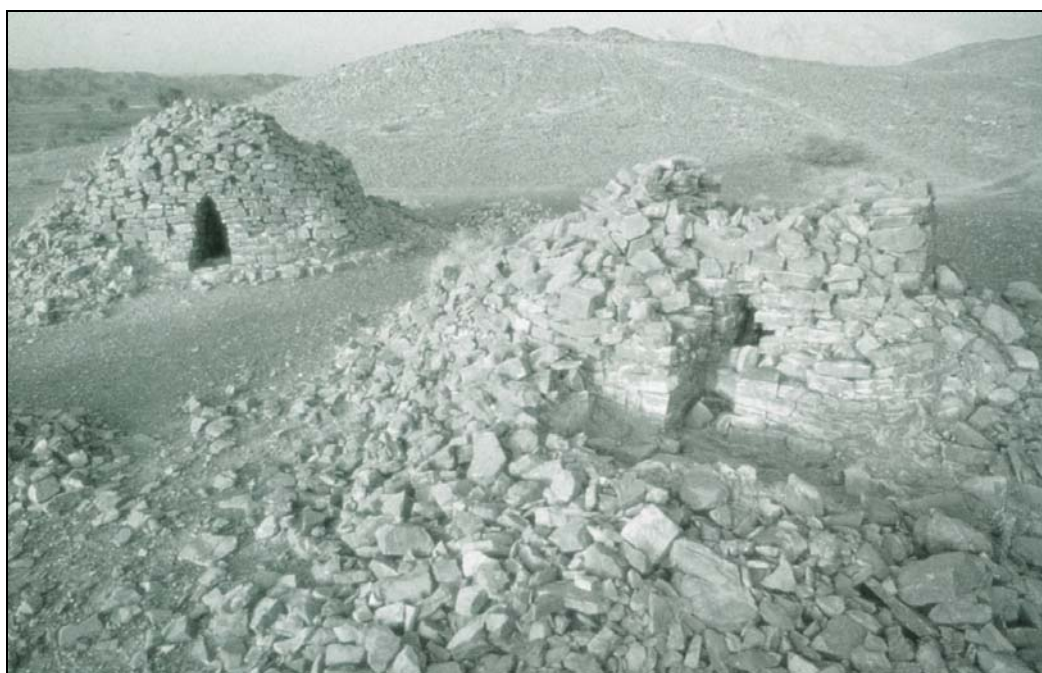


Fig. 5. We think that the topographic reference in the Portuguese log, those “pallizos” of the Portuguese sailors that Silva compared to the hives of straw of Spanish villages, must have been something similar to the “Beehive graves” of this photograph. (Photo: “Beehive graves” near Bat, in Oman, after D.T. Potts, 1992, vol. I, plate IIb).

3.1.- Ancient Spanish and European agricultural life: haycocks, *almiares* and *pallizos*.

The mechanization of modern agriculture has caused the disappearance of many of the tasks, tools and installations that during centuries had belonged to our villages and hamlets. Quite a few of these elements became images that reminded us in a very special way of agricultural life, unmistakable elements of the rural landscape of Europe. If we bring to mind some well-known compositions of the traditional paintings of our continent,

such as *The Angelus* of F. Millet or *La meule, Pontoise* of C. Pissarro¹⁹, we will immediately understand what the Portuguese sailors and the ambassador were referring to. When the Portuguese of the 17th century talked about “*pallizos*”, García de Silva understood immediately what they were referring to and as he describes those “*montezillos*”, he compares them to common elements of European agriculture. Although he does not name them specifically he referred to what in Spain has always been called “*almiars*”, which in some northern regions of the Iberian Peninsula, like Galicia, were also called “*palleiros*”, a word that is very similar to the Portuguese.



Fig. 6. Ancient rural villages of Spain usually had hives of straw, hay or corn, commonly called *almiars*. Julio Caro Baroja recorded many of these rural elements in his work (Photo: J. Caro Baroja, 1977, 233, lower picture).

As we picture those paintings by Millet or Pissarro or by simply turning our eyes back to our own childhood, we will remember that once upon a time the European peasants used to make a sort of “open-air barn” by heaping up several layers of straw, grain or hay around a stick that served as an axis. When finished, the heap that was formed looked similar to some type of beehives or a sort of cone with a more or less curved and sloping surface. A profound investigator of traditional Spanish culture, Julio Caro Baroja, devoted an important number of his writings and field drawings or ethnological photographs to the

¹⁹ In the background, far away from the pious pair of peasants in the canvas of Millet, one can distinguish several *almiars* or haycocks. On the contrary in the painting by Pissarro, the haycock itself is the main subject of the canvas. Both French, we have chosen them because these works are well known, but all schools of European painting preserve pictures about rural themes that include haycocks, which are very similar to each other, as they were a peculiar element of the rural landscape of former times.

almiares or haycocks of Castile, Galicia, Andalusia, Navarre or the Basque Country²⁰. His drawings or photographs are even better illustrations than the paintings mentioned above.



