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Earliest Cultures and their Time Frames along the Coastlands of Oman

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The identification of the hunter-gatherer societies of the beginning of the Early Holocene, is an important theme for research in Oman Peninsula. The chronology of the techno-cultural facies of Fasad, long based on conjecture, which we know today to belong to the first half of the 8th millennium BC, a period of high precipitation that should be correlated with the intensification of the south-west monsoon. The elements characteristic of this assemblage are projectile points made on blanks of flakes that are thin or sometimes thick; blade products are rarer. The tang is generally fashioned by bifacial retouch, sometimes simply direct or inverse, rarely alternately. The distal extremity of these points is naturally sharp and not retouched, although some are sometimes reworked by a series of short marginal retouching. Absent from Yemen, except for the Hadramaut and the Mahra where its presence is slight, this cultural entity is well represented in some localities of Dhofar, the only region having produced stratified sites (Jebel Qara, Nadj, etc.). In Oman Peninsula, Ras Al-Jinz 37, is actually the unique stone dwelling known for this period. Since the early Holocene, most of the occupations of this period have suffered the effects of strong winds or violent erosion and the remains in place are rare.

The role of autochthonous cultures in the appearance of the first producer societies, and the influence of the PPNB of the Levant in the emergence of the Neolithic in the Oman peninsula are themes that remain crucial for research.

Between 6500 and 3100 BC, fully “Neolithised” cultures developed in the peninsula. Except for the Gulf, the earliest culture from Oman to Yemen was characterised by the domestication of Caprinae and the presence of pressure-retouched trihedral points sometimes “fluted”. In the Ja’alan, this period was the object of excavation at Suwayh SWY-1, of which the stratigraphy covering the period 5700-4200 BC is exceptional.



FIGURE 3.1. Ras Al-Jinz 37 a 8th millennium camp site during 1989 excavation (copyright, Y. Guichard).



FIGURE 3.2.

Ras Al-Jinz 37 during the 1989 season
(copyright, V. Charpentier).

The earliest habitation structures are set directly upon the beach-rock. a circular structure of about 2 m in diameter with a long ditch associated with post holes has been excavated.

This period is characterised by a production society which had mastered domestication and formed strong groups in the form of coastal villages principally oriented towards production related to fishing. Technologically, it was an innovating society, devising trifacial projectiles, fluting of certain points, sophisticated fishing kit, (shellfish-hooks, big nets, shark-teeth, arrowheads, etc.). Fishing pearl is also attested in the Gulf and Arabian

Sea. As an indication of new social relations, the creation of trade movement, especially over very long distances, is regarded as one of the characteristics of *Neolithization*. In Arabia, it is during this period that complex networks of long-distance trade developed, internal to Arabia and reaching to distant lands such as the Horn of Africa. The materials traded in these networks included materials, such as exotic marine shells in the Rub Al-Khali and clastic rocks such as obsidian in Yemen and Saudi Arabia, and carnelian, agate and chalcedony in the Gulf, and possibly opalescent flint in the Oman peninsula.



FIGURE 3.3. Fasad point from BJD-1 Dandah Al-Jaddeed Al-Haddah, 8000-7500 BC (copyright, V. Charpentier).

In the Emirates, it was this Neolithic population who made the first contact with the Ubaid 1 and 2-3 society, and were to assimilate goods and artificial materials (pottery, plaster, bitumen).

At about 4500-4200 BC, a new cultural entity emerges during a phase of great aridification and disappears about 3700 BC. Coming from the “trihedral points facies”, its material culture is manifested by the appearance of several innovations, some of which affect the lithic industry: new forms of very slender projectile points, with an often fusiform silhouette and a diamond-shaped or lozenge-shaped section. Within the assemblage a true blade production is manifested, as much in Ja’alan as in Northern Oman and the UAE. Along the Arabian Sea, fishing equipment becomes standardized and new tools are henceforth fabricated. It is during this period, even a little earlier, that the open sea is conquered, with tuna fishing in the Sea of Oman and in the Arabian

Gulf (cf. Dalma, Akab, Ras Al-Hamra RH-6, etc.). At Suwayh, this facies is present in all the late levels of SWY-1 and 20, in the earliest levels of SWY-2 and 3. The occupation at Ras Shaqallah SAQ-1, Ras Al-Hamra RH-6 and the earliest levels of Ras Al-Hamra RH-5 are related to this group, as are several sites of the Gulf (Al-Madar, Jazirat Al-Hamra and Ar-Ramlah 6).

In the Ja’alan, the sites attributable to the end of the Neolithic are the most numerous and those whose material culture we know best. More than fifty sites of this period were found, mainly on the coastal side, and several excavations or test trenches were made, at Ras Al-Hadd (HD-2.5, HD-6 Period I), Ras Al-Jinz RJ-2 (Period I), Suwayh (SWY-2, 3, 10), and Ras Al-Khabbah (KHB-1). ■

FIGURE 3.4. Trihedral point for Khor Al-Hajar KHJ-1, 6500-4500 BC (copyright, V. Charpentier).

