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# Tomb N at Hili and the question of the subterranean graves during the Umm an-Nar Period

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## Introduction

Since the discovery of the Umm an-Nar culture by the Danish archaeological expedition in the late 1950s, monumental collective tombs of circular shape are considered as a diagnostic feature of this culture. A large number of these tombs has been discovered in the U. A. E. and several of them were excavated, like recently at Tell Abraq (Potts 1994, 1995, 1997), Shimal UNAR-2 (Blau & Beech 1999) and Mleiha (unpublished). Apart from those discovered on the Umm an-Nar island itself (Frifelt 1991), the Hili collective tombs form a nucleus for the Umm an-Nar culture in the Eastern region of Abu Dhabi (Al Tikriti 1981; Cleuziou & Vogt 1983; 1985; Vogt 1985a and b). While the large Tomb 1059, located in the middle of Hili Garden, is the best known monument in the city of Al Ain, Tomb A at Hili North was much more informative about burial customs. An original primary inhumation layer comprising 31 individuals was recovered on the floor of one of the subterranean compartments of the two-storey Tomb A, corresponding to the final stage of its use (Cleuziou & Vogt 1985: fig. 3; Bondioli, Coppa & Macchiarelli 1998: 233). According to Bondioli *et al.*, the burial customs could be reconstructed as follows: after decomposition, the bodies lying on the floor of the subterranean compartments were moved to the upper part of the grave in order to be burned. The remains of more than 300 different individuals were identified in the grave. The process of disarticulation was testified by cut-marks in some cases, and most of the bones were burnt, the temperature of burning

sometimes exceeding 600°C (Al Najjar 1985; Bondioli, Coppa & Macchiarelli 1998: 232, tab. 3).

During the 1983 maintenance programme of the Hili circular tombs excavated in the 1970s by M. Saeed ur Rahman, a new structure was discovered just outside one of the circular tombs (Tomb E) located inside Hili Garden between the Hili 1 and Hili 8 settlements. Tomb E is circular in shape with a diameter of 9.25 m. Although it was in a very bad state of preservation when it was first discovered, the remaining foundations indicate a six-chambered grave (Fig. 3). No sugar-lump stones of the ring wall were found *in situ*. However, the remaining plinth of the circular wall and the lower portions of the interior dividing walls were enough evidence to restore the tomb to its present shape.

Some large stones extending underneath a newly placed pavement to the east of Tomb E provided the evidence for this new structure. Having obtained permission from the Municipality to remove the pavement, archaeological activities at the site resumed in 1984 and a total of five excavating seasons have been carried out by M. Al Haddou under the supervision of W. Y. Al Tikriti. A report on these excavations was published in Arabic in 1989 by M. Al Haddou.

From the beginning, it was obvious that the new structure represented a new type of tomb (Figs 1, 2 and 3). Being subterranean and oval in shape, it suggested the possibility of belonging to the Wadi Suq period, but the complete absence of artefacts dated from this period and the abundance of late third millennium objects led to the conclusion that



FIGURE 1. *View of Tomb N from the North. Large slabs of the tomb cover, collapsed inside the pit. (Photo W. Y Al Tikriti.)*



FIGURE 2. *View of the bone deposits, upper layer. (Photo W. Y. Al Tikriti.)*

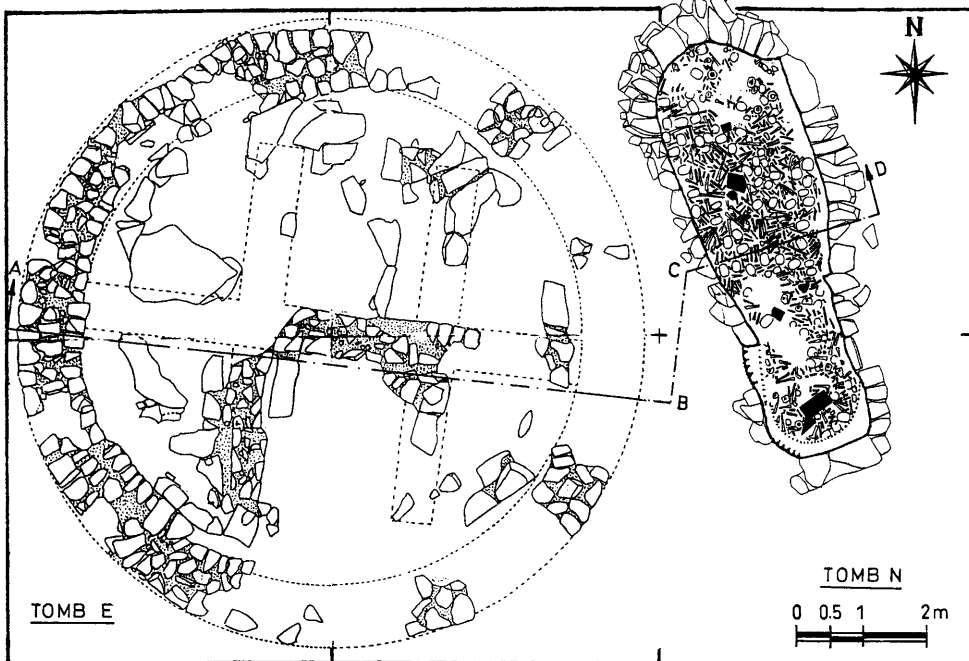


FIGURE 3. *Drawing of Tombs E and N before restoration. (Drawing C.U. John.)*

the structure was a new type of Umm an-Nar grave (Haddou 1989). Until now, discoveries have brought to light only a single other subterranean tomb of the same type and date in Mowaihat, in the Emirate of Ajman (Al Tikriti 1989; Haerinck 1991). Both graves are partly built and much larger and deeper than the small pits dug into the sand which were excavated at Al Sufouh Tombs II and III (Benton 1996). Moreover, no articulated bones were found in the Al Sufouh pits, as was the case in Tomb N at Hili (see below) and at Mowaihat Tomb B (Haerinck 1991: 6, 9, pl. II A).

At the end of the 1988 season the central part of the deposits was left intact in Tomb N, in order to have two sections showing the succession of accumulated levels of human remains as deep as 1.7 m. The decision to excavate the remaining part of the tomb was taken recently because the methodology and techniques of funerary field anthropology have developed significantly in the last ten years (Duday 1995; Chambon 1999) and it was important to benefit from these new developments regarding such an exceptional grave as Tomb N.