Fig. 7. The form of the ancient haycocks of the Spanish countryside differed according to the material of the hives and the regional customs. But normally their silhouettes were similar to cones or domes. In the photograph, three almiarres or palleiros from Gallice, (J. Caro Baroja, 1977, 233, upper picture) and an horreo (small barn) and two haycocks in Vigo (J. Caro Baroja, 1979, 45).

The modernisation of agricultural work and the introduction of increasingly multipurpose machinery has caused the straw or hay used to feed cattle to be reaped and stored in a very different way. Because of this, the *haycock*, *-almiar*, *meule*, *Strohschober*, *pagliaio*-, has disappeared from our rural landscapes. To the Portuguese and Spanish comrades of García de Silva and to himself, those far-away constructions that rose up in groups of three or four, silhouetted before the line of mountains visible from the sea, looked like something they knew well from their hamlets and villages: a sort of structure with domed or pointed silhouettes, a circular base and made of straw. For this reason, the Portuguese called them “*pallizos*”, Silva recalled the *parvas* or *almiares* of Spain and we think that his memories and words have a further meaning: the first-known mention of the 3rd millennium graves in Oman.

²⁰ J. Caro Baroja.- *Los pueblos del Norte*. Editorial Txertoa, San Sebastian 1977, 76, 233: Cuadernos de Campo. Ediciones Turner/Ministerio de Cultura, Madrid, 1979, 45, 98.

3.2. Funerary architecture of the 3rd millennium in Oman

As the words used in the manuscript evoke silhouettes that can still be recognised in European agriculture and rural ethnology, we must now stress that, as we wrote in the beginning, when we noticed the peculiar commentaries of Silva in connection with those “*montezillos*”²¹, we immediately recalled our “*almiares*”. At the same time, we asked ourselves if the author was not referring to the funerary constructions of the Bronze Age that are typical in the culture of the 3rd millennium in the Oman Peninsula, and which are very familiar in the archaeology of the region. As it is well-known, the so-called “*Hafit Horizon*”²², uncovered initially in the work of P.V. Glob and other colleagues in the region of Buraimi at the end of the fifties of the last century²³, brought to light a typology that was unknown at that moment. Particularly striking was the field of *cairns* and its 200 graves built of stone. They were collective tombs for two to five individuals, with an oval or circular shape, 2 or 2.5 m in height and with an outer diameter between 4 and 8 m, reaching occasionally even 11 m. Built without pavement directly on the ground -in fact there are not any known tombs excavated in the ground prior to the second half of the 3rd mill. B.C.-, they used to occupy the terraces of the *wadian*, the slopes of the mountains and, rarely, the crests of low hills. They were built of unhewn stones, crudely bonded and set in irregular levels that came closer and closer until they formed a sort of dome over the inner chamber, a chamber that could be surrounded by one or two concentric walls with an entrance directly on the ground that was hidden outside by little stones and a small corridor of approximately 1 m height²⁴ (fig. 11). Although their appearance is more rustic than the Umm an-Nar graves of Abu Dhabi²⁵ -that are normally better constructed, have greater dimensions and can occasionally contain several hundreds of bodies (fig.13)- this funerary tradition of the *cairns* seemed very close to them, though some materials found at Buraimi seemed to suggest a more recent date. Finally the doubts about their dating were resolved by the excavations of K. Frifelt at the oasis of Jizzi²⁶, as the Jemdet Nasr pottery collected in the tombs 1141, 1137, 1138 and 1320 put an end to the debate. On the other hand, the same pottery found its parallel with the shards found in tomb 1137 at Bat, a typical *Beehive Grave*²⁷ as are called certain tombs that are similar to the hives of these insects found in the interior of Oman and in areas near the coast. The idea they belonged to different periods was discarded by B. Vogt²⁸, who synthesized both types of graves in his group “*Typ der Hafit/Bienenkorb-Gräber*”. So we understand that the “*montezillos*” pointed out by Silva y Figueroa were in fact what to the NW of the Oman Mountains is called *Hafit Type* graves or what to the E or SE of the same mountains is called *Beehive Type*.

²¹ In English “little hills”.

²² So-called after the first grave of this type found at the N part of Jebel Hafit and at its eastern foothills, south of the oasis of al-Ain and Buraimi, in the interior. Their beginnings are dated around 3200-3100 and they continue through the 3rd millennium until around 2250 B.C..

²³ D.T. Potts.- *The Arabian Gulf in Antiquity. From Prehistory to the Fall of the Achaemenid Empire*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, Volume I, 72-85. See 72.

²⁴ M. Mañé.- *La arqueología de la muerte en la Península de Omán (III mil. A.C.). Prácticas y creencias en la región del piedemonte*. Centro superior de Estudios de Oriente Próximo y Egipto. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Madrid 2005, 65-68.

²⁵ Which owes its name to the island where the first graves of this type were found, in the emirate of Abu Dhabi.

²⁶ K. Frifelt.- “A possible link between the Jemdet Nasr and Umm an-Nar Graves of Oman”, *Journal of Oman Studies* I (1975), 57-80.

