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Varia

Medieval Qalhāt, historical *vs* archaeological data

La ville médiévale de Qalhāt, données historiques et archéologiques

Axelle Rougeulle

Résumés

English Français
Qalhāt, in Oman, was one of the main hubs of the Indian Ocean trade at the time of the kingdom of Hormuz, in the 13th to 15th centuries AD. It is now an impressive archaeological site, a large ruined city about 35 ha wide. Excavations started there in 2008 with a French team under the authority of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture of Oman, and have since turned into an important development project with the final aim to create an archaeological park on site. Research have yielded considerable data about: the spatial organization and

development of the town, its fortifications, the various quarters and main buildings including the Friday mosque, the daily life of its inhabitants and the trading activities of the port. Paralleled with literary sources they now give a clearer idea of the history of this main harbour of the medieval period.

Qalhāt, en Oman, était l'un des centres majeurs du commerce de l'océan Indien à l'époque du royaume d'Hormuz, aux XIIIe–XVe siècles. C'est aujourd'hui un vaste champ de ruines de près de 35 ha. Les fouilles y ont débuté en 2008, menée par une équipe française sous l'autorité du ministère omanais du Patrimoine et de la Culture ; elles se poursuivent aujourd'hui intensivement dans le cadre d'un vaste projet de développement qui doit mener à la création d'un parc archéologique. Ces recherches ont apporté de nombreuses informations sur l'organisation spatiale de la ville et son évolution, les fortifications, les divers quartiers et principaux bâtiments, notamment la grande mosquée, la vie quotidienne de ses habitants et les activités commerciales du port. Menées en parallèle avec l'analyse des textes elles fournissent aujourd'hui une vision assez précise de l'histoire de ce grand port médiéval.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : Qalhāt, Sultanat d'Oman, Moyen Âge, océan Indien, commerce, ville-port, mosquée
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Texte intégral

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The joint efforts of all these stakeholders of the QP/QDP eventually led to the inscription of Qalhāt on the Unesco World Heritage List in 2018.

Introduction

1 Qalhāt is one of the most famous and impressive archaeological sites of Oman, and is located near the city of Sūr, about 50 km northwest of the Ra's al-Ḥadd in the al-Sharqiya Province (22° 41' 40" N, 59° 22' 30" E) (fig. 1). Nowadays, it is a field of ruins 35 ha wide, all that is left of one of the main harbour cities during the Middle Ages (fig. 2). It was probably founded around the end of the 11th century, and had become the second capital city of the kingdom of Hormuz and one of the main ports of the Indian Ocean trade by the 13th–15th centuries. It was then sacked by the Portuguese in 1508, and was eventually totally abandoned in the second half of the 16th century.

2 The city is known from several literary sources which underline its key importance in the history of Oman and of the Indian Ocean trade, especially during the kingdom of Hormuz. The site had nevertheless been little studied until recently, except for some surface surveys[1] and an excavation mission in 2003 by an Omani-Australian team[2]. As such, in 2008 the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (MHC) of the Sultanate started a comprehensive research project at the site, the Qalhāt Project (QP), in cooperation with a French team from the French CNRS-UMR 8167, and with the support of the archaeological committee from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Five excavation seasons, each six weeks per year, were first conducted in 2008–2012. Surface studies and soundings in various parts of the site led to the discovery of several main buildings of the town and yielded considerable interesting information about the history of the city, its spatial organisation and development, the daily life of the inhabitants and their activities, and the regional and international trade networks of the harbour. In parallel to the QDP (below), a second five-year plan for the QP was implemented in 2013–2017 to complete the general study of the site.

3 Given the QP's results, the MHC launched a new five-year project in January 2013, with the final aim to create an archaeological park at the site. The Qalhāt Development Project (QDP) is led and supported by the Ministry. Its aim is to excavate extensively, then carry out consolidation work in order for certain specific buildings discovered during the course of the QP to be on display to the public. It therefore includes an excavation component, carried out by the CNRS and the archaeological agency Eveha International, and a conservation component, realized by World Monuments Fund, both working in collaboration in the field six months a year. The tourist development component has yet to be initiated.

4 Research conducted so far (2008–2016) has focused on many points. A cartographical project was carried out, which achieved first a GIS and preliminary maps of the medieval city, and a complete documentation on the various quarters, architectural units, main buildings and circulation networks (fig. 3). Digitization and 3D documentation of the site as a whole and of the excavated structures, before and after conservation works, are also achieved. Surface surveys led to the identification of the spatial organization of the town, and soundings provided data on the chronological evolution of the

various areas. The defensive system, water supply system, and the funerary areas, were studied. The Friday mosque was discovered and extensively excavated. Several large buildings were also tested, some secondary mosques, a house, a large store, a *sūq*, a hammam, a ceramic factory and a jeweller's workshop were extensively cleared and are now preserved, or are currently being preserved. A detailed study of the archaeological material, and especially of local and imported ceramics, has allowed the identification of the main commercial partners of the harbour during the pre-Hormuzi and Hormuzi periods.

5 Now, the comparative study between historical literary sources and archaeological data provides a fairly detailed picture of the history and town planning of medieval Qalhāt.

History of Qalhāt

The pre-Islamic period, a legendary tradition?

6 The oldest mention of Qalhāt is to be found in the *Kitāb Ansāb al-'Arab*, a text attributed to Salāma b. Muslim al-'Awtabī al-Suḥārī and generally dated to the late 11th–early 12th century[3]. According to the ancient chronicle, the foundation of the city of Qalhāt goes back to the beginning of the Christian era, when Mālik b. Fahm, the mythic king of a faction of the Azd tribe, is reported to have migrated from Yemen through Hadramawt to Oman. The country was at that time under Persian occupation and the Azd reportedly left their families and baggage at Qalhāt before defeating the Persians in a battle at Salūt near Nizwā. Mālik is then said to have become ruler of Oman and founded his coastal capital at Qalhāt from where one of his sons, Salima b. Mālik, sailed to Jask and then Kirmān in Iran where he eventually became king. The Banū Salima later became very powerful in Kirmān, controlling the Hormuz straits and trade with India, maintaining a strong relationship with Qalhāt until they were eventually overthrown by the Buwayhids in 967[4].

7 The history of Mālik is commonly interpreted as a semi-legendary tale, reflecting the long trail of migrations of the Azd from western Arabia to Oman and Iran, starting well before the Christian era and well into the Islamic period[5]. Details on the foundation of Qalhāt as given in *Ansāb* are therefore questionable if not doubtful, as not a single trace of a pre-Islamic occupation has been found at the site so far. Furthermore, other than two erratic Abbasid shards of the 10th century, no trace of an early Islamic period occupation has been found either. The centre of maritime trade in the area at that time was apparently located about 50 km southwards, on the Ra's al-Ḥadd. Although still unidentified in literary sources, excavations held in 1988 by a British team of the Joint Hadd Project at HD4, a low mound on the sandbar separating the Khawr al-Ḥajar from the sea, delivered some coral structures, a lapis lazuli beads workshop and a lot of ceramics from the 10th to the 12th centuries, including many imports from Africa, Yemen, Iraq, India and China[6].