Therefore, the Department of Antiquities and Tourism in Al Ain started in November and December 1998 a new programme of excavation, jointly with the French Archaeological Mission in the U. A. E.<sup>1</sup> The project was organized on the request of H. E. Saif Ali al Darmaki, the Department's Under Secretary. Its main aim is to reconsider local funerary practices that until now were only partially recognized in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, since Tomb N is very different, not only in shape and techniques of construction but also in internal organisation of the deposits, from the well-known circular monumental Umm an-Nar graves nearby. During the 1998 season, the first 30–35 cm of the bone layer were carefully excavated and recorded. We will briefly present here the results of these new excavations.

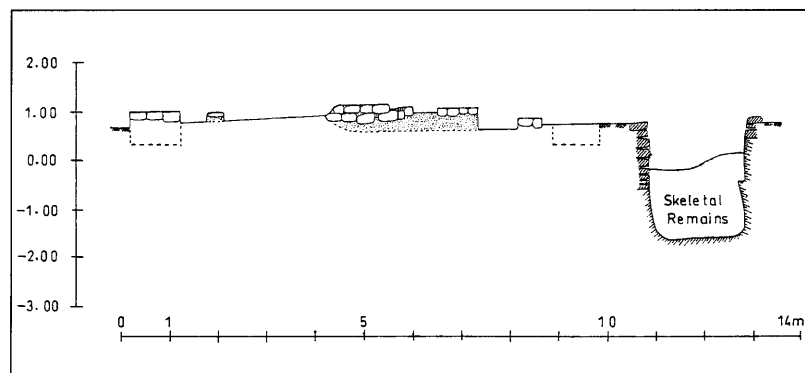
### The Structure

The type of architecture of Tomb N is different from the typical Umm an-Nar circular graves. While the Umm an-Nar circular tombs reflect a high standard of architecture, Tomb N is a simple pit dug into the ground. Its original shape was oval, with a length of 4.8 m, a maximum width of 2.2 m and a depth of 2.5 m (Figs 3 and 4). It was enlarged by adding a small extension to the southern side, thus making the total internal length of the tomb 6.6 m (about 8 m if we take into consideration the total length of the tomb).

In the original pit, the upper part of the western side was strengthened with a stone wall to withstand the pressure of the adjacent circular grave, but only the very top of the northern and eastern sides were strengthened. The western stone wall was built with ashlar blocks (originally belonging to the facing of a circular Umm An-Nar tomb) mixed with unshaped stones (Fig. 5). The use of ashlar blocks may indicate that Tomb E was no longer utilized and at least partly destroyed when Tomb N was constructed. The central ashlar on Fig. 5 is engraved, but the motif is different from those already known on Umm an-Nar graves (Thorvildsen 1962; Frifelt 1968; 1991)

A flat roof covered the tomb, since some large flat slabs collapsed inside the pit were found in the upper layer (Fig. 1). Despite the discovery of some slanting stones along the eastern wall and some flat stones, there was no evidence for a corbelled ceiling. The upper layer of Tomb N was void of bones and only sterile earth mixed with fallen stones was found.

FIGURE 4. *Sections through Tomb E and N.* (Drawing C. U. John.)



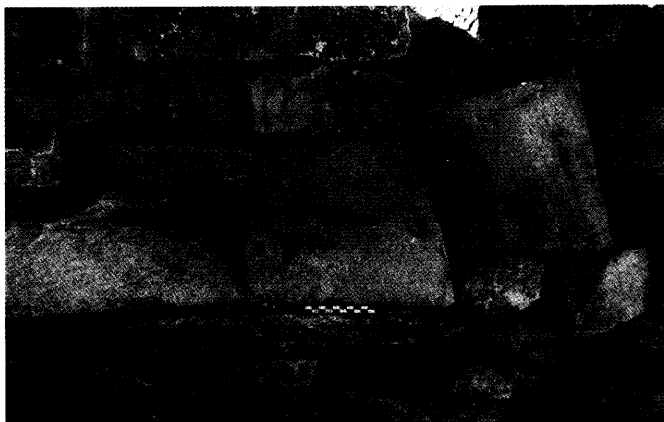


FIGURE 5. Ashlars reused in the western wall of the original pit. One of these is engraved. (Photo S. Méry.)

### The Skeletal Remains

As previously mentioned, the upper layer of the tomb was void of skeletal remains. Soon after removing this layer, which was about 70–80 cm in thickness, the initial layer of bones was encountered. Continued excavations revealed skeletal remains, which covered almost the entire surface (Fig. 2). This layer, more than 1.7 m thick, consisted primarily of fragmented and disarticulated bones mixed with artefacts. A random layer system was adopted during the 1980s excavations, as it was impossible to distinguish actual layers during the course of the excavation, except the basal layer of bones (depth: 2 m) which was covered with a whitish earthen level containing wadi gravel as well as many pottery sherds. In 1998, the detailed study of the sections of the remaining central part of the deposits (not illustrated), showed that the bone deposits which are over the wadi gravel layer clearly went back up along the long sides of the pit.

By the end of the 1988 season three quarters of the tomb had been excavated down to the bedrock. Although there was no sign of plundering, only a few of the bones were articulated. The discovery of so many disarticulated and fragmented bones associated with complete fragile pottery vessels, made us believe that Tomb N was an ossuary.<sup>2</sup> The initial impression was that the bones had been originally buried elsewhere (probably in Tomb E), prior to being placed in this pit. The bones may have

been fragmented during their transferring, with 'new' pots utilized together with the original ones.

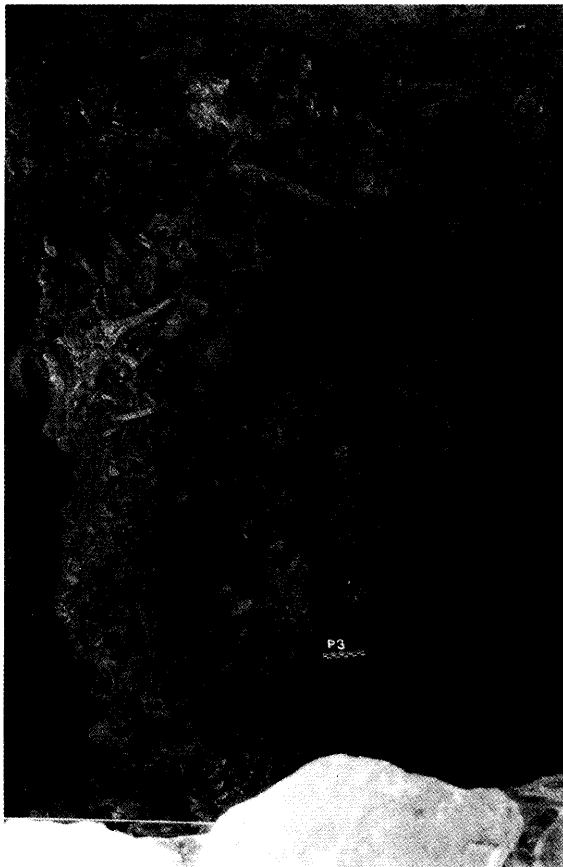
Even if we continue today to hypothesize that the original function of Tomb N was for re-burial, the results of the 1998 excavations showed that the tomb was probably used as a primary burial during the most recent phase of its use. This interpretation is based on the recurrent identification by the anthropologists of *very fragile* anatomical connections like foot or hands in the upper part of the bone deposits. This opinion is also supported by the discovery of a few semi-complete skeletons also found in the upper layer during the previous campaigns of excavation.