²⁷ K. Frifelt.- Op. cit., figs. 11 and 21, plate 9.

²⁸ B. Vogt.- *Zur Chronologie und Entwicklung der Gräber des späten 4.-2. Jtsd. v. Chr. auf der Halbinsel Oman*. Ph.D. Thesis, Göttingen 1985.



Fig. 8. Three typical cairns built of stone north of Oman, that arise on a hill that dominates the nearby steppe. The silhouettes of these graves of the 3rd millennium had to remind a European of the 17th century of the countryside of his homeland (Photo: M. Rice, 1994, fig. 8.19).

In addition to this, the extraordinary concentration of this type of funerary architecture in the region of Ja'alan²⁹, whose coast was visible to the ship that took García de Silva to Muscat and Ormuz, has recently been highlighted. The surveys by the French-Italian team in the area show an astonishing number of these tombs³⁰, that are clearly visible on the hillocks and mountains, more or less of equal distance from one another, so that the silhouettes of three or four of them standing out against the horizon would offer a peculiar vision of regular constructions of similar height.

²⁹ J. Giraud.- "Ja'alan (Oman) in the third Millennium: an attempt at a modelisation of an interrelational geographic space", in H. Kühne, R. M. Czichon and F. J. Kreppner (eds.) *Proceedings of the 4th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*. Harrassowitz Verlag. Wiesbaden 2008, vol. I, 101-113.

³⁰ J. Giraud refers to eighteen years of excavations and surveys led by S. Cleuziou and M. Tosi that led to the discovery of innumerable Umm an-Nar and Hafit settlements and necropolis in the Ja'alan region, an inner and coastal area of important size, that has its NE vertex at the point of Ra'as al-Hadd. See J. Giraud, *op. cit.*



Fig. 9. The horizon of the interior and coast of the Ja'alan region often shows groups of funerary constructions, more or less in a collapsed state, whose silhouettes from a distance would have reminded Portuguese and Spanish sailors of the hives of straw in the villages and hamlets of their country (Photo: J. Giraud, 2008, fig. 7)

Furthermore, in the coastal and semi-coastal regions before the Cape of Ra's al Hadd, important groupings of these tombs can be found in many different places³¹. Without a doubt, he was referring to one of these when he wrote "*certain hills that appear on the peaks of the mountains, ... and these little hills are three or four, very visible to those who sail there*"³². This clear visibility and permanence surely were the reasons the Portuguese used them to fix the course of their coastal navigation to Muscat.

These graves called *Beehive* and, in a way, those called *Hafit*, are similar to a traditional beehive, as suggested by the Anglo-Saxons, but also to the haycocks of traditional European agriculture. Therefore, the name of "*palleiros*"³³ given to them by the Portuguese, seems correct to us and very descriptive. In technical literature, the "Beehive Graves" are described as collective tombs located on the slopes or crests of the mountains, contemporary to the *Hafit Type*, although their structure is circular and more complex. They have a base or plinth that sticks out of the grave, a paved floor inside and two to four concentric walls. The height is 3 or 4 m and their outer diameter can reach 8 or 9 m. Sometimes they are surrounded by a small parapet of a half-meter high that is more crudely built. The thin and mostly flat stones, as well as the flagstones, give them a better appearance and make them more stable than the *Hafit* tombs. The entrance also is at ground level and there is a corridor too, but inside they may show a dividing wall³⁴ (fig.12). We have already stressed that in the beginning, it was said that these graves were probably the outcome of an evolution of the *Hafit* grave of the 3rd millennium, an

³¹ J. Giraud, op.cit., figs. 8 and 9.

³² "*çiertos montes que parecen sobre las cumbres de las montañas, ... y son estos montezillos tres ó quatro, muy a vista de los que por allí nauegan*". G. de Silva y Figueroa.- *Comentarios de D. García de Silva y Figueroa...* Edición de M. Serrano y Sanz, Sociedad de Bibliófilos españoles, Madrid MCMII, vol. I, 229.

³³ Haycock.

³⁴ M. Mañé.- Op. cit. 2005, 68-71

intermediate step on the way to the more monumental ones of the *Umm an-Nar* type³⁵ They had to be studied separately as they had only been found at sites in the interior, like Bat, and along the coastal regions of Oman, and what is more, the peculiarities observed at the funeral rites have not even been considered. If at one time their peaked-shaped silhouette (fig. 14) seemed to put them a special category in archaeology, today they are considered to belong to the same period.



Fig. 10. If we look from a distance on a well-preserved Beehive grave, its similarity to a haystack, almiar, meule or Strohschober is astounding (Photo: M. Rice, 1994, fig. 8.18).

