

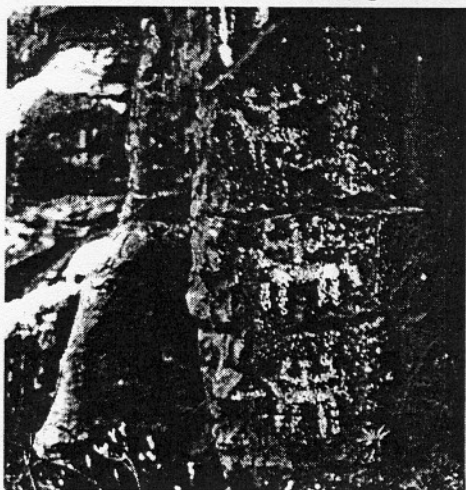
## New rock art sites in the Musandam Peninsula, Sultanate of Oman

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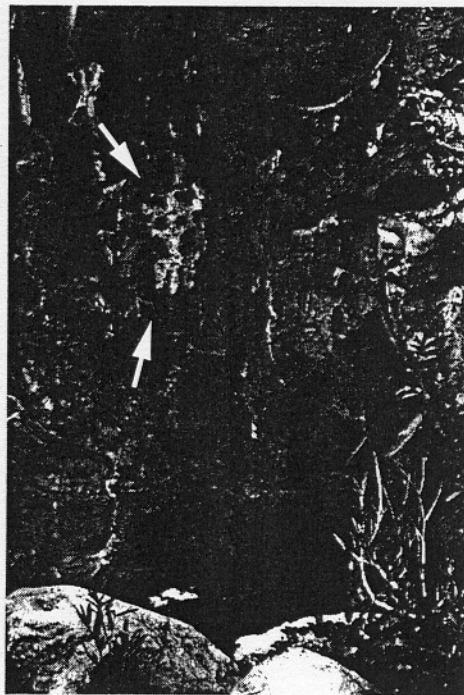
A brief survey carried out along the coast of the Musandam Peninsula in April 1990 led to the discovery of new archaeological sites, among which were one shell midden and two rock art sites. The survey, which was carried out mainly by boat, was possible thanks to the financial support of the IUCN - World Conservation Union, under the patronage of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the Sultanate of Oman (Oman 1991). The data collected during this brief visit complement those already collected by the Royal Geographical Society expedition in 1972 (de Cardi, 1975).

The 1990 survey covered the coastal zone between Bukha, to the west, and Ras Sarkān, to the east. One shell-midden site was discovered a few hundred metres into the interior of Ras Shakhs, near Kashab, close to the village of Fanakhah (UTM coordinates DP280990). It consisted of highly fragmented *Thaïs* marine shells, a sample of which was radiocarbon dated to 2770±40 BP (GrN-23868). The site did not yield any trace of material culture remains. The importance of this midden, although relatively recent in date, consists in its uniqueness within the Musandam region.

Two new rock art sites were discovered along the southern coast of Dawhat al-Shīṣah, some 6 km south east of the village of Shīṣah itself, and along the western shore of Khawr Habalayn, just to the north of the homonymous village. The site of Dawhat al-Shīṣah consists of only one pecked rock located just behind the abandoned village. Here, three overimposed figures of horsemen with curved, lifted arms are represented in this vertical rock, the UTM coordinates of which are DQ438008 (fig. 1, below).



Only one isolated human figure was found at Habalayn (figure 2, below). It consists of one single anthropomorphic figure with lifted, curved arms, apparently pecked with the same technique employed to produce those of the preceding site (UTM coordinates DP327935).



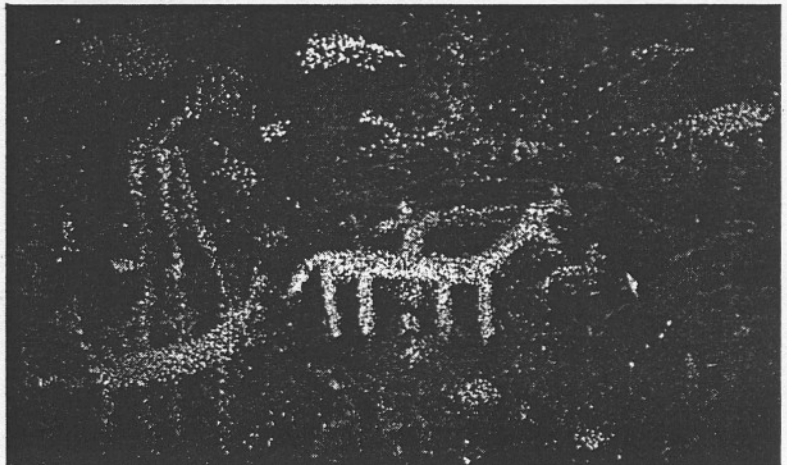
Only three rock art sites had previously been discovered during the 1972 survey, those of Jabal Shamm, Wadi Qidah and Wadi Khaṣab (de Cardi 1975), all of problematic dating, although some of the figures engraved at Wadi Qidah, namely boat images are clearly of historical age (Costa 1991: 209). This is the most famous rock art site of the Musandam Peninsula. Here, in the vicinity of the village of Tawi, large boulders are ornamented with petroglyphs, among which are anthropomorphic figures, horsemen, camels (figure 3) and even sailing-ships (UTM coordinates DP220954). As shown in Figure 4, the pecking technique employed in the preparation of this latter design looks different from that of the horseman; this observation should point to a different age for the two images, which might be used as broad chronological indicators. Furthermore, Costa (1991: 207) reports the presence of pecked anthropomorphic figures and other naturalistic representations on the vertical tombstones of Wadi Bih.

FIGURE 3.



The only well studied rock art complex of the region is that of Wadi al-Hayl in the Emirate of Fujairah (Ziolkowski 1998), which represents the only case study analytically examined with the aim of reconstructing the chronology, the distribution pattern and the significance of the various groups of images. Furthermore, although the analysis of these petroglyphs has been conducted in the most accurate possible way, the dating of the pecked rocks remains in most cases problematic, since they can be 'tentatively placed between 1300 BC and the present' (Ziolkowski 1998: 77). Also the dating of the two new sites of Dawhat al-Shīsha and Habalayn is difficult to estimate because of the absence of any archaeological remains in the vicinity of the rocks. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that most of the archaeological sites so far discovered in the Musandam Peninsula, apart from a few groups of cairn tombs (de Cardi 1975; Salm pers. comm. 1990), are, broadly speaking, of historical age, and that the result obtained from the only radiocarbon dated site of the area, the shell-midden of Fanakhah, should probably fall within the first centuries of the first millennium BC.

FIGURE 4.



#### Bibliography

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The Society is keen to encourage research into the rock art of the Arabian peninsula, particularly to involve local scholarly participation, but also in the hopes of ensuring the protection of these extremely vulnerable sites. Further articles on the subject would be appreciated. See for instance Peter Harrigan 'Art Rocks in Saudi Arabia' in SAUDI ARAMCO WORLD. For further information the author is based in Jeddah: harrigan@fastmail.fm



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