A minority of the bones were burnt. While mainly scattered in the basal level, these burnt bones were more abundant in the upper levels where they were concentrated in two different places: in the centre of the original pit and in the additional pit. In the centre of the original pit, bones had been burnt *in situ*, as indicated by the presence of bones heavily burnt in the middle but less burnt or not burnt on the outer edges, as well as fragile articulated connections preserved in the burnt area (Fig. 6). In addition, some pottery sherds as well as other finds were found blackened by fire. It is clear that the burnt bones were the result of cremation. However, the cremation practiced by the Bronze Age populations was only partial, since only a small part of the grave was involved.

### The Pottery

More than 450 pottery vessels with a complete or semi-complete profile have been previously recovered in Tomb N as well as a large collection of rimsherds (about 250). Several types of wares can be identified, following the results of the study of pottery from Hili North Tomb A recently published in the *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* (Méry 1997). We will not describe here the types of fabric as they are discussed in detail in this last paper.

**FIGURE 6.** *The cremation area in the unexcavated central part after initial cleaning in 1998. (Photo S. Méry.)*



#### **The Omani Fine Red Ware**

Also described as *black-on-red ware*, this is the most characteristic type of pottery in the Umm an-Nar tombs. However, it is rare in the grave, with only 10% of the MNI (Minimum Number of Individuals).<sup>3</sup> Necked pots (Fig. 7 nos 1–4) and small bottles (no. 6) are the most numerous, but some suspension vessels (no. 7) and miniature vessels (no. 5) are also recorded.

It is often difficult to give a precise date to vessels recovered in collective graves, since we do not know the duration and possible interruptions in their use. However, several types of vessels recovered in Tomb N are characteristic of funerary contexts dated from the last part of the Umm an-Nar period. This is the case with ovoid necked pots decorated with a row of chevrons below a wavy painted line (Fig. 7

no. 1) or a series of short oblique lines (no. 2), as well as globular suspension vessels with bevelled rim and a painted narrow lattice on the body (no. 7).<sup>4</sup> Another type of necked pot, with a globular body and a row of chevrons on the upper part of the shoulder (no. 3) is more ubiquitous, since it is recorded in Umm an-Nar graves dated from the mid-third millennium BC until the end of the Umm an-Nar period.<sup>5</sup>

Two types of vessels found in the grave are more unusual:

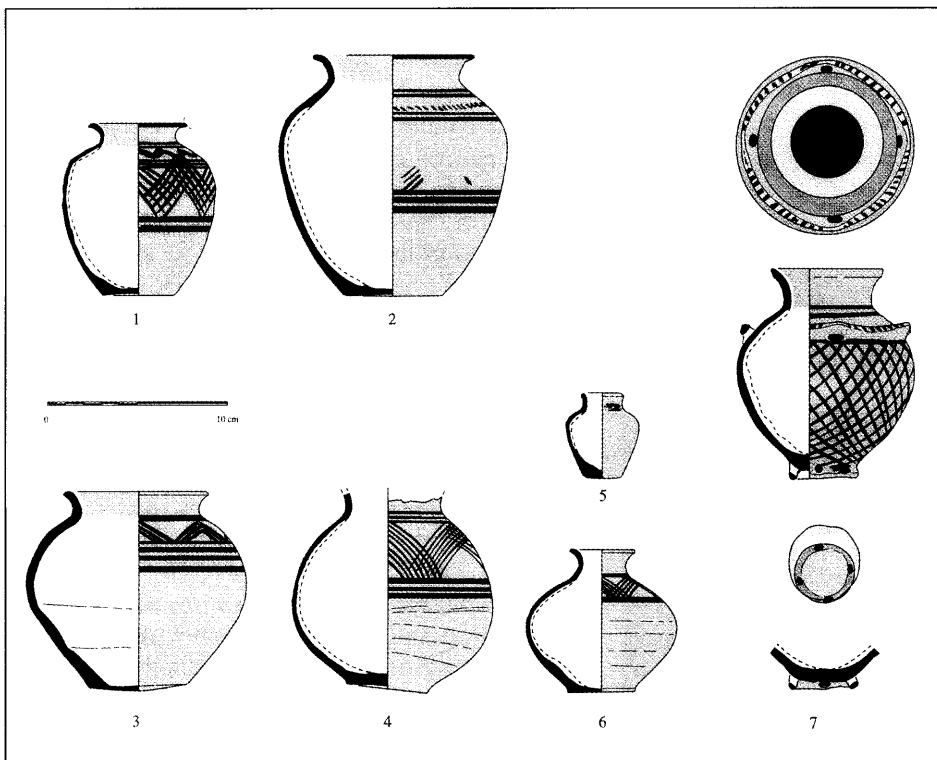
— Necked pots with a very low maximum diameter (no. 4), a type which is known only in Tomb B at Mowaihat (Al Tikriti 1989: pl. 39 D), in association with ovoid necked pots decorated with a row of chevrons below a wavy painted line (*op. cit.* pl. 39 G, 40 C) identical to the ones found in Tomb N at Hili (Fig. 7 no. 1).<sup>6</sup>

— Small bottles decorated with a row of chevrons on the shoulder (no. 6) are even more unusual. This type of vessel is rare in Hili tombs as well as at Mowaihat Tomb B (Al Tikriti 1989: pl. 42 H).