The Islamic foundation (11th–12th centuries)

8 At least it may be stated that Qalhāt was a settlement important enough at the time for al-'Awtabī to refer to it in the *Ansāb*

as the centre of such major events. Several other literary sources mention the existence of Qalhāt at about the same period. The *Shāhnāmeh*, a chronicle about the history of Hormuz written by Turanshah, a prince of Hormuz in 1348–1378, tells a story very similar to the pre-Islamic tradition, but at a later date. The original manuscript of the *Shāhnāmeh* has disappeared and is known thanks to two summaries: the first one in Portuguese from a Dominican monk, seemingly around 1575, but the most well-known one is in Spanish, written by traveller Pedro Texeira in *c.* 1595. According to Texeira's abstract, the Hormuzi dynasty was founded by Dirhem Koh, king of an Arab tribe who migrated from Yemen to Iran. He embarked at Qalhāt for Jask, then onwards to the Mināb delta in the Hormuz straights, leaving 'in Kalayāt a son of his, with a wise wazir, that, if he should have ill success over sea, he might here have safe harbour and passage'[7]. The other abstract adds that 'it seemed good to him and to his followers to found in that port a city, inasmuch as it was a place suitable for those of the country to trade with the ships that passed that way; wherefore his son remained there with many people, carrying out the determination of his father and those of his council; and the city went on prospering in the course of time'[8]. None of these summaries mention the date of these events, but according to specialists they probably date to the 11th century or the beginning of the 12th century[9]. The Arab geographer Yaqūt al-Rūmī, who visited the city in *c.* 1218, also noted that it was a fairly recent foundation, possibly no later than AH 500/AD 1106[10]. The city of Qalhāt could then have been founded sometime around 1100, probably from an existing village of fishermen, 'non-tribesmen' who eventually 'multiplied and became numerous' as emphasized by Ibn al-Mujāwir. This author also mentioned that Qalhāt flourished after the ruin of al-Tīz, when merchants from this port moved to Qalhāt, Mogadishu and Aden[11]. This is around the time when the Saljuqs of Kirmān invaded Oman which they took from the hands of the Buwahids and kept under their control for a century or so (1063–1167); it is interesting to note that king Kaward crossed the straight thanks to the fleet of the *amīr* of Hormuz, the earliest attested mention of the Hormuzi rulers[12]. Ibn al-Mujāwir also hypothesizes about the origin of the name of the city, according to him, a *shaykh* in the village used to stand on the seashore, shouting to passing boats 'Tell [the captain]; bring [her in]' to persuade the crew to enter the port which was therefore called Qulhāt[13].

9 This dating of the foundation of Qalhāt would fit much better with the archaeological data. The centre of the ancient city was mainly razed down to the bedrock when a large Friday mosque was built around 1300 and excavations there did not deliver much information regarding pre-mosque occupation (see below). But none of the soundings made so far in the vicinity, or any other excavation at the site, have yielded traces of occupation prior to the 11th–12th centuries, except for the two erratic Abbasid shards already mentioned. The earliest levels, on the bedrock, may be dated to around 1100 due to the associated glazed ceramic assemblage which includes Iranian sgraffiato, a typical ware with a hatched, incised or champlevé decoration under a monochrome or a polychrome glaze.

10 After al-'Awtabī, literary sources on Qalhāt in the 12th century are quite lacking, except for al-Idrīsī. In his *Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*, published around 1160, Sūr and Qalhāt are described as two cities of Oman on the shore of the sea between Hadramawt and Muscat, small but wealthy with some pearl fishing activity[14]. Other Omani cities mentioned by al-Idrīsī are Mirbāt and Ḥāsik to the south, RamāḌamā[15], Muscat and Suḥār to the north, with no mention of a port on the Ra's al-Ḥadd. This suggests that Qalhāt had then probably superseded HD4 as the main settlement of the area, although the HD4 site delivered several Chinese stoneware bowls of the 12th century[16], when no Chinese importation prior to the 13th century has been identified until now at Qalhāt. As a matter of fact, traces of 12th century occupation are rather scarce in excavations, found only at the bottom of some soundings opened in the area of the great mosque (B12) and a neighbouring

large building (B13), in the very centre of the medieval city. The most interesting in this regard, dug against the façade of the *qibla* wall of the great mosque, delivered 1 m of archaeological deposits belonging to phase I, i.e. from the earliest settlement in this area around 1100 to the appearance of 'Mustard' ware, a Yemeni ceramic production dated to the 13th and first half of the 14th century. These are sandy or clayey layers with many pebbles, some ceramics, charcoal, bones and shells, but not a single trace of construction, wall or floor[17].

The expansion (13th century)

11 The fame of Qalhāt actually started in the 13th century, following the decline of the previous pre-Islamic and early Islamic Omani emporium of Suḥār on the al-Batina coast[18] and the rise of the Hormuzi kingdom. Mentions of the city become more and more numerous in literary sources, and we know for example from the history of the Ayyubids and early Rasulids in the Yemen, *Al-simṭ al-ghālī al-thaman*, written by Yemeni historian Ibn Ḥātim around 1300, that a naval expedition sent in 1205 against pirates by the Atābak Sunqur, regent of the Ayyubids in Yemen, reached Qalhāt[19]. According to Ibn al-Mujāwir, the port 'together with all the regions of Oman' fell around 1215 under the control of the Khwarizm ruler Khwājah Raḍī al-Dīn Qiyām al-Mulk Abū Bakr al-Zūzanī, who collected taxes and traded in Qalhāt until he died in 1218–19, leaving in the city 64,000 *mann*[20] of silk and 500 horses[21]. Shortly later, in *c.* 1219, a fortification wall was built and after that Qalhāt flourished, 'ships from all direction, through every inlet, came. It became a great and respected town'[22]. Visiting the city in the 1220s, Ibn al-Mujāwir even drew a sketch map of these fortifications[23]. The surface surveys and excavations held on several sections of the ramparts confirmed most of the information he gave, and especially the dating of the walls (see below).

12 Ibn al-Mujāwir also gives a somewhat harsh description of the inhabitants of the city: 'Their food is dates and fish. Their clothes are blue and they go bare-headed (…) There is no one in the whole of the inhabited world more hostile to strangers than they are (…) There is no one more cowardly then they. When they spot pirates at sea (…) they surrender the ship to the pirates and leave empty handed (…) There is no steelyard smaller than that of Qalhāt'[24]. Some years earlier, Yaqūt al-Rūmī who visited Oman around 1212 was much more positive: 'la majorité des bateaux de l'Inde y sont mouillés. De nos jours, c'est le port de ce pays et la plus exemplaire des provinces du 'Umān. Elle est vivante, habitée. Elle n'existait anciennement à la surface de l'œcumène et on pense qu'elle ne fut fondée qu'après l'an 500 de l'Hégire. Elle appartient au seigneur de Hurmuz et ses habitants sont tous des Kharijites (Khawārijūn 'ibāḍīyātun) attachés à cette confession extrême ; ils la professent en public sans le cacher'[25].

13 Qalhāt probably had strong links with its sister-city Hormuz since its very beginnings but it is now clearly mentioned as part of the Hormuzi kingdom. The Omani port was then known as the *Dār al-Fatḥ* (place of victory). It was administered by governors from among the ruling family or aristocracy of Hormuz, a 'sanctuary for the fleets and families of ousted Hurmuzi kings and pretenders to the throne', the place where 'exiles and "kings-in-waiting" passed long sojourns, establishing courts in exile, raising armies and building ships to fit out their fleets for an assault against Hormuz'[26]. As stated by Marco Polo, 'this city is on the mouth and the entry to the Gulf of Qalhat, so that no ship can enter or exit without their goodwill. Many times, the *melic* of this city suffers great hardship from the sultan of Kerman, to whom he is subject: for when this sultan places some levy on the *melic* of Hormuz (or another of his brothers) that it does not want to give and the sultan sends his army to

compel him, [the *melic*] leaves Hormuz, boards a ship, comes to the city of Qalhat and stays there, letting no ship pass, which causes the sultan of Kerman great damage. Therefore [the sultan] is obliged to make peace with the *melic* of Hormuz'[27]. As a matter of fact the princes of Hormuz were vassals of various local Iranian dynasties depending of the political situation, the Salghurid *atabegs* of Fars or the Saljuqs of Kirmān, then the Ilkhānid Mongols and finally the Tīmūrīds in the 15th century, to whom they pledged allegiance and paid tribute. But they did enjoy some independence in the Arab Gulf and Indian Ocean trade, controlling most of the navigation from the ports of Hormuz and Qalhāt, only challenged by the fleet of Qays when the island was seized and the last ruler of the Banū Qaysar killed in the late 1220s.