³⁵ M. Mañé.- Op. cit. 2005, 70. "In fact this small wall and the separation inside that sometimes appears, as well as the base or plinth that sticks out of the tomb, was what had led for a long time to think of a late evolution of the *Hafit* graves into the *Uman-Nar* graves. The circumstance that the first ones to be excavated were in Bat, where there are examples of *Hafit* graves as well as of *Umm an-Nar* ones, gave even more support to this idea, and the idea of a progressive evolution in a continuously inhabited region was accepted as evident. But later B. Vogt stressed that the architectonic concept and the funerary character of the *Hafit* and *Beehive* graves, does not allow the classification of them into two different categories. Instead they would belong to the same one, out of which the *Umm an-Nar* type would have evolved. The use of flatter stones that permitted a better construction would not be a chronological mark, but the consequence of this material being available in the surrounding areas. This can probably be doubted, because the same material was available for the *Hafit* graves that can also be found at this site and if it is true that on the outside *Beehive* graves are practically identical with *Hafit* tombs, on the inside they already show many aspects that point to the way *Um an-Nar* tombs are built. The material found in both types of graves, specially the Jemdet Nasr pottery, suggests the end of the 4th mill. B.C. and the beginning of the 3rd mil. B.C., but the artefacts in copper and stone already show certain affinities to the *Um an-Nar* period. As no other elements that would permit a more precise dating have been found and as both types of graves coexist during a fairly long time with those that seem to be their successors (more or less until 2250 B.C.), both theses must be accepted as valid. It is true that until now Vogt's idea prevails, as we are awaiting more accurate dates than the one given by the morphology of the tombs. In fact most authors limit themselves to mentioning in general *Hafit* and *Umm an-Nar* tombs as the types of graves existing on the Peninsula during the 3rd mill. B.C., without further details."

And finally, we know today that many funerary constructions of the Bronze Age were built on the high areas of the terrain, and so were always, as they are today, clearly perceptible from a long distance.

4. CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the 1st millennium B.C. the use of the camel for transport of persons and goods made it possible to cross the deserts of the Orient, which until then had remained impenetrable. The guides of the caravans usually used the features of the landscape that did not change as the points of reference for their routes. The lone tree mentioned by Marco Polo on his march through Central Asia³⁶ is only one of those few known by the European travellers of the Middle Ages out of the thousands that possibly existed and that they never noticed. And a similar thing happened when sailors began to explore the world's coasts and seas.

The early navigation on the Mediterranean Sea, the African and American coasts or those of Arabia and India, was, at the beginning, an affair of the Italians, Portuguese or Spaniards, depending on their spheres of influence³⁷. The portolani and navigational charts included all kinds of references that helped to recognise the course and to correct the frequent errors of latitude and, even more, of longitude³⁸. When they sailed near the coast, sailors could establish more accurate logs thanks to coastal features like islands, capes, gulfs and inlets, more or less friendly cities and, of course, points of inland topography, that could serve as secure positional marks because of their distinctiveness and visibility. The Portuguese log mentions the Arab place names of capes, gulfs and inhabited places with astounding accuracy, but at a certain place in that same Arabia the best reference were those "*certain hills that appear on the peaks of the mountains, ... and these little hills are three or four, very visible to those who sail there*". In conclusion, there is an evident connection between a manuscript of the 17th century, the archaeology of the Oman Peninsula and ancient agricultural customs known through ethnology: although he was ignorant of their real nature³⁹, Silva y Figueroa has left us the first-known mention of the graves of the 3rd millennium B.C. on the Oman Peninsula.

³⁶ M. Polo.- *Libro de las maravillas* (M. Armiño, translator and editor). Ediciones Generales Anaya, Madrid, 1984, 85. The translations of the works of Marco Polo into the different European languages are each a bit different, although not substantially, depending on the manuscript used. M. Armiño's edition includes this reference to the "dead tree", that other versions omit, in chapter XL of Book I.

³⁷ F. Fernández-Armesto.- *Antes de Colón*. Ediciones Cátedra S.A., Madrid, 1933.

³⁸ Spanish sailors and pilots of the 16th century brought together their practical and cartographic experience in the *Casa de Contratación de Sevilla*, the Trading House of Seville. This place served as an archive and naval school for the pilots who were going to practise the astronomical navigation. One of its best teachers and pilot major (*Piloto Mayor*) was Alonso de Chaves, author of the excellent *Espejo de Navegantes* (*Mirror for Sailors*), a treatise about sailing that included a method to fix the latitude by tables, that even today show an astounding accuracy. See A. de Chaves.- *Espejo de navegantes* (edition by P. Castañeda, M. Cuesta, P. Hernández). Museo Naval, Madrid 1983, 61. Nevertheless at that time, latitude could not be accurately determined, in spite of its enormous importance. At the beginning of the reign of Philip the 3rd of Spain, the first international contest in history was held in the country, where a considerable prize was offered to whoever was able to find the way to accurately determine the latitude on the sea. See J. M^a Piñero.- *El arte de navegar en la España del Renacimiento*. Editorial Labor S.A., Barcelona 1986, 199. This contest was widely known throughout Europe and Cervantes himself mentioned it in one of his books.