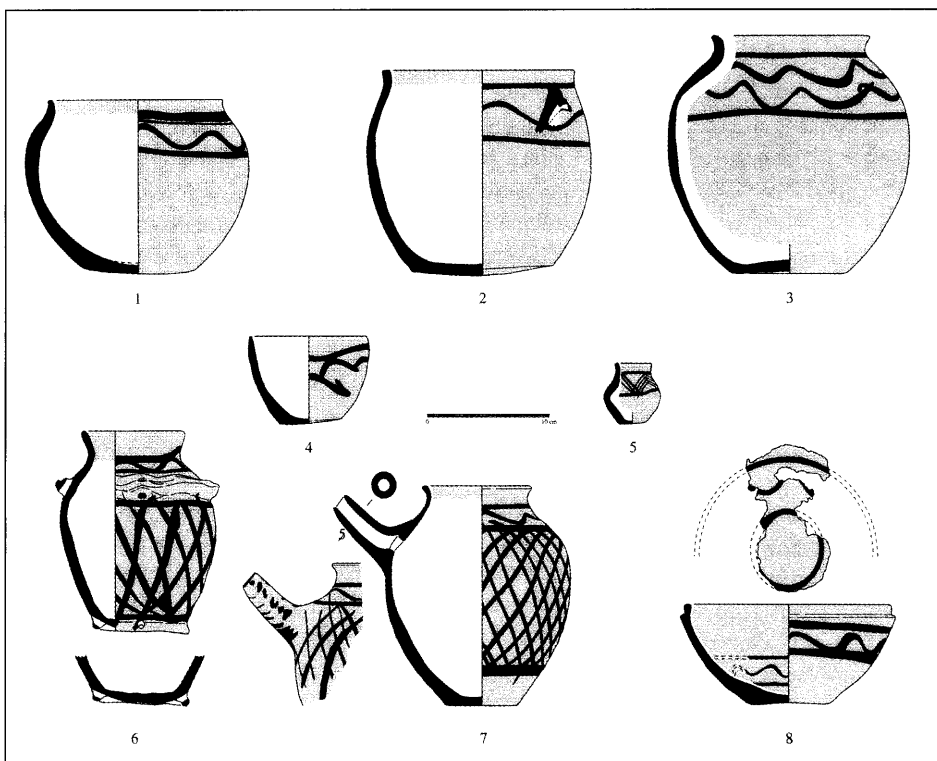
#### **Hili Sandy Red Ware**

This is the most common type of ware in the grave (about 75% of the MNI). This ware is considered to be locally manufactured (Méry 1997: 172) and the discovery of one overfired jar with a distorted shape in Tomb N is a supplementary argument.

Jars are the most frequent (Fig. 8 nos 1–3), then the goblets (no. 4). Both types have close parallels in the c. 2300–2000 BC domestic assemblage of Hili 8 (Cleuziou 1989) as well as the contemporary graves at Hili, like Tomb B, Tomb 1059 or Hili North Tomb A.<sup>7</sup> Jars (from 1 to 3.5 litres in capacity) are usually decorated with a black painted single wavy line on the shoulder between two straight lines (no. 1), but other patterns are present, like a wavy line cross-checked by vertical or oblique lines (no. 2) or two parallel wavy lines (no. 3). The comparison with Hili North Tomb A is very fruitful, because some types (shape and decoration) are frequent in both graves (nos 2–3, to compare with Cleuziou & Vogt 1983: fig. 7 no. 2; Vogt 1985b: pl. 23 no. 4; Méry 1997: fig. 3). However, some other types which are present in Tomb A are not recorded in Tomb N and the reverse is also true, indicating that part of the material found in both tombs is



**FIGURE 7.** *Different types of Omani Fine Red Ware from Tomb N at Hili. (1: HN-388, 2: HN-88, 3: HN-120, 4: HN-130, 5: HN-110, 6: HN-339, 7: HN-383). (Drawings H. David.)*



**FIGURE 8.** *Different types of Hili Sandy Red Ware from Tomb N at Hili. (1: HN-319, 2: HN-358, 3: HN-354, 4: HN-65, 5: HN-118, 6: HN-435, 7: HN-348, 8: HN-454). (Drawings H. David.)*

probably not exactly of the same age. As an example, the low jar illustrated in Fig. 8 no. 1 is common in Tomb N, whereas only a single comparable vessel was found in Tomb A (unpublished). On the other hand, no jar with a rounded base (Cleuziou & Vogt 1983: fig. 7 no. 3) was found so far at Hili N, and only one single rim decorated with a double undulated line, whereas this is a diagnostic pattern of period IIf at Hili 8 (Cleuziou 1989: fig. 7 nos 2–3), also well represented in Tomb A at Hili North (Méry 1997: fig. 3).

Two types of Hili Sandy Red Ware vessels which are common in the recent Umm an-Nar graves at Hili are also recorded in Tomb N, such as the elongated suspension vessels with a painted loose lattice (Fig. 8 no. 6, to compare with Al Tikriti 1981: pl. 75 D; Vogt 1985a: Taf. 68 no. 5; Méry 1997: fig. 4 no. 4) and miniature vessels (Fig. 8 no. 5, to compare with Cleuziou & Vogt 1983: fig. 8 no. 1).

One notices also the presence of two unique shapes. A bowl with a grooved rim (Fig. 8 no. 8; see also Haddou 1989: pl. 11) is very close to a vessel from Tomb I at Al Sufouh (Benton 1996: fig. 116), but the same type of rim is dated from periods IId to IIf at Hili 8 (Cleuziou 1989: 62, fig. 7 nos 11–2). The jar illustrated Fig. 8 no. 7 (see also Haddou 1989: pl. 10) is the first case of a spouted Umm an-Nar pottery vessel, whereas the lattice decoration on Hili Sandy Red potteries other than suspension vessels was already locally recorded (see Vogt 1985b: pl. 23 no. 11).

#### Imported vessels

In Tomb N we assume that about 10% of the vessels correspond to imported or possibly imported ceramic types. Most of them come from the Indus Valley and the area covering south-eastern Iran and Pakistani Makran. As in other Umm an-Nar graves of the Hili region, there are no imported vessels from Dilmun in Tomb N, whereas Barbar funerary vessels are recovered in the Northern Emirates (Méry, Phillips & Calvet 1998).