14 In 1243 the governor of Qalhāt, Maḥmūd al-Qalhātī (also known as Maḥmūd b. Aḥmad al-Kustī, or Kushī/Kāshī, in Omani chronicles), became the twelfth prince of Hormuz, ruling as a tyrant. His fleet is said to have attacked and subjugated the coasts of both the Oman and Arab Gulfs up to al-Qaṭīf, and even some ports in India[28]. He landed in 1262 at Qalhāt, where he organized an expedition to Dhofar, returning with his ships 'laden with booty'. A following expedition to inland Oman ended in disaster, especially as the ships waiting at anchor at Qalhāt were burnt in an attack led by the inhabitants of Ṭiwī in retaliation for an aborted attempt by the Turkish troops of Maḥmud in Qalhāt to sack their city. Maḥmud tried in 671/1272 to finally seize Qays, then under the control of the Salghurids but was defeated at sea by the fleet of the governor of Fārs, who pursued him until Qalhāt[29]. After the death of Maḥmūd in 1278 a succession struggle between his sons ended in 689/1291 in the assassination of the reigning prince Sayf al-Dīn Nuṣrat and his family[30].

15 The governor of Qalhāt at that time was Baha al-Dīn Ayāz Seyfin, a former Turkish slave in the service of Maḥmūd al-Qalhātī, probably as the tutor of the previously mentioned son Prince Nuṣrat, and who had been appointed at Qalhāt either by Nuṣrat or even by Maḥmūd himself, probably around 1280[31]. To avenge the death of the prince, Ayāz rebelled against Mas'ūd the new king, raised an army and attacked Hormuz with the help of Mālik al-Islām Jamal al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Tībī, one of the wealthiest Iranian merchants then and the Ilkhānid Farmer General of Fārs, who had recently established a new merchant dynasty in Qays[32]. In 1294, Ayāz was eventually appointed as the representative in Hormuz of Mongol queen Padishah Khatun. He then shared his time between the city of Qalhāt and his work in Hormuz, appointing his wife Maryam, also a former Turkish slave of Maḥmūd, to rule Qalhāt during his many absences. As admiral of the Hormuzi fleet he battled against the Tībīs of Qays who had been growing in power and had tried to get rid of the Hormuzi until Ayāz defeated them at sea and sacked Qays in 1297. Around 1300, he decided to transfer Hormuz from the mainland in the Mināb delta (Old Hormuz), where it was threatened by the Turcoman tribes devastating Kirmān, to the barren island of Jarun in the middle of the Hormuz straights (New Hormuz), from where it could control all the Gulf routes[33]. This stroke of genius gave Hormuz control of the international trade routes of the Gulf for over two centuries. In around 1311 Ayāz either died or retired at Qalhāt where he would die a few years later, leaving power in Hormuz to Hormuzi Prince Gordanshah. According to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and several later traditions, the widow Bībī Maryam built her husband a beautiful great mosque and a mausoleum[34]. Maryam continued ruling the Omani port until 718/1319 at least, when she got involved in the struggle for the succession of Gordonshah, giving refuge to his son Quṭb al-Dīn Tahamtan for a year in Qalhāt, before he succeeded to seize power in Hormuz[35]. Excavations proved that the city had experienced at that time a major development. Dated to around 1300, the great mosque built by Bībī Maryam was indeed recently discovered, a large and highly decorated building. Most of the ancient quarter around the mosque was rehabilitated and the city expanded greatly, with the foundation of peripheral quarters (see below).

16 Other than its political and military importance, Qalhāt is mostly known for its key commercial role in the Indian Ocean trade in the 13th century, after the rise of the commercial power of Hormuz in the area. Already when Yaqūt al-Rūmī visited the country, around 1220, Qalhāt was the main port of Oman, 'where most vessels bound to India were at anchor'[36]. At the end of the century it is still the only port mentioned by Marco Polo on the Omani coast, 'Qalhat is a great city within the gulf that is also called Qalhat; ... It is a noble city on the sea ... They have no grain, but get it from elsewhere, for merchant bring it in their ships. The city has a very good port: and I tell you in all truth that many ships come here from India, and in this city they sell very well, because from this city wares and spices are carried inland to many cities and castels. I also tell you that from this city, many good warhorses are taken to India, on which merchants make great profit, for know that from this country, and the others that I described to you before, handsome horses are taken to India in great quantities — so great that it can hardly be described. ... Know also in all truth that the people of this country live on dates and salted fish, for this they have in great plenty'[37]. The description of the limited local natural resources of Qalhāt will be later tempered by De Albuquerque who notes that 'around the city there is not a single tree, except a few palms close to some pools of water, whence they get drink; and all their supplies of corn, barley, maize, millet and dates come from the interior, for there is plenty of these products there'[38]. In the Rasūlid archives of the 13th century Qalhāt is one of the three ports mentioned in the Arab Gulf, with Qays and Hormuz, whose vessels reached Aden between December and February, leaving the port in May[39], although only Qays appears in the earlier texts. Hormuz and Qalhāt were at the time involved in regional trade, with the Dhofar and Hadramawt to the west, the Sind and Gujerat to the East, and in long distance trade with all the harbours of south India[40].

The height of Qalhāt (14th–15th centuries)

17 Maḥmūd al-Qalhātī, Baha al-Dīn Ayāz and Bībī Maryam are the most renowned historical characters of Qalhāt and none of the later Hormuzi governors of the city are known by name, even the one who sheltered Ibn Baṭṭūṭa in 1331, shortly after Bībī Maryam's reign. The famous Moroccan traveller made a call at Sūr on his way between Eastern Africa and Hormuz and from there went to Qalhāt on foot. The trip was very harsh and as he finally reached the gate of the city, totally exhausted and his feet blistered, the guard sent him to the *amīr* who housed him for six days[41]. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa gives interesting information about the local way of life, describing the high quality local fish sundried on tree leaves and served with rice imported from India, the strange local Arabic dialect of the inhabitants, and the fact that they were mostly 'schismatic' (i.e. *khārijis 'ibāḍī*) but could not practice openly as their ruler the sultan Quṭb al-Dīn Tahamtan II, king of Hormuz, was Sunni[42]. More interestingly on the archaeological point of view, he mentions the presence of smart markets and 'one of the most beautiful mosque'[43]. As a matter of fact a *sūq* and the great mosque were discovered on the shoreline, and excavations confirmed his description and dating of the mosque (below).

18 Shortly before Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited Qalhāt, in 1327, the island of Qays was taken by Quṭb al-Dīn Tahamtan, and the later death of the last descendants of Malīk al-Islām put an end to the al-Tībī dynasty, finally leading to the unchallenged supremacy of Hormuz on Gulf maritime routes[44]. Since the time of Ayāz, Hormuz already had a tight control on these routes, thanks to an efficient war fleet and a well-organized series of fortresses dotting the shores to prevent ships from docking