³⁹ Considering the sharp observation skills and the rational and analytic mind that the ambassador shows on other occasions and especially at Persepolis, it would be interesting to imagine what he could have said about this "*montezillos*" if he had been able to disembark and examine them more closely. In any case, the mentioning of them in his manuscript is doubtless still very interesting.

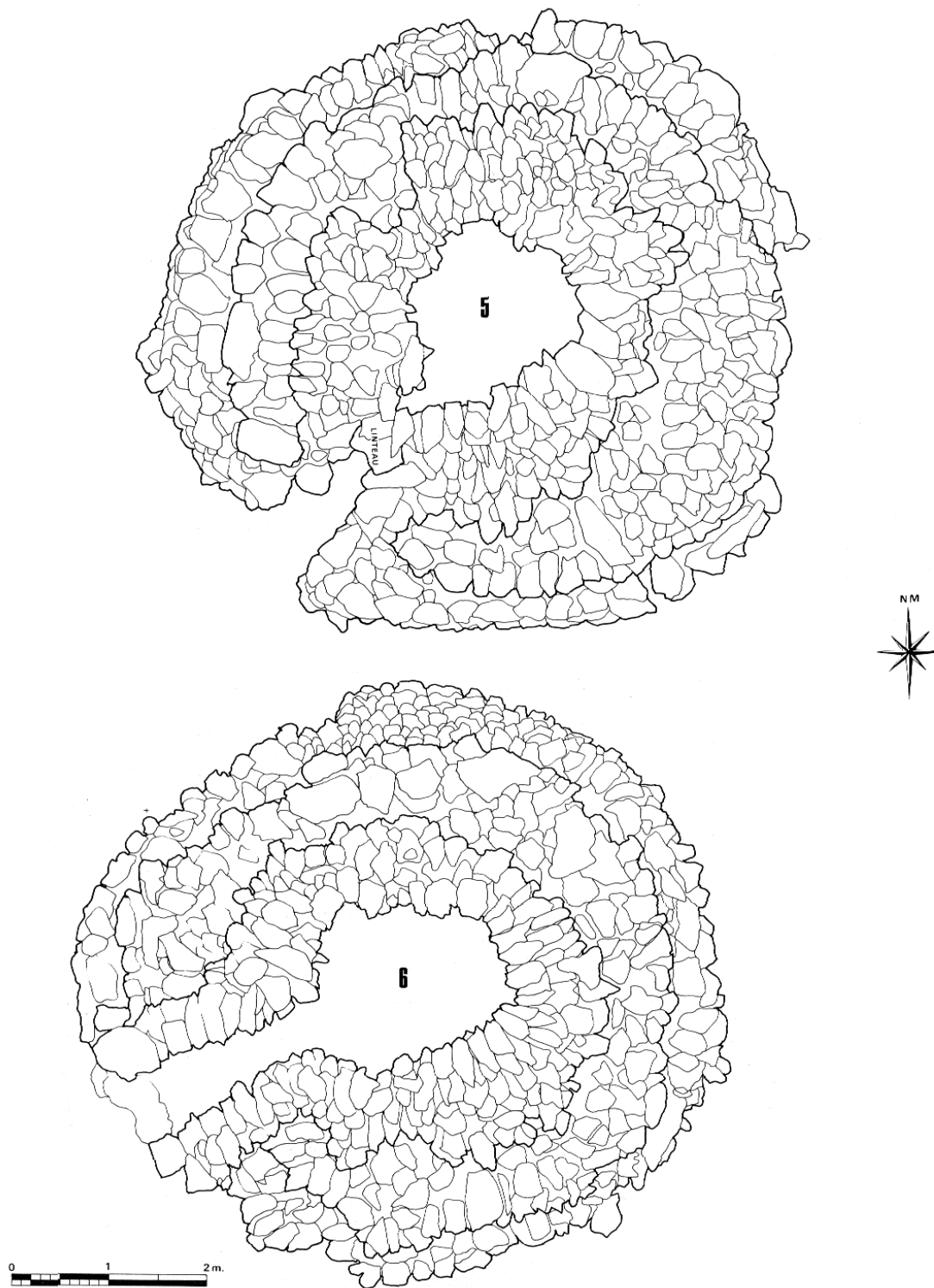


Fig. 11. Hafit, cairns 5 and 6: groundplan (S. Cleuziou et al.: Archéologie aux Emirats Arabes Unis- Archaeology in the United Arab Emirates vol. 1, 1977-1978, p. 46, fig. 15).