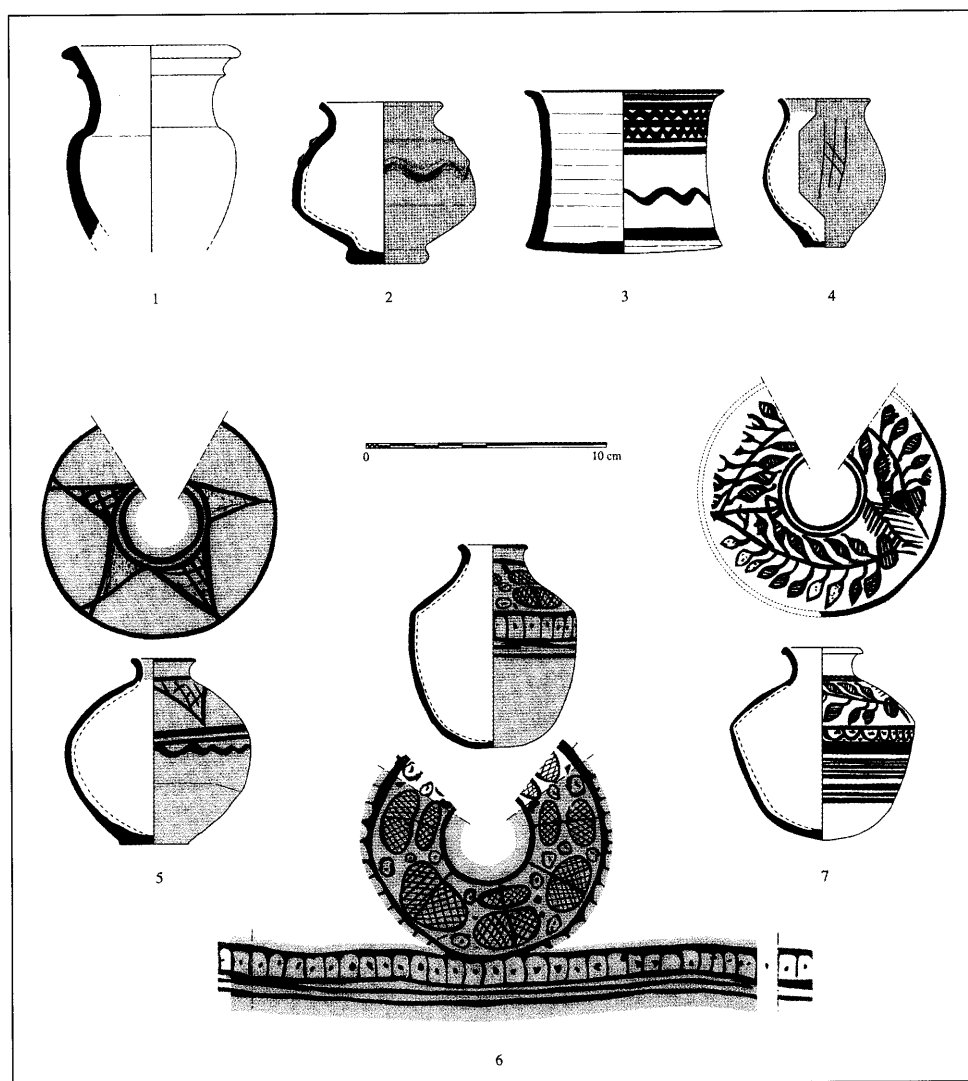
Mesopotamian pottery is seldom found in the inland Oman Peninsula at the end of the Umm an-Nar period, and only one single vessel of this type was found in Tomb N (Fig. 9 no. 1). The same

shape is known in the Royal Cemetery of Ur in the Akkadian Period (Woolley 1934: pl. 253; Karstens 1987: 179) and the characteristic beige and sandy fabric of the pot from Tomb N leaves no doubts about its origin (Méry & Schneider 1996). In the United Arab Emirates, the same type of rim is known in an Umm an-Nar grave at Munayi associated with other artefacts dated from the last third of the third-millennium BC (Méry, Phillips & Calvet 1998: 171). This dating is consistent with the finds in Bahrain: the same Mesopotamian pottery type is quite common in the most ancient types of Late Dilmun graves, where Omani Red Fine Ware and *Série Récente* chlorite vessels are also recovered (Lombard 1999: 56–76).

As in other recent Umm an-Nar graves, Indus vessels are well represented in Tomb N (n=19). Their fabric is macroscopically identical to the ones found at Hili North Tomb A (see for example Cleuziou & Vogt 1985: fig. 7 nos 3, 4, 6–8; Méry 1997: 185, fig. 11), which were imported from the Indus valley according to the results of recent archaeometrical analyses (Blackman & Méry in press). Most of them are small black-painted bottles with naturalistic or geometrical patterns. Some of these decorative patterns were already recorded in the Oman Peninsula, like grid-trapezes associated with palms (Haddou 1989: pl. 5 bottom row on the right, to compare with Méry 1997: fig. 11 no. 5). Other patterns are more unusual, like pipal leaves (Fig. 9 nos 6–7; Haddou 1989: pl. 4, 5 bottom row on the left). Among other types of Indus vessels recovered in Tomb N, a red-slipped pot with a protruding base has an engraved Harappan sign on the body (no. 4). A comparable shape but bigger is attested at Hili North (Méry 1997: fig. 12 no. 1).

One of the most striking features of Hili N is the absence of Incised Grey Ware as well as the scarcity of Painted Grey Ware (n=4). Among these, a black-slipped pot with plastic decoration (Fig. 9 no. 2, see also Haddou 1989: pl. 7 right and compare with Stein 1937: pl. XIII Khur. B. ii. 198) corresponds to a type which is not uncommon in Umm an-Nar graves.<sup>8</sup> A large cylindrical goblet of Painted Grey Ware (Fig. 9 no. 3, see also Haddou 1989: pl. 7 middle) is unique in the Oman Peninsula, and recalls only a miniature pot from Tomb A at Hili North (Vogt 1985a: Taf. 58).





**FIGURE 9.** A selection of imported or imported-like potteries from Tomb N at Hili. (1: HN-22, 2: HN-389, 3: HN-394, 4: HN-391, 5: HN-106, 6: HN-353, 7: HN-386.). (Drawings H. David.)

Among other types of Iranian or Iranian-like pottery found at Hili N, bottles of Sandy Buff Ware (Haddou 1989: pl. 5, top row no. 3 from the left) belong to a type known in three other graves at Hili (Frifelt 1975: fig. 15 e; Al Tikriti 1981: pl. 70 P, T and W, pl. 76 A; Cleuziou & Vogt 1985: fig. 7 no. 2; Méry 1997: fig. 10 no. 5) as well as at Khurab in Iran (Stein 1937: pl. XIV Khur. B. ii. 204, pl. XV Khur. D. 250). On the other hand, several bottles of

Fine Red Ware decorated with a 'rose-window' (Fig. 9 no. 5) are close to a vessel found in Tomb A at Hili North (Vogt 1985b: pl. 25 no. 6). They have good parallels in Iran, at Shahdad (Hakemi 1972: pl. IV B).

Other types of pottery (5% of the MNI) mainly correspond to Omani Sandy Red Wares and will not be discussed in the present paper.