elsewhere than the Hormuzi ports, including Suḥar where not a single Far-Eastern import is to be found after the 13th century[45]. This was still a time when links with China were strengthened under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) with political embassies between China and Hormuz and the four voyages to the western Indian Ocean, between 1413 and 1433, of the Chinese fleet under the command of the admiral Zheng He (Cheng Ho), who visited Hormuz and then sailed along the Arabian coast to Aden and Africa, possibly calling at Qalhāt. Much Chinese porcelain and stoneware of the 14th and 15th centuries were found at the site but the port served mainly as the storehouse of India, as emphasized by most literary sources at the time, and by the fact that Indian ceramics at the site are extremely numerous, reaching up to 40% of the total amount of pottery in some areas. Many sandstone trays on three feet, a typical Indian implement, were also found, together with two fragments of carved slabs with Indian motives (fig. 4); it is more than probable that a large Indian community was established here. As emphasized by the famous seafarer Ibn Mājid at the end of the 15th century, 'from Qalhāt and Maskat for Makrān they can travel twice or three, or four or five times [a year]; or for Gujerat if you do not remain long in any of the ports. The sea is not closed for any part of the year from Qalhat and Masqat to Gujerat'[46]. The main commodities traded with India were dates and especially horses, as thousands of thoroughbred Arabian horses were sold every year at very high prices to the Indian rulers for their cavalry[47]. The horses originated from all parts of eastern Arabia but many were shipped at Qalhāt, as 'ils ne peuvent aborder ailleurs' as noted in 1517 by a Florentine traveler[48]. As a matter of fact, the topographical context of Qalhāt was ideal for shipping horses (see below). However, contacts between Qalhāt and the West, Yemen and Africa, are more difficult to evaluate. Trade links with Yemen seem to have become rather scarce by the end of the 13th century according to literary sources, as Rasūlid texts mention no ship from Qays, Hormuz or Qalhāt in al-Shiḥr at that time, probably no more than a few a year in Aden[49]. It must nevertheless be noted that the 'Mustard' ware, a Yemeni ceramic production commonly dated to around 650/1250–750/1350, is well represented at the site, a fact which testifies to some regular links with Yemen. In the beginning of the 15th century, Qalhāt is in fact still mentioned as one of the three main ports of the Gulf in the *Mulakhkhaṣ al-Fiṭan*[50]. It was in any case a wealthy city with a mixed culture and a cosmopolitan population of Arabs, Persians and Indians, not to mention other minor communities as maybe Africans (although no more than a handful of African shards were found at the site).

19 On the political point of view, Qalhāt kept its status of second capital of the kingdom, and was referred to as the 'door of Hormuz' by Qalhātis themselves[51], until the arrival of the Portuguese: 'on the coast of Arabia the chief town was Kilhat, the governor and custom master at which overruled those in the other towns in the principalty'[52]. It also still plays its traditional role of refuge for Hormuzi princes who had fallen out of grace. In 1345, king Quṭb al-Dīn Tahamtan II was overthrown by his brother and had to take refuge again in Qalhāt for one year before regaining the throne, 'and the port gained much by his presence, for he detained there the ships bound from India to Harmuz'[53]. One century later, in 1436–37, most of the attacks led against king Sayf al-Dīn Mahar by his brother Turanshah were carried out from Qalhāt where he 'ordered warships and horses from al-Ḥasā and raised funds from Omani merchants' until a vessel from China with rich cargoes was seized in the harbour[54]. It seems that this dispute between the two brothers was due to fears of the Arab population that the power in Hormuz may fall in the hands of the Turco-Iranian elements of the dynasty; the replacement of Sayf al-Dīn by Turanshah II marked the victory of the Arab Omanis[55].

20 But it is also clear from these texts that Qalhāt was superseded by Muscat as the main port of Oman over the course of the 15th century. In 1442 and 1444 for example the merchant's ship which carried 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Samarqandī, an ambassador

of the Tīmūrīd king Shah Rukh, stopped at Muscat and not at Qalhāt to spend monsoon on his way between Hormuz and India and back. Thirty years later the Russian trader Afanasy Nikitine also stopped at Muscat on his way to Hormuz[56]. None of these travellers even mentioned Qalhāt. Furthermore, although Ibn Mājid at the end of the 15th century mentions Qalhāt on many occasions in his book, it is only as one destination among others. The only places to be mentioned in detail are Ra's al-Ḥadd, as a dangerous area for sailing, and the city Muscat: 'Maskat is the port of Oman where year by year the ships load up with men, fruits and horses and they sell in it cloth, vegetable oils and new slaves and grain and all ships aim for it'[57]. This evolution is probably due to advances in navigational techniques, and also possibly to destruction by earthquakes[58]. According to some scholars, Qalhāt was damaged by an earthquake around the middle of the 14th century, but this assertion is never referenced[59] and the only possibly attested cataclysm would date to the last quarter of the 15th century, possibly the same one which destroyed the high buildings, wind-towers and mosque minarets at Hormuz in winter 1482–83, forcing the king and his court to camp during forty days outside the city[60].

21 In any case, the inhabitants of Qalhāt are described by an anonymous manuscript as rebuilding their city after a seism when the Portuguese land there in 1507[61], an assertion which seems confirmed by some characteristics noted during excavations at the great mosque (see below). At that time the port had clearly lost much of its splendour as noticed by Bras de Albuquerque 'Calayate is a city as large as Santarrem, badly populated, with many old edifices, now destroyed'[62]. Despite these destructions and the fact that part of the population lived in reed huts outside the ancient city, it is still described as a beautiful town with its fortification walls, towers, residences, narrow streets, terraces and windows in the Spanish style, and its population is estimated by some scholars at 5,000 to 6,000 souls[63]. Duarte Barbosa who visited the city around that time described it as 'a large Moorish town, of fine, well-built houses, wherein dwell many merchants, wholesale dealers and other gentlemen'[64]. The port 'was still a great entrepôt of shipping, which comes thither to take horses and dates to India'[65]. It is ruled from an administrative and political standpoint by a member of the aristocracy sent here every year as a *goazil* (*wazīr*). 'And in the taxes and duties paid to the king, no one interfere except an eunuch, a servant of Cogeatar, and in all the places under the Kingdom of Ormuz he places these eunuchs, his servants, who had charge of the revenue, and the great obedience was shown to them throughout the land'[66]. This first visit did not result in fighting but the Portuguese seemed to have been very suspicious of the inhabitants who 'were continually marching along the beach and through the city, armed and clothed like Turks, with bows, lances, swords and scimitars (and on the bank they had a stockade with four mortars)'[67]. Afonso left Qalhāt some days later, after ordering 'a ship of Aden, of about two hundred tons, which was there loading horses and dates to be seized'[68].

The decline and the end (16th century)

22 One year exactly after his first visit, Afonso de Albuquerque anchored at Qalhāt again, this time with the aim of destroying the city. Bras noticed that it was defended by a garrison of 200 bowmen, but when the Portuguese, 230 men altogether, began firing their guns on the inhabitants stationed on the beach, they fled away into the city 'as quickly as they could', crossing it completely up to the foot of the mountain[69]. The Qalhātis tried on several occasions to regain their city but the Portuguese fortified themselves inside and eventually sacked it and laid fire to 'all the principal houses of the city, for in them the Moors

had the greater portion of their supplies', and to the great mosque 'which fell to the ground, without anything in it which was not burnt'. They also 'burnt there twenty-seven ships, large and small, which lay in the harbour waiting for cargoes in order to sail away to different parts'[70].

23 Excavations until now have not brought precise information as to the extent of the destructions caused by the Portuguese to the city. Some traces of fighting or destruction were found, as extensive levels of ashes in the prayer hall of the mosque and evidence of a fire in a jeweller's workshop for example, but not enough is known about the 16th century ceramics to allow accurate dating of the last occupation and collapse layers. Nor do we know to which point the presence of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean affected trade in the harbour and the kingdom of Hormuz in general. But, according to historian De Barros, the vizirate of Qalhāt was still the greatest Arabian vizirate of Hormuz when the Portuguese eventually subjugated the kingdom in 1515. It covered the whole northeast coast of Oman and tax revenues from Qalhāt amounted to nearly 60% of the total revenue of the vizirate, while Muscat amounted to about 21%, and Suḥar and Khawr Fakkan 8%[71].