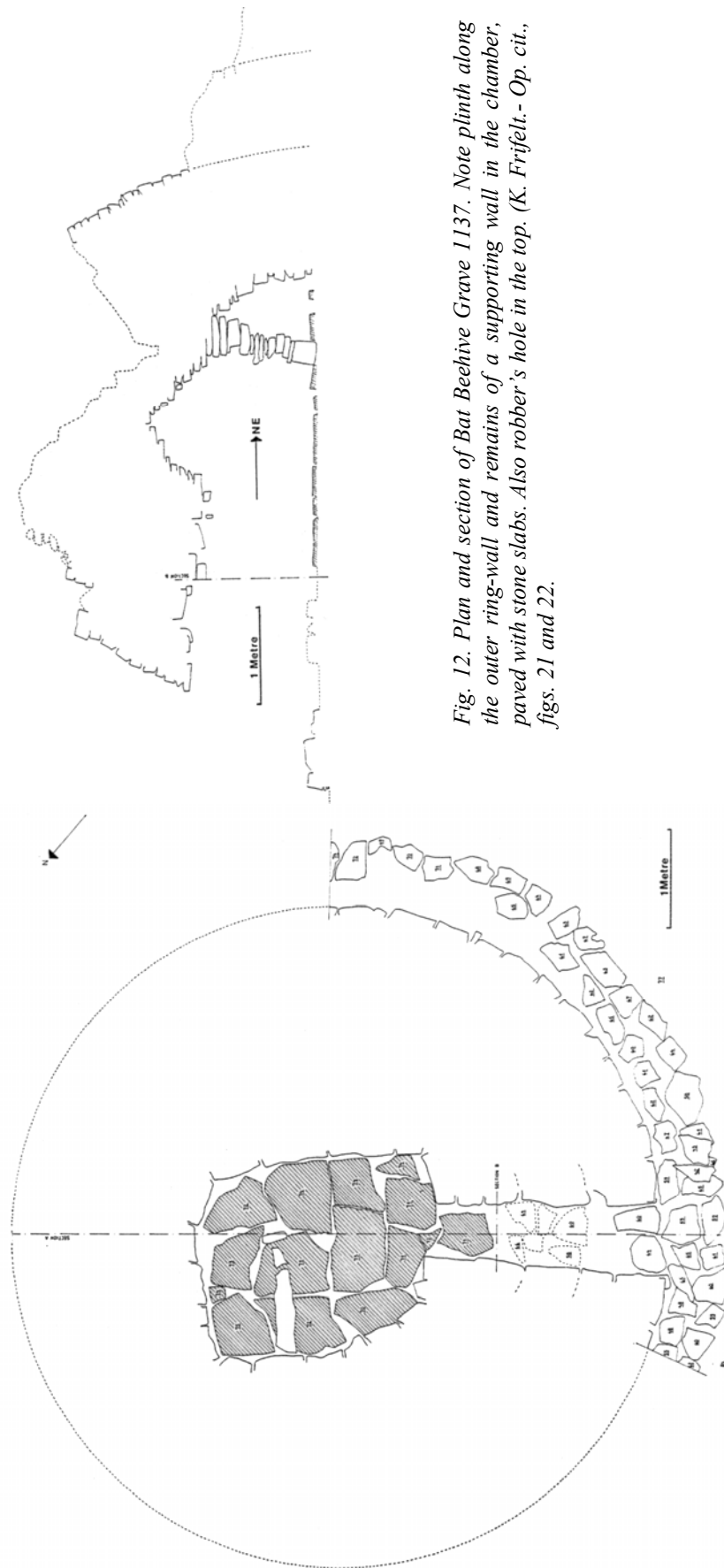


Fig. 12. Plan and section of Bat Beehive Grave 1137. Note plinth along the outer ring-wall and remains of a supporting wall in the chamber, paved with stone slabs. Also robber's hole in the top. (K. Frifelt. - *Op. cit.*, figs. 21 and 22.