### The Small Items

#### Chlorite vessels

The 38 chlorite vessels (28 have a complete profile) recovered in Tomb N belong to the *Série Récente* (or serie Umm an-Nar), a regional production dated

from 2300–2000 BC and usually associated with funerary contexts (David 1996). The three classical types of this group are attested: open bowls (Fig. 10 no. 1), compartmented rectangular boxes with lids decorated with double-dotted circles, and goblets with a straight wall covered with horizontal lines (Haddou 1989: pls 13-4). More unusual types are also represented in the assemblage (Fig. 10 no. 2). H. David, who is in charge of the study of the soft-stone vessels, noted that the types were more homogeneous than in Tomb A at Hili North. However, the vessels from both graves are very similar, and the technical features of some vessels could indicate a common origin.

#### Alabaster vessels

Several well preserved alabaster vessels were found in the grave (Fig. 10 nos 3–4, see also Haddou 1989: pl. 15). Alabaster vessels were also found at Hili North Tomb A (Vogt 1985a: Taf. 72 nos 1–4) but apart from one open bowl (no. 2), their shapes are rather different.

#### Copper/bronze items

No copper weapons were recovered at Hili N as was the case in more ancient grave contexts at Umm an-Nar or at Al Sufouh Tomb I, but copper rings (Fig. 10 nos 6–7) are quite numerous and identical to the ones found in many Umm an-Nar graves in the U. A. E. (Vogt 1985b: pl. 28 nos 6–8; Haerinck 1991: fig. 7 nos 15–22; Potts 1995: Abb. 8; Benton 1996: fig. 194). One flat trapezoidal blade or 'razor' was also recovered in Tomb N (Fig. 10 no. 5), a little different from the asymmetrical type recorded in other recent Umm an-Nar graves at Hili, Mowaihat and Abraq (Vogt 1985b: pl. 28 nos 1–2; Haerinck 1991: fig. 8 no. 28; Potts 1995: Abb. 3), and in settlement contexts, like Ra's Al Jinz RJ-2 Period III, c. 2300–2200 BC (Cleuziou & Tosi 1997: fig. 12 nos 1–2). Good parallels are known for this type of object at Ur in the most ancient graves until the Sargonid Period (Woolley 1934: pl. 231).

#### Beads

Among small items beads are the most numerous and many necklaces were found in Tomb N still in their original place with the skeletons. As in the other graves dated from the last part of the Umm an-

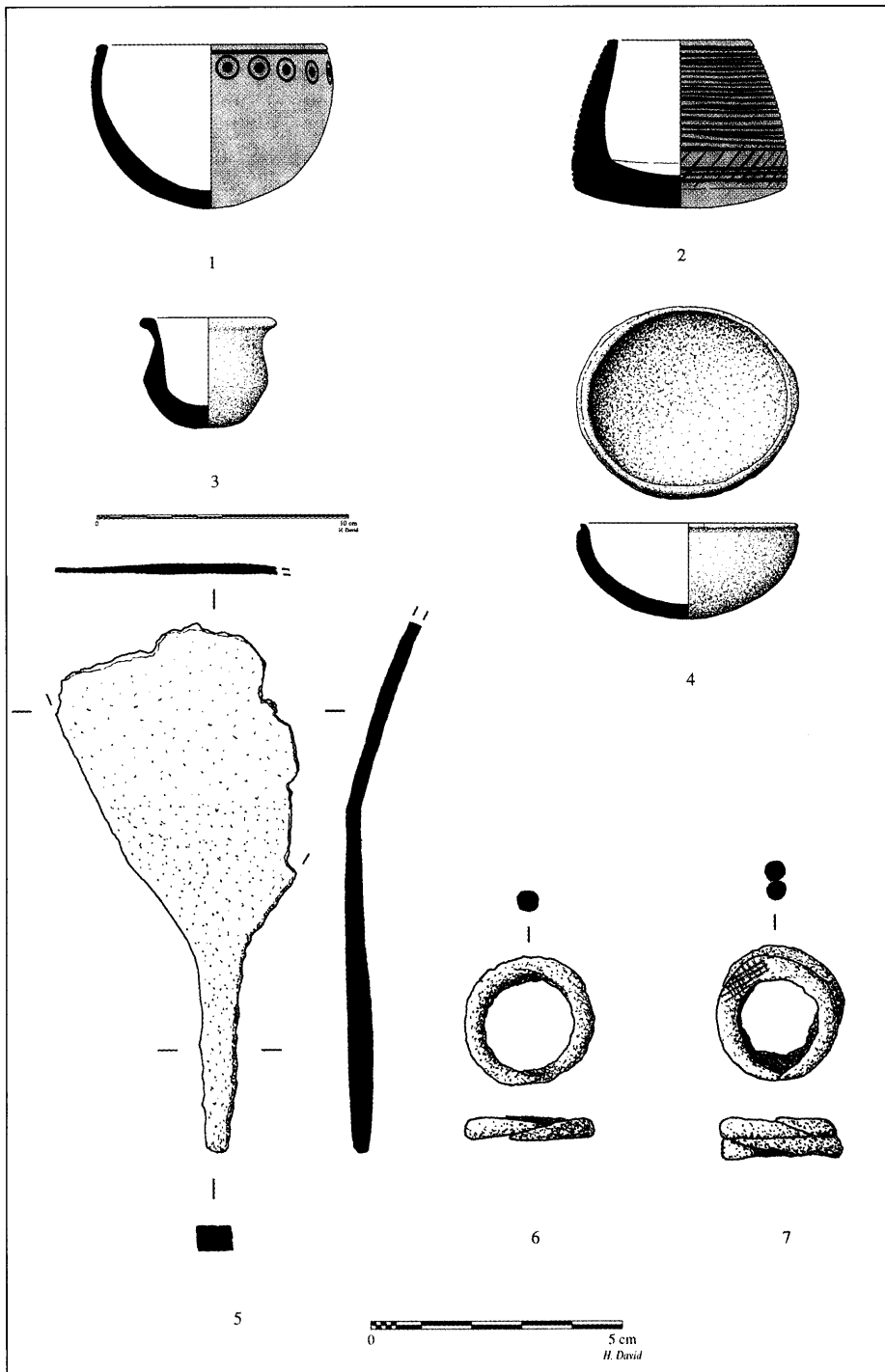
Nar period, carnelian beads are the most frequent. From among the many shapes recovered in the grave, long biconical beads and flat rectangular ones (Fig. 11 no. 1; Haddou 1989: pl. 16 nos 208 and 226) were imported from the Indian sub-continent as were a very beautiful series of white-on-red etched carnelian beads (Fig. 11 nos 2–3) (note 9). Other types of beads include two lapis-lazuli beads (Fig. 11 no. 4, to compare with Casanova 1997: 236 no. 6) and several small biconical silver beads (Fig. 11 no. 5). Silver beads have good parallels in Tomb B at Mowaihat (Al Tikriti 1989: pl. 56 C) as well as Ra's Al Jinz RJ-2 in a context dated from about 2200 BC (pers. comm. S. Cleuziou).