24 In 1517, two years after Hormuz felt in the hand of the Portuguese, André Corsal described in a letter to Duke Laurent of Medicis, how his vessel anchored at Qalhāt where he stayed for fifteen days: 'Ce port de Calayate a vingt-deux degrés de latitude, et n'est guère plus grand que Zeila. Les maisons y sont bâties de chaux et de pierres, mais la ville n'a point de murailles, et les natifs d'icelle sont Arabes en paroles, mœurs et habillement, ayant un drap alentour des parties honteuses, et en la tête un turban fait à la turque : combien que les plus nobles sont habillés d'une chemise ceinte assez longue, avec les manches larges et un bonnet long de gros feutre tanné et pointu, comme la mitre d'un pape. Les femmes ont le visage couvert d'un drap de coton non guère épais, azuré et coupé au-dessus des yeux comme un masque ; et le demeurant de leur habillement est fait comme une robe ouverte, et devant longue jusqu'aux genoux, ayant les manches larges, avec des chausses à la marine jusqu'aux talons de diverses couleurs, et sous leur nez d'un côté une petite pomme d'or enchâssée dans la chair, et plus bas un anneau attaché comme les buffles de notre pays. Cette terre de Calayate est fort stérile, comme le demeurant de l'Arabie : toutefois il y a quelques raisins et grande quantité de dattes, et bien peu d'autres semences. Les hommes plus riches se nourrissent de riz, mêlé avec quelque peu de froment, n'ayant faute aussi de beurre et de lait, à cause du bétail qui s'y trouve en grande quantité. De ce port passe grand nombre de chevaux venant aux Indes, parcequ'ils ne peuvent aborder ailleurs, comme j'ai déjà dit une autre fois'[72]. This description by Corsal, of the golden nose rings worn by the inhabitants of Qalhāt, and certainly also the earrings, most probably explains why Afonso ordered his men 'to cut off the ears and noses of all the Moors whom they had captured' before going aboard and leaving Qalhāt after the sack of the city in August 1508[73]; an act which was therefore probably not mere cruelty but also clearly greed.

25 Qalhāt, as Muscat and Suḥar, was then a Portuguese station where the Lusitanian fleet could anchor and the representative impose duties on the Indian ships at anchor. The city is poorly documented in texts during this period. According to some scholars, Lopo Vaz de Sampaio, the 6th Governor of Portuguese India from 1526 to 1529, razed Qalhāt in 1526 because it had revolted against taxes levied by the governor of Hormuz Diogo de Melo, and the Ottomans attacked the city and took it in 1550, but none of these assertions are referenced[74]. It is nevertheless clear that the importance of the port declined quickly as shown by the fact that the tax revenues of the harbour fell down to 1500 *ashrafis* in 1542–43, and that 'by the late 1570s, Qalhat Portuguese factor, whose salary depended on the level of customs revenues, earned about half of his peer in Masqat'[75]. As previously stated about the Portuguese destruction of 1508, it is currently extremely difficult to get from excavations a precise dating of the thick collapse layers which covered each building and to evaluate the speed of its decay. It must

nevertheless be noted that one of the two large buildings excavated in the northwest quarter of the city, made of two contiguous houses with courtyards (B94), was still occupied in the second half of the 16th century and has yielded a lot of Far-Eastern ceramic imports of that period (fig. 5).

26 This house was most probably one of the last buildings in use at Qalhāt. The city was at that time mainly deserted, contemporary levels are mostly identified as squatter occupation in ruined buildings. As a matter of fact, starting from the end of the 16th century all visitors at Qalhāt emphasized the fact that the city was totally ruined and abandoned. As early as 1592 Sebastiao de S. Pedro, the Dominican monk who left us an abridged Spanish version of the *Shahnameh*, saw only ruins when visiting the city which he describes as 'barren and unpopulated'[76]. Around 1617 D. Garcia de Silva Figueroa, the Spanish ambassador to the Safavid king Shah Abbas mentions that 'Calayate était autrefois une fort grande ville, & bien peuplée ; mais aujourd'hui elle est presque toute détruite et déserte, aussi bien que les autres villes voisines'; he adds that Qalhāt, Ṭiwī and Qurayat, although traditionally part of the Hormuz kingdom as all the coast of northern Oman, 'se sont néanmoins soustraits il y a quelque temps de l'obéissance de cet État, qui s'en trouve fort affaibli, avec beaucoup de pertes pour les Portugais'[77]. Some time later, in 1639, the ship of a Carmelite monk, Esprit Julien, was taken by a storm on her way between Qurayat and Sūr and found shelter at Qalhāt, a 'ruined city', where they discovered another Portuguese ship and stayed for three days; he observes that 'there are no shallow places in the sea, even near the shore' until Qalhāt[78].

27 In 1835 British J. R. Wellsted, member of the Bombay Marine, made an extended journey through Oman. From Muscat he sailed to Sūr, landing briefly in Qalhāt where he noticed interesting details about 'a small mosque', in fact the Bībī Maryam mausoleum[79]. Forty years later, in 1874, the British political agent and consul in Muscat S. B. Miles, visited Qalhāt twice and carried out the first scientific survey of the site, publishing very interesting information about it[80].

The city

General layout of medieval Qalhāt and its evolution

28 Surface surveys and excavations held since 2008 now allow a fairly good understanding of the spatial organization of the city and its evolution. The site is located on a narrow triangular rocky plateau at the foot of the Jabal al-Ḥajar al-Sharqī, which is totally surrounded by the sea to the east, the mountain to the southwest and the high bank of the Wādī Hilm to the northwest (fig. 6). The plateau slightly slopes down from the foot of the mountain (at level about 40 m), ending at the seaside with a steep and inaccessible cliff about 10 m high, beaten by the waves at high tide. There is only in one place in the northern part of the plain where the ground reaches sea level, as a natural depression bordered by a small and sloppy pebble beach (fig. 7). This is the only place in the area where a boat may land, and it is furthermore protected by a sand spur at the mouth of the Wādī Hilm, which breaks the choppy sea. Underwater surveys led by T. Vosmer in 1998 showed that nearly all of the 27 medieval stone anchors detected were indeed located in front of this beach[81]. The original settlement was situated there, in the depression and on the surrounding slopes.

29 As already stated, soundings in this area yielded early occupation levels dated to the 12th century[82], this seems to confirm

the information provided by Yaqūt and Turanshah about the dating of the foundation of Qalhāt. Levels of this period have not been found elsewhere until now and the settlement was at that time probably quite small, first a fishing village then a small city, as described by al-Idrīsī around 1150, centred on a mosque on the seashore. Thereafter the town most probably quickly expanded into the plateau up the depression, possibly until the two small *intra-muros wādī*-s which later delineated the city centre (fig. 2-3; and below, fig. 28). It was much smaller anyway than the area enclosed within the fortification walls in *c.* 1220 which covered all the northern part of the coastal plateau (see below). It is difficult to have a precise idea of the layout of this early settlement as it is probable that it was later substantially rehabilitated, but it could have shared the same main features as the later agglomeration of the 14th–15th centuries.

30 As a matter of fact, excavations confirm the growing importance and major development of Qalhāt starting in the second half of the 13th century and especially around 1300 under the rule of Ayāz and Bībī Maryam, and again in the 14th century when the city came into the spatial organization the ruins still display today. A wide architectural complex, which included an impressive Friday mosque, a large building and several courtyards, was then erected in the centre of the ancient quarter on the shore, most probably at the site of a former Friday mosque (see below). All around, in the depression and on the slopes, this quarter seems to have been largely rehabilitated, turning it into a new city centre with massive high constructions, official buildings and wealthy residences, and a dense network of streets and lanes (below). To the south, west and north, the peripheral intramural areas were probably mostly settled at the same time, as the structures excavated there go back to the end of the 13th or to the 14th century. The urban planning was much less dense, with many large buildings, up to 1,000 sq. m. in some cases, including houses, stores and workshops, which were aligned along relatively straight streets or arranged in groups around city-squares (below). To the north, along the rampart, where there is now a wide empty space with lines of big boulders forming enclosures, could have been either for cattle, or the area settled with reed huts mentioned in texts, although archaeological material is very scarce there. All around, to the west, northwest, and southwest, inside and outside the fortification walls, a wide funerary area grew, with various types of funerary structures, topped by the beautiful Bībī Maryam mausoleum built in the beginning of the 14th century (below).