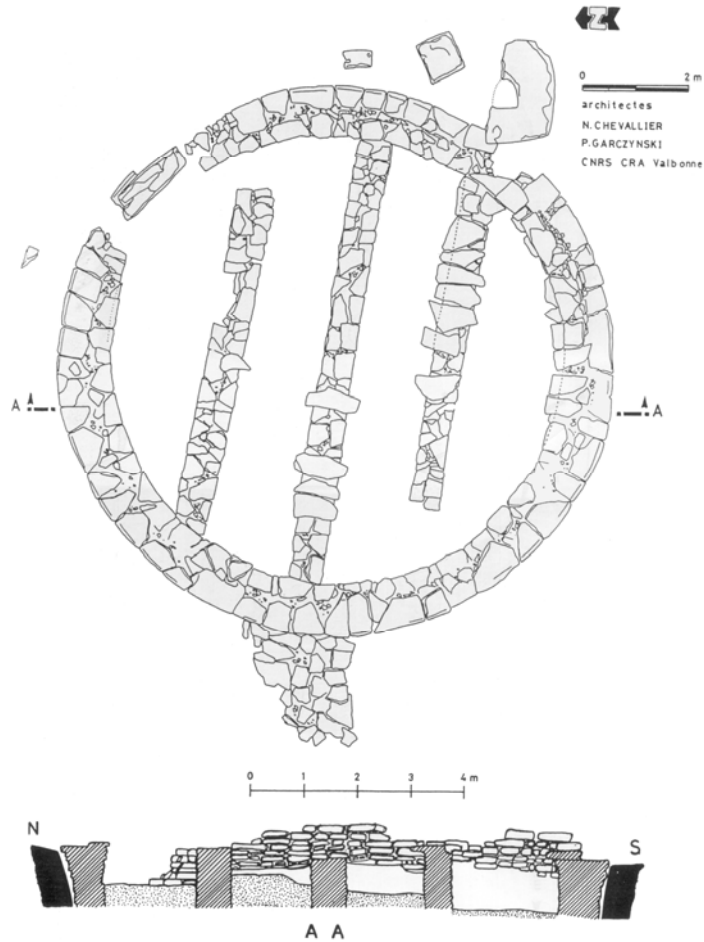


Fig. 13. Tomb A Hili North. Ground plan, section and general view (B. Vogt "The Umm an Nar Tomb A at Hili North: A preliminary report on three seasons of excavations, 1982-1984" in *Archaeology in the United Arab Emirates vol. IV*, 1985, *Al Ain*, pp. 20-37, pl. 22 and 29.

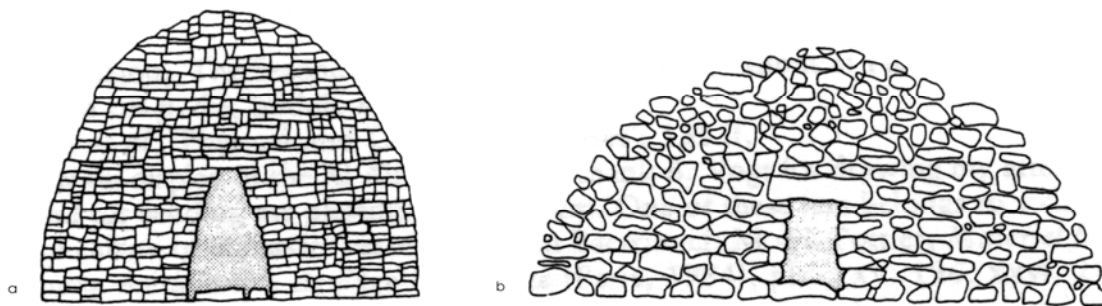


Fig. 14. Idealized reconstructions of beehive- (a) and Hafit- (b) type graves (D. T. Potts, 1992, vol. 1, p. 75, fig. 8).