#### Other finds

Apart from the usual Umm an-Nar funerary items such as *Ficus subintermedia* shells (see for example Haerinck 1991: pl. IX B no. 34 top row; Frifelt 1991: fig. 255; Benton 1996: fig. 202), a soft-stone square seal with a prehension button was found (Fig. 12). Its decoration of four petals and five dots has no parallel among the Bronze Age seals published to date (for a recent review, see Magazzu 1995). This motif recalls a square seal found in Rumeilah in a building dated from Period I (Lombard 1998: fig. 1 no. 3 and note 7 for scattered parallels, all later than Bronze Age, from Carchemish to Togolok in Margiana). An oblique line intersected by three shorter lines is engraved on one side of the seal found in Tomb N. This sign is different from the four identified at Ra's al-Jinz RJ2 which were interpreted as local writing signs (Cleuziou *et al.* 1994: 460).

#### Conclusion

Discovered in 1983, Tomb N at Hili was the first example of a collective pit-burial dated to the Umm an-Nar period (Haddou 1989). Until now, only one other grave of this type has been discovered and excavated in the U.A.E., at Mowaihat (al-Tikriti 1989; Haerinck 1991). As already said, tombs II and III at al-Sufouh do not belong to the same type (see also Benton 1996: 37).



**FIGURE 10.** Chlorite vessels of the *Série Récente* (1: HN-459, 2: HN-16), alabaster vessels (3: HN-194, 4: HN-456), bronze 'razor' (5: HN-247), bronze rings (6: HN-41, 7: HN-44). Tomb N of Hili. (Drawings H. David.)

TOMB N AT HILI AND THE SUBTERRANEAN GRAVES DURING THE UMM AN-NAR PERIOD

FIGURE 11. Carnelian and etched beads from Tomb N of Hili (1: HN-204, 2: HN-225, 3: HN-235), lapis-lazuli bead (4: HN-240), silver beads (5: HN-190). (Drawings H. David.)

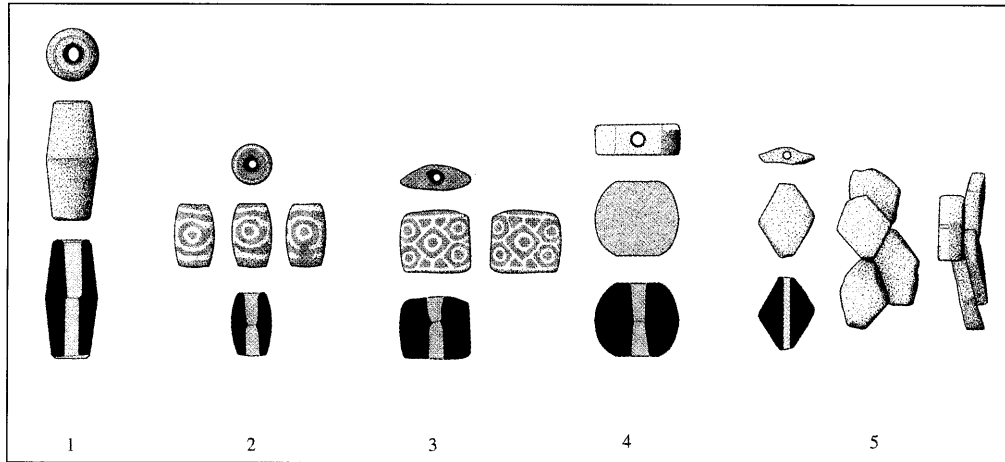
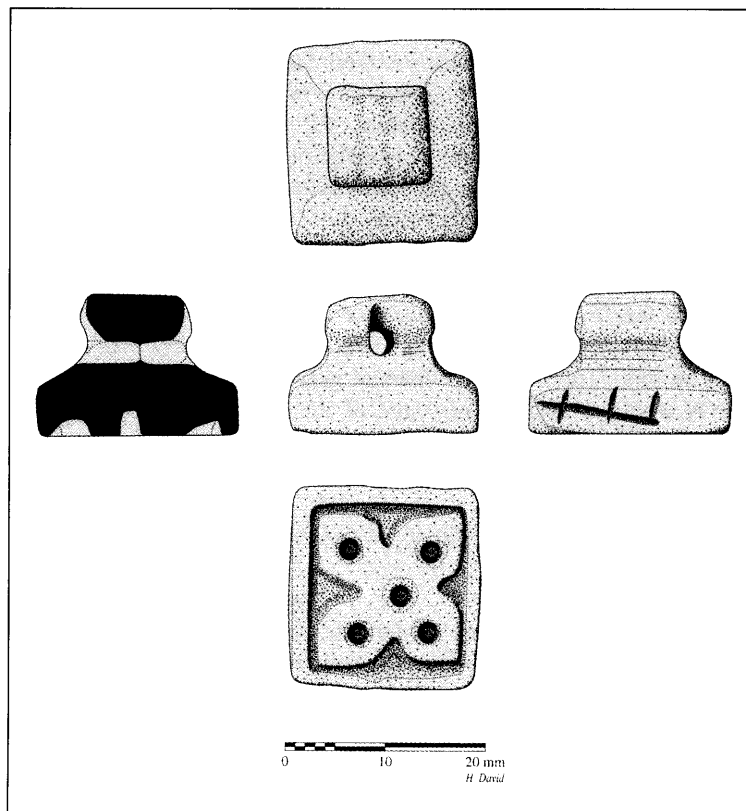


FIGURE 12. Semi-hard stone seal, Tomb N of Hili. (Drawing H. David.)



According to K. McSweeney, more than 250 individuals were deposited in Tomb N at Hili, much more than at Mowaihat, where only 160–180 individuals were found in Tomb B (Haerinck 1991: 8). This number roughly corresponds to what was already known from circular Umm an-Nar graves dated from the end of the Umm an-Nar Period, like Tomb A at Hili North with more than 300 individuals (Bondioli, Coppa & Macchiarelli 1998: 232). As in other Umm an-Nar graves, there was no selective burial in Tomb N, since infants and young adults of both sexes and different ages were found together.

