

## **HISTORY OF SETTLEMENT IN THE MOUNTAINS OF NORTHERN OMAN IN THE BRONZE AND IRON AGES**

The project aims at investigating the development and forms of settlement in one of the least known parts of Oman – in the mountain valleys of northern Hajjar mountains. The research will center on remains of human settlements from a period described in the periodization of this part of the Middle East as the Bronze and early Iron Ages, which translates in calendar years to 3<sup>rd</sup> to mid-1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC. At that time this region, and especially its northern part, were among the main centers of copper mining used both by the neighboring lands and by ancient Mesopotamia, as we are informed by cuneiform inscriptions of Mesopotamian kings. These texts mention the territory of present-day Oman as the land of Magan. However, up till now, archaeologically investigated sites from these periods in Oman lie either in inland oases south of the Hajjar mountains, or in the coastal zone. Therefore, investigations of settlement in the mountains of northern Oman will fill a gap in the currently available knowledge of the various ecological conditions related to the development of proto-historical cultures of eastern Arabia.

Research within the framework of the project will encompass not only the remains of human settlements themselves, but also all kinds of evidence that can help in reconstructing the economic background of these settlements, such as agriculture and animal husbandry, and – considering the special characteristics of the investigated region – also copper mining and, perhaps, also traces of early copper processing. The research aims of the project are to be reached by means of archaeological investigations in a specially chosen micro-region in that part of Oman. In the course of earlier cooperation between Prof. Piotr Bieliński from the University of Warsaw and the Omani Department of Excavations and Archaeological Studies, the valley of *wadi* Qumayrah was selected for this purpose, as an area representative for the whole, hitherto archaeologically omitted mountain region. The selected micro-region has the additional advantage of being situated at a junction of important routes used since antiquity, so the valley's inhabitants are likely to have been in regular contact with other regions, including important centers of Bronze and early Iron Age cultures.

During introductory explorations in the selected micro-region three settlement sites were registered that dated to the Bronze Age and to the second phase of the Iron Age. One of them (code-named QA 3) seems to be the largest and holds architectural remains from both periods, that is, more precisely from the so-called Umm an-Nar culture, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC, and from Iron Age II. A nearby site (QA 21) is also large, and the pottery fragments recovered from its surface allowed it to be dated to Iron Age II. The third site, c. 10 km away, called Bilt 1, was probably a small Umm an-Nar culture-related settlement, but its main interest lies in the presence of numerous copper ore outcrops in its vicinity, making it a promising hunting ground for traces of copper processing.

To achieve these research aims, carefully selected parts of each settlement need to be excavated. This will allow to establish each settlement's size, recognize the character of the architecture and interpret the function of separate buildings based, for instance, on the types of pottery vessels found there. Much specialist research will also be necessary to delve into the environmental conditions, including palaeobotanical and palaeozoological analyses, as well as geomorphological and geological studies that will provide data allowing to compare the environment in the selected micro-region with those in better-known parts of Oman. The project, which can only be conducted in close cooperation with Omani archaeologists, presents an opportunity to fill in a gap in the knowledge of the ancient land of Magan and its successors. It also opens new research perspectives for Polish archaeologists from the Polish Centre of Mediterranean Archaeology, University of Warsaw, of further development of a specialization, that is still new in Poland, that is the archaeology of the Persian/Arabian Gulf and eastern Arabia.