31 Excavations have not been extensive enough yet to allow a clear perspective of the gradual decline of Qalhāt in the 15th century, then following the probable earthquake in the late 15th, and finally after the attack of the Portuguese in 1508 and the fall of Hormuz in 1515. Islamic ceramics of the 15th–16th centuries are not known precisely enough to allow an accurate dating of the late occupation and collapse levels. Most excavated buildings seem to be still actively used in the 15th century, except for example the ceramic kiln B41 then covered with refuse from the surrounding houses. Some indications seem to provide evidence of the earthquake, for example the fact that the great mosque was under repair when the Portuguese destroyed it (below). The brown speckled ware, an Omani ceramic production going back to the early 16th century is mainly characteristic of a squatter reoccupation of abandoned buildings but the twin houses B94 in the northwest quarter were occupied and still active until late in the century, as the latest layers delivered a rich assemblage of Omani brown speckled and Iranian blue speckled, together with Chinese blue and white porcelain of the second half of the 16th (see above fig. 1-5a, and below). In any case, no traces of occupation in the 17th century has been found so far at the site.

The defensive system

32 The fortifications of Qalhāt are the features of the city which are best documented by historical sources. Information is mostly found in Ibn al-Mujāwir's *Ta'rīkh al-mustabṣir,* who drew a sketch plan of the city showing its defensive system as he saw it around 1230[83] (fig. 8). According to this plan, the city was at that time in the shape of a trapeze, entirely surrounded by walls with towers. The geographer also indicates one tower inside the city, near the southern side, and three others outside on the mountain, two north of the Wādī Hilm and one south. He adds that the fortifications were built in AH 616 (AD 1218–19), so shortly before his visit, and made of stone and *juss*.

33 Further information, especially about the city gates, is given in the description of the attack of Qalhāt by the Portuguese in 1508. According to the Portuguese chronicle, the inhabitants who had gathered on the beach, fled inside the city when the Portuguese fired upon them from their ships: 'As soon as [Afonso de Albuquerque] disembarked, with all the forces united, (he) entered the city along with the enemy in great confusion, passing through the gates into the inner part, and pursuing them through the streets until he had driven them out'[84]. The Qalhātis gathered at the foot of the mountain and Afonso 'ordered the captains to guard the gates of the city'[85]. He then took four cannons from his boats and 'placed them upon the walls' and ordered one of his captains to watch the city gates leading to the mountains, while he himself with a hundred men 'guarded the other gate which led to the beach'[86]. Later, as the Portuguese troops were pillaging the city, the Qalhatis 'came down from the mountains with five hundred men, and set to work to attack the gate where D. Antonio de Noronha and Diogo de Melo were stationed'[87]. Eventually, after melee fights in the city streets the Qalhātis were driven back 'up to the gate by which they had entered'. The Portuguese had also noticed, during their first visit to Qalhāt in 1507, that 'on the land side, a little distance from the city, there was a wall about the height of a lance, which comes down from the top of the mountains, and reaches to the sea; this was made by the citizens out of love for [peace with] the Moors of the interior, for they had come into collision with them on several occasions'[88].

34 Textual evidence on the Qalhāt fortifications is therefore quite detailed but does not correspond exactly to what appears now on the surface. This is the case in particular for the trapezoidal shape of the city drawn by Ibn al-Mujāwir as the present layout is triangular with the western corner isolated by an interior partition wall. As the settlement was certainly much more reduced in 1230 than in its heydays in the 14th–15th centuries, it was first hypothesized that the walls visible today were perhaps a later stage of the fortifications, the original intramural area being smaller with walls possibly following the layout of the two inner *wādī*-s. However, no trace of such walls can be seen on the ground and the layout of the north wall, along the Wādī Hilm, does not seem to have changed. The results of excavations on the present walls are furthermore consistent with the dating of Ibn al-Mujāwir: the walls are built on a pre-wall layer which yielded ceramics of the 11th–12th centuries (sgraffiato), while their base is associated with ceramics of the 13th–14th centuries ('Mustard' ware). The fortification layout therefore did not evolve much and included at the beginning wide vacant areas all around the town itself. It was indeed mostly required by the topography of the ground, the steep bank of the Wādī Hilm to the north and a deep depression at the edge of the plateau to the south strengthening the defence serving as natural ditches.

35 The second hypothesis possibly explaining the trapezoidal shape of Ibn al-Mujāwir's plan was that the intermediary wall (B6) was part of the original layout, the western corner being a later addition. Such an extension of the fortifications westward up to the foot of the mountain would have meant including the Bībī Maryam mausoleum, built one century later, inside the walled perimeter. It would have also allowed total control on the coastal track from Sūr to Qurayat, which now ran through the fortified area before reaching the breach in the bank leading to the bed of the Wādī Hilm[89]. But soundings done

at the junction of the intermediary (B6) and southwest (B7) walls proved that B7 was built in a single construction phase and that B6 was erected at a later date, leaning against the inner façade of B7 (fig. 9). It seems therefore clear that the original layout of the ramparts was triangular as is visible today, and that the intermediary wall was added later, maybe in connection with the construction of the Bībī Maryam mausoleum around 1320, or at any time to separate the city proper from the coastal track. No diagnostic ceramic was found in the B6/B7 soundings which could bring information as to the dating of B6, but the trapezoidal shape drawn by Ibn al-Mujāwir could suggest that it was built soon after. Perhaps Ibn al-Mujāwir did not notice the western extremity of the ramparts because the mausoleum had not been built at that time and so this remote part of the city was much less prominent than it is today.

36 Another question drawing from literary sources is the presence of an eastern sea-wall, which is drawn by Ibn al-Mujāwir and mentioned by the Portuguese, 'a stockade with four mortars'[90], but does not show on the surface today (fig. 3). This eastern border of the site is now largely eroded, but surface surveys and excavations proved that there had indeed been some kind of a sea-wall on the beach, at least in the heydays of the city in the 14th–15th centuries. Large almost contiguous buildings were then aligned along the shore which were most probably several storeys high and/or fenced in by high retaining walls as the ground sloped up inside. Excavations at the mosque complex for example proved that the great mosque was about 11 m high (see below). As the beach itself was very sloppy, the front line of the city must have appeared as a very high and massive line of defence. Ibn al-Mujāwir indicates four towers on this side of the city, while only three quadrangular structures have been observed, built on the beach against the line of the buildings. However, the minaret of the early Friday mosque, prior to the one excavated, would probably also have been drawn as part of the fortifications. Further north, the shore is bordered by a steep cliff and no wall or tower is visible there.

37 Ibn al-Mujāwir does not show any tower on his sketch of the northwest wall, and indeed no tower is visible on the wall (B5). It was built across the edge of the steep bank of the Wādī Hilm and was no more than one or two courses high on the inner city walls, although the outside façade built on the slope could reach more than 1.5 m in elevation. A narrow gate used to open onto a path leading down to a small embankment cut in the foot of the bank. The number of towers on the two other walls is much less accurate. Ibn al-Mujāwir indicates three towers on the west wall when five are now visible; strangely enough these structures are located on the eastern, inside face of the wall. As for the southwest wall, it shows six towers in Ibn al-Mujāwir's drawing when at least eight are visible in this section. This wall is the only real rampart of the city, running from the bank of the Wādī Hilm at the foot of the mountain, down to the sea with several sections forming angles, especially at a spot where it forms a quadrangular corner giving way to an extramural cistern (B9). Its width varies from 1.90 to 2.20 m, made of two facings with medium blocks and a filling of very small pebbles. The wall is preserved up to 2 m in some places and it appears that it was not much higher, topped by a walkway protected by a parapet up to 1.50 m high, the total height of the wall thus possibly being approximately 3.50 m (fig. 9). At least two staircases provided access to this walkway, both reaching the top of a tower, where the Portuguese most probably placed their cannons (fig. 10).

38 The Portuguese mentioned several gates on the sea side, and several others on the mountain side. As for the sea gates, it is clear that all the east-west running streets leading down to the beach, maybe as many as ten, acted as gates in the line of defence, which might even be sealed off by wooden doors as was the case at least for the mosque sea-gate where traces of a wood frame were found. The gates mentioned on the mountain side were possibly the two openings now visible in the intermediary wall B6[91], and the main south gate flanked by two buttresses, now totally ruined in the eastern part of wall B7.

De Albuquerque does not seem to mention the gates in the north wall, nor the small one to the east towards the mouth of Wādī Hilm, not even the main one to the west, on the crest of the breach leading down to the *wādī* bed. Here a natural terrace, mid-slope of the *wādī* bank, was landscaped and strongly fortified as the main access to the city. A hammam was located there (fig. 11), the only building of that kind ever found in Oman, most probably erected at the time of Ayāz and Bībī Maryam[92].

39 South of the city this road used to run through the coastal plateau which extending southwards for about 700 m, an empty space more than 15ha wide which was entirely enclosed between the south-west fortification wall, the steep mountain, the cliff by the seashore, and the south advanced fortification mentioned by the Portuguese (fig. 12). This area included a dam in a small *wādī* bed and an outside cistern which was probably used to keep horses bound to India: a deep indentation in the cliff just outside the city wall, which was a trace of the tectonic Qalhāt fault, would have allowed them to reach the beach for boarding. The advanced rampart (B10) was the main defence of Qalhāt on its south side, running from the cliff on the shore to high on the slope of the mountain as noticed by the Portuguese (fig. 13). It is 2.50 m to 3 m thick, with a path 2.00 m large and 1 to 2 m high, protected by a parapet 0.5 m thick, altogether therefore probably no higher than the 'height of a lance'. In some places it even includes two sidewalks at different heights and it was most probably strongly guarded, as was also the monumental gate, a narrow passage 7.50 m long protected by two towers up to 5 m high now preserved. It is probably there that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was stopped by the guard who eventually brought him to the *amīr* of the city.

40 Finally, the city and its surroundings were also protected by several lookout posts located on top of the first ridge of the mountain. Ibn al-Mujāwir shows two towers north of the Wādī Hilm and several groups of structures of unknown dating were discovered up the *wādī* bank, overlooking the actual village. A landscaped pathway is visible along a crest further north, most probably leading to another structure. South of the *wādī*, immediately up the site and connected to the western side of the medieval city by a long wall climbing up the crest, two groups of small structures were found on top of the first ridge (B103-106), which include a cistern, a small mosque, an enclosure and a square building, maybe the base of the tower indicated by Ibn al-Mujāwir in this area (fig. 14). They were accessible through a meandering path partly landscaped on the slope of the mountain; from there it was possible to see the sea and the whole coastal plain north and south of Qalhāt.

The great mosque

41 According to literary sources, the main edifice of the city of Qalhāt was the Friday mosque described by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and the Portuguese chronicles. Around 1330, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa says that the city has 'one of the most beautiful mosques. Its walls are tiled with *qāshānī*, which is like *zalīj*, and it occupies a lofty situation from which it commands a view of the sea and the anchorage. It was built by the saintly woman Bībī Maryam'[93]. Nearly two centuries later, Bras de Albuquerque gives a much more detailed description of the mosque the Portuguese destroyed in 1508, 'a very large building with seven naves, all lined with tiles, and containing much porcelain fastened upon the walls, and at the entrance to the gate a very large nave made with arcading, and above these was, as it were, a terrace looking towards the sea, all covered with tiles; the gates and roof of the mosque were all of elaborate masonry'[94]. Some days earlier Afonso had 'ordered a look out to be placed in the tower of the mosque'[95], which means that it had a minaret.

42 The location of this mosque has since long been one of the main archaeological questions about the city, and most scholars interested in the site have speculated about it. It was initially identified with a large building located in the northeast quarter of the city, up the cliff[96], which was later identified by the Qalhāt Project as a large residence with courtyards, possibly the palace (B16, see below); then with the Bībī Maryam mausoleum, at the foot of the mountain[97]; or with a large enclosure nearby[98]. Fortunately enough, fragments of glazed tiles were discovered on the surface of a large building on the shore up the beach during the preliminary visit on site in 2007, that suggested that the mosque might be located there (fig. 3). Soundings then extensive excavations confirm this and have provided interesting information about the plan, elevation and chronology of this building[99]. The fact that the mosque was indeed located on the shore is clearly mentioned in the Portuguese description of their attack of Qalhāt. Bras wrote that 'as soon as they disembarked they were to proceed at once to attack the city on the side near the mosque, which was close to the sea…'[100]. Another description is even more specific, saying that the Qalhātis 's'enfuirent en un temple prochain du rivage, d'où ils furent contrains sortir pour se sauver en la ville. Les Portugallois allerent apres jusques aux portes, & vouloyent entrer dedans, si Albuquerque ne les eust retenus: car la nuict approchoit les chemins estoyent estroits, les maisons haut eslevees, dont les ennemis pouvoyent jetter pierres & traits, ce qu'avenant en tenebres les assasillans estoyent en grand danger. Ainsi donc ils passerent la nuict dans ce temple'[101].

43 The great mosque of Qalhāt is an extremely complex and interesting building, quite unique in Islamic architecture, and which was recently extensively excavated. It was built on a high basement and, when it was destroyed, collapsed into the basement, with almost none of its superstructures being preserved (fig.15). The analysis and tentative reconstruction of the monument (fig. 16) therefore rely mostly on the very precise excavation and accurate study of all the architectural and decorative fragments found in the collapse layer, which has furthermore largely eroded since the 16th century[102].

The mosque complex

44 The great mosque of Qalhāt is part of a great architectural complex, a rectangular enclosure about 80 m north-south and 60 m east-west, bordered by the beach on its eastern side, by a *sūq* to the north, and by streets on its south and west sides. It includes two units, north and south, the northern one comprising a large building, possibly associated with a courtyard (B13, see below).

45 The southern unit (fig. 17) includes the mosque itself in the southeast corner, a small (350 m²) low courtyard at beach level in the northeast corner, and a wide (1,300 m²) high courtyard to the west and northwest, both courtyards separated by a terraced wall with a connecting ramp or staircase. At least two gates to the mosque complex were located in the surrounding walls. One gate in the east wall connected the beach to the low courtyard, and was most certainly the one used be the Portuguese to pursue the Qalhātis inside the 'temple' in August 1508; it is now largely eroded and little is known about it. The second access was located at the other end, city side, opening onto the northwest corner of the high courtyard. In its last stage this gate was protected by a porch with benches, and it opened onto a roofed corridor between B13 and a structure of unknown function (B95), a single elongated room, 13.10 m x 4.60 m, with many niches against one wall.

The basement and north wing

46 The most remarkable characteristic of the mosque is that the prayer hall was erected on top of a massive basement, about 25 m x 27 m, and roughly 4 to 5 m high along the slope of the bedrock. This basement was built on the bedrock after clearing away all previous occupation layers, up to 2.5 m thick, between the line of the *qibla* wall and the shore. Thus, only 1.5 m of the west side of the basement was above the surface of the western high courtyard, while the north, south and east walls were entirely visible. With the superstructure of the prayer hall on top, the mosque must have therefore appeared as a very impressive monument indeed, especially seen from the shore, appearing on top of the beach. This explains why it was described by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa as a very high building overlooking the sea and harbour[103].

47 The basement was divided into six spans by five north-south walls parallel to the *qibla* wall, regularly spaced 3.10 m apart (fig. 15-17). The two western spans were filled with an earth backfill, while the four eastern ones were empty. The westernmost was a long corridor connecting the south street to the north courtyard, opening onto four rooms located in the adjacent east span. The two easternmost spans were accessible from the beach, with five doors leading into a long room with four back rooms. The northernmost rooms in both spans are different, each one accessible from the north courtyard only.

48 The mosque had a minaret which was probably square according to the study of the ruins, thus testifying to architectural influence foreign to the Omani tradition. It was located at the northeast corner of the building, near the shore. As Afonso de Albuquerque had placed a sentry on top ‘to keep watch from thence upon the movements of the Moors” gathered at the foot of the mountain[104], it is clear that this minaret was fairly high. Several crenellations and fragments of large mortar decoration were found in its collapse. Against the northwest corner was another square tower of unknown height, sheltering a staircase leading from the upper courtyard down to an ablution room at the level of the lower courtyard, possibly also leading up to the roof of the mosque. Between the two towers against the north wall of the mosque was a staircase and rooms connecting the north courtyard to the basement corridor and cellars.

49 These outer rooms were covered by a roof acting as a terrace at the level of the prayer hall, and which was immediately accessible from the northwest courtyard or through two staircases from the lower courtyard. Two gates of the prayer hall would open onto this terrace, one to the west and another, covered by a domed porch, to the east, against the minaret. It is therefore possible that this terrace is the one described by the Portuguese, located above ‘a very large nave’ at the entrance to the gate, and ‘looking towards the sea’. Bras adds that it was ‘all covered with tiles’, and that the gates of the mosque were of ‘elaborate masonry’.[105] It must be noted that this area yielded many fragments of moulded panels and glazed tiles. These were star-shaped or cross-shaped, blue or green monochrome tiles, probably of local origin, with some beautiful lustre glazed tiles from Kāshān in Iran which ornamented the main façade of the mosque (fig. 18).

The prayer hall

50 One of the main problems which arose during excavations of the mosque was that the Portuguese chronicles describe a prayer hall with seven naves, whereas it obviously had five naves only. As a matter of fact, the floor of the prayer hall was supported by beams resting on top of the span walls, which served as a foundation for the columns. Given the location of

these walls, and of the preserved bases of the columns from the last row, it would appear that the prayer hall had five naves and six bays.

51 However, extensive excavation and analysis of the collapse layers demonstrate that the mosque indeed had seven naves. As a matter of fact, the first floor above the basement did not constitute a single space, a prayer hall 21 m x 24.5 m, but it was divided into two separate spaces (one-third and two-thirds) by a north-south wall built on the wall between the second and third spans of the basement. The part east of this wall, one third of the inner space on the seaside, would be accessible through the porch on the outer north terrace and presented two north-south naves with a central row of four octagonal columns, approximately 75 cm in diameter on an almost cubic base (fig. 19). No fragments of arches were found and the roof probably rested directly on top of the columns. It was possibly an entrance hall, which overlooked the sea through arched windows in the east wall.

52 From this hall, large arched doors in the intermediary wall would open onto the western space, the prayer hall proper. It had five east-west naves and four north-south bays, the total number of naves in the mosque thus being seven, each of them with various columns shapes and decoration styles. The columns of the first two rows have a short massive cylindrical shaft on a cubic base, all built in carefully cut stone blocks, but two different types were recorded. Most of them are 96 cm in diameter and built with tightly adjusted plain rectangular blocks (fig. 20). Four of these are bigger, 108 cm in diameter, and built from polygonal blocks leaving space in the corners for an inlaid relief decoration of small stars made of cut fragments of glazed tiles set in mortar (fig. 21). These are located at the intersection of the axial nave in front of the *mihrab* and the bay in front of the second door in the north wall. They supported highly decorated arches, their intrados with stars and crosses made of glazed tiles inlaid in plaster, and spandrels with complex star motives made of fragments of glazed tiles under coils of mortar. The columns of the last row near the *qibla* wall were possibly octagonal, made of cut stones, their eastern face decorated with moulded panels with inlaid tiles. The concentration of fragments of fan-shaped masonry found in the area of the four large cylindrical columns indicates that they supported a cupola. Vestiges of the drum and of the squinches were also found. The rest of the roof was flat, the axial nave resting on arcades running in both directions, and the lateral ones on north-south arches only.

53 The *qibla* wall is the only one still standing, up to roughly 1 m high (fig. 22). Little is known regarding its decoration except for a plinth at least 50 cm high, made of a mosaic of star and cross glazed tiles, topped by a row of niches. The original *mihrab* was a niche 1.80 m wide and 1.60 m deep, with a decoration of Kāshān lustre glazed tiles. It was later reworked, narrowed to 1.40 m with a decoration of moulded mortar slabs including inlaid fragments of similar tiles. The niche was most probably surrounded by an inscription as may be deduced from some fragments found in front of it (fig. 23). To the north was a *minbar*, with five steps still preserved. Several architectural phases were also attested in this *minbar*, the first one being in wood, and the later ones in masonry, first decorated with glazed tiles, then with slabs of moulded mortar with star and cross motives.

54 It would seem therefore that the mosque was highly decorated, with local monochrome and imported Kāshān glazed tiles, or fragments of tiles, arranged in various ways, along with mortar slabs with moulded motives, as mentioned in the descriptions of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa and the Portuguese (Bras writes of ‘elaborate masonry’). Several fragments of large blue and white Chinese plates of the 15th–16th centuries, some of them still set in plaster, have also been found in one area, but the Portuguese description of ‘much porcelain fastened upon the walls’ seems exaggerated.

Chronology of the mosque

55 A sounding carried out in the west courtyard against the *qibla* wall of the basement provided interesting information about the dating of the mosque. Terracing works for the construction of the basement were done starting from a level which yielded 'Mustard' ware shards, a typical Yemeni ceramic production commonly dated to the period *c.* 650/1250–750/1350, starting possibly slightly earlier, and which was also found in the first layers of occupation of the courtyard, against the *qibla* wall. The mosque was therefore built during this period. This dating is also confirmed by the presence of lustre tiles, together with some fragments of *lajvardina* and monochrome turquoise tiles, whose styles were only produced in the Kāshān kilns at the end of the 13th and beginning of the 14th century[106]. The attribution of this mosque to Bībī Maryam by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa is therefore confirmed, probably between *c.* 1290 when Ayāz gained power in Hormuz and *c.* 1311 when he died, in fact most probably around 1300 or at the very beginning of the 14th century. It most certainly replaced a previous smaller mosque which was entirely destroyed during the construction works.

56 Except for the basement proper, which does not seem to have changed much through time, the great mosque complex underwent several architectural stages. Important restoration works were done during the 14th century, after the floor of the western part of the prayer hall had subsided. The bases of the columns were then strengthened, as were the walls of the north wing. The *minbar* and *mihrab* were similarly rehabilitated on several occasions. The west courtyard was also backfilled in the 14th century, the surface raised by 1.5 m, up to the top of the basement; the retaining wall between both courtyards was therefore reworked and a structure built against the northern extremity of the *qibla* wall, seemingly for ablutions. The area of the west gate, the entrance corridor and secondary structure B95, also witnessed considerable evolution, maybe in the same period. Although the detailed chronology of these works is still under study, excavations indicate that the mosque was under repair when it was eventually destroyed, possibly in the late 15th century due to the earthquake mentioned in some texts. Although the extent of the damages cannot be assessed, restoration works seem to have been fairly limited, the city having at that time lost most of its splendour and wealth.

57 According to Goulart, the Portuguese spent their first night in Qalhāt inside the mosque complex. It is also probable that some of them were stationed there during their time in Qalhāt, as shown by the fact that Afonso heard the 'shouts' of the sentry on top of the minaret warning that the 'Moors' were re-entering the city and attacking the garrison at the gates[107]. Excavations have found some plausible traces of the Portuguese occupation as a small bronze bell, the fragment of a stemmed glass, and a pig bone. Traces of cooking activity found on the ground floor of the minaret may also date back to this period, as could be the crucibles in the basement corridor, attesting to the repair of weapons for example.

58 Bras mentioned that the great mosque was entirely burned and destroyed and traces of extensive fire were found in excavation. Nevertheless it has not been established to which extent the mosque was made unusable. On the other hand Qalhāt was occupied until the second half of the 16th century. Although it was much less populated, then and during Portuguese domination, it is not impossible that the mosque, or at least part of it, was still in use after 1508. The precise dating when the monument was finally abandoned is therefore unknown.

The city centre around the mosque

59 Beside the great mosque, most of the main buildings of the city were also located in the central quarter, especially along the beach.

The large building

60 The building located north of the mosque unit