The close proximity of the Hili Tomb N and Mowaihat Tomb B pits to monumental circular graves, the architecture of which is more typical of the Umm an-Nar period, led scholars to hypothesize that the Umm an-Nar grave-pits were ossuaries, for the 'reburial of bone from circular tombs which had become full' (Potts 1997: 48; Haerinck 1991: 10). New excavations in 1998 at Hili N, as well as a preliminary reassessment of the previous documentation, led our team to the conclusion that the situation was more complex than had previously been thought. Primary inhumations are actually found in the upper level of bone deposits at Hili N, and they also probably existed at Mowaihat B (Haerinck 1991: 6, 9, pl. II A). In Tomb N, however (and while waiting for the results of future excavations), we continue to hypothesize that the basal level of the bone deposits corresponds to the re-burial of bones coming from the adjacent Tomb E. Study of the funerary items is interesting in this respect, since only the basal levels of Tomb N seem to contain imported pottery from the Indus Valley, always found in funerary contexts dated from the last third of the third millennium BC in the Oman Peninsula.

Both pit graves at Hili N and Mowaihat B are dated to the end of the Umm an-Nar period according to the artefacts. The occupation of Tomb N is probably earlier (at least for the upper levels) than Tomb A at Hili North. It is presently difficult, considering the partial publication of its material, to make comparisons with the circular grave at Tell Abraq, which is dated to the very end of the third millennium BC according to C14 dates and some

types of offering (Potts 1994, 1995; Potts & Weeks 1999).

Umm an-Nar collective pit-graves represent a 'resurgence' of a regional tradition existing in the 5th–4th millennia in the Oman Peninsula but not recorded until now during the Hafit Period (3000–2700 BC). For the fifth millennium BC, multiple burials are recorded at Buhais-18 (M. Uerpmann, pers. comm.) and a collective pit-grave containing 42 sub-adults and young adults of both sexes was excavated at Umm al-Quwayn UAQ 2 (Phillips in press). In the Ra's al-Hamra 5 cemetery, dated to the fourth millennium BC, multiple burials are frequent (Salvatori 1996: 209) and 'a minimum of 40 individuals were collectively buried in the later partially burnt southern area of the site, called Area 43' (Bondioli, Coppa & Macchiarelli 1996: 230). Primary but also secondary burials are reported at Buhais-18 (M. Uerpmann, pers. comm.) and at Ra's al-Hamra 5, '...which presupposes either the exposure of the corpse or a previous burial until the soft parts of the body are completely decomposed, in order to carry out the formal burial of the bones at a later time' (Salvatori 1996: 209). Cremation is not a third millennium BC innovation either, since primary and secondary burnt collective burials are reported at Ra's al-Hamra 5 by Bondioli, Coppa & Macchiarelli (1998: 230).

Today, it is not possible to claim that Umm an-Nar pit-graves constitute a transitional grave-type before the appearance of the Wadi Suq subterranean graves, since the Tell Abraq discovery showed that circular monumental graves continued to be in use until the very end of the Umm an-Nar Period. On the other hand, we do not yet know if the Umm an-Nar collective pit-graves existed throughout the Umm an-Nar Period or if they are more characteristic of the end of that period.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> A team under the direction of both authors resumed the excavations. Two anthropologists (J. Rouquet from Bordeaux-I University and K. McSweeney from Edinburgh University) and one archaeo-anthropologist (G. Basset from Bordeaux-I University) took part in these excavations. The campaign was jointly financed by The Department of Antiquities and Tourism

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- <sup>2</sup> The very small number of anatomical connections recorded during its excavation also led E. Haerinck (1991: 9) to interpret Tomb B at Mowaihat as a secondary burial, 'a subterranean ossuary in order to make room in the circular grave' (*op. cit.* 20).
- <sup>3</sup> Calculation after the minimum number of individuals or MNI, *i.e.* all complete, semi-complete vessels and rims. The same calculation was used for the study of the material from Tomb A at Hili North, where 19% of the corpus was classified as Omani Fine Red Ware (Méry 1997: 172).
- <sup>4</sup> Ovoid pots decorated with a row of chevrons below a series of short lines are known at Hili Tomb M, Al Sufouh, Cairn II at Umm an-Nar and Hili North Tomb A (Fig. 7 no. 2, to compare with Frifelt 1991: fig. 98; Benton 1996: fig. 82; Méry 1997: fig. 5 no. 2). However the elongated shape of the pots found in Tomb N, with a base narrower than the neck, is closer to most of the vessels of that type found in recent graves like Hili North Tomb A, rather than older graves like Al Sufouh or even Umm an-Nar Cairns I and II, where they tend to have a base larger than the neck.
- <sup>5</sup> Globular pots with a row of chevrons on the shoulder (Fig. 7 no. 3) are recorded in Umm an-Nar Cairn II, Al Sufouh Tomb III, and Hili North Tomb A (Frifelt 1991: fig. 102; Benton 1996: fig. 73; Méry 1997: fig. 5 no. 1).
- <sup>6</sup> The same association is recorded in tumulus 7. 1 at Saar (Lombard 1999: 58–9). Usually, in Bahrain, imported Omani Fine Red wares are found in the most ancient type of graves of Late Dilmun and dated from the last three centuries of the third millennium BC (*op. cit.* 56).
- <sup>7</sup> The jar represented in Fig. 8 no. 2 can be compared with Vogt 1985b: pl. 23 no. 4. For Fig. 8 no. 3, see Al Tikriti 1981: pl. 97 A; Cleuziou & Vogt 1983: fig. 7 no. 2. The goblet represented in Fig. 8 no. 4 has good parallels in Al Tikriti 1981: pl. 92 C and Méry 1997: fig. 4 no. 2.

- <sup>8</sup> See Al Tikriti 1981: pl. 72G, 79 N; Cleuziou & Vogt 1983: fig. 5 no. 5; Frifelt 1991: fig. 82. The same shape but beige or orange in colour is also attested in Tomb III at Al Sufouh (Benton 1996: fig. 127–8) and Shahdad in Iran (Hakemi 1972: pl. VA).
- <sup>9</sup> No. 2 on figure 11 corresponds to type B3 in the classification of J. Reade (1979: fig. 1). The same type of etched-carnelian beads is known in three other Umm an-Nar graves (Al Tikriti 1989: 95, pl. 46 U; Benton 1996: fig. 150). No. 3 is rare in the Oman Peninsula (only one unpublished occurrence in Shimal according to Benton 1996: tab. 12) and corresponds to type E2 of Reade (1999).

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