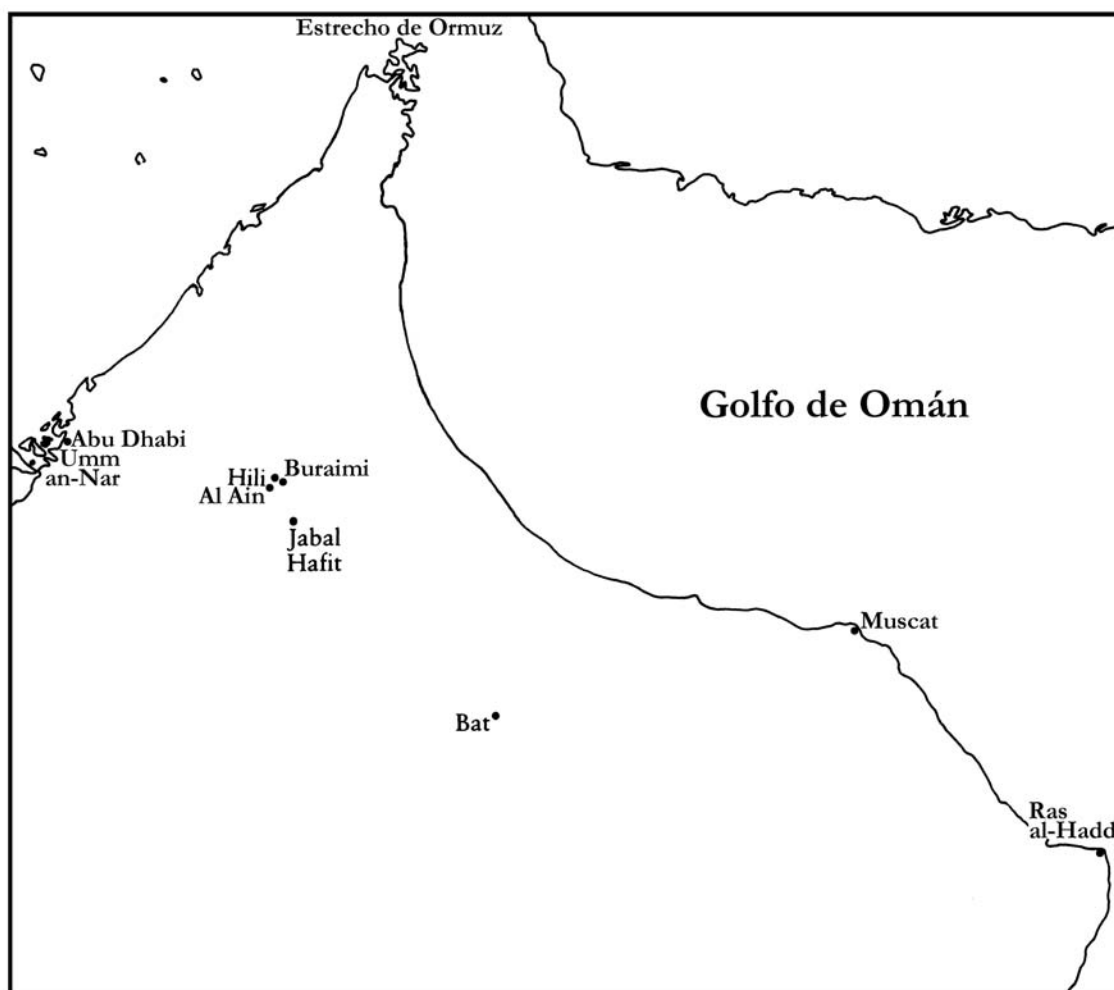


Fig. 15. Main sites mentioned in the text.

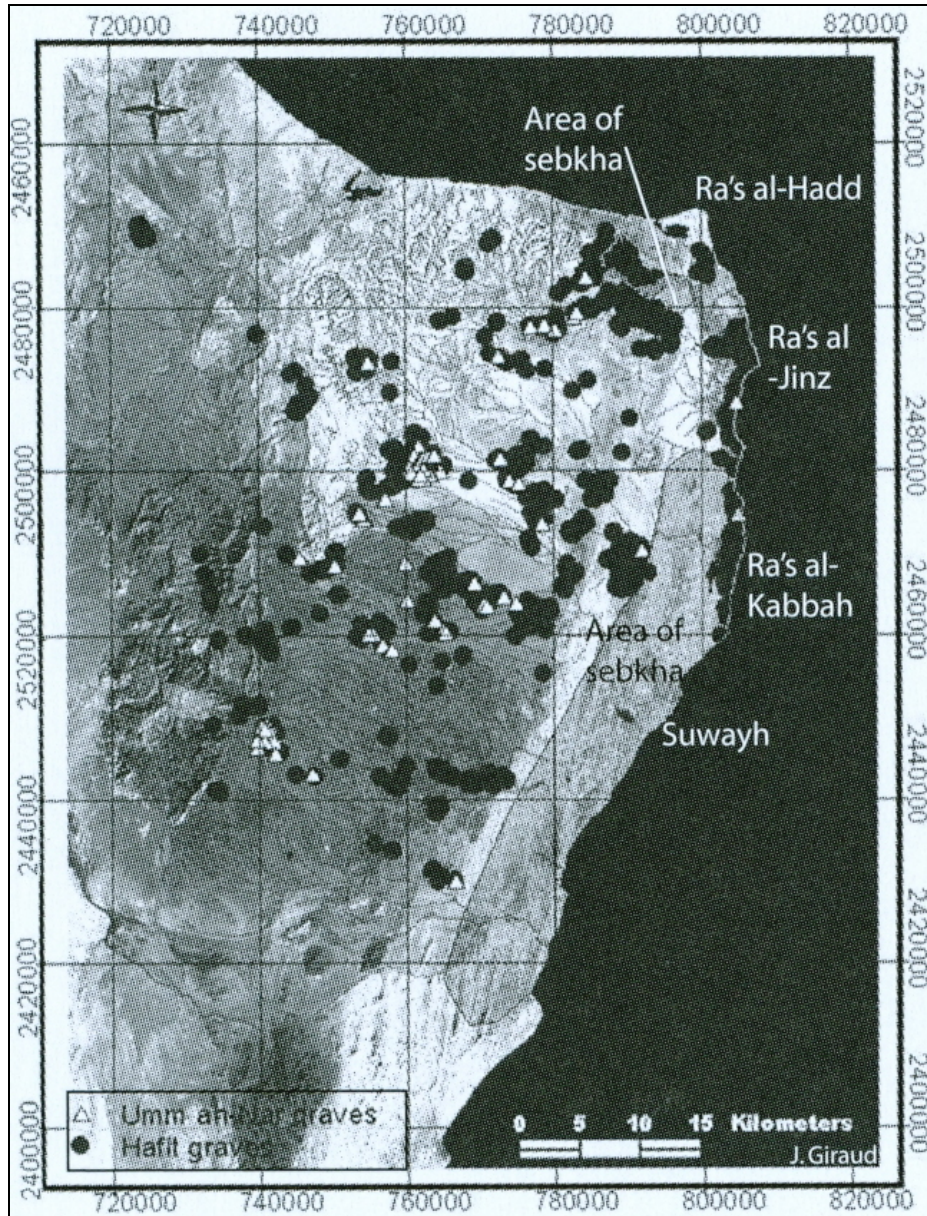


Fig. 16. J. Giraud sums up in his study the surveys made and the sites and funerary areas belonging to the 3rd millennium catalogued during eighteen years of work in the region by the French-Italian team lead by S. Cleuziou and M. Tosi. His map shows the high density of Hafit tombs in the region their work is located (J. Giraud, 2008, fig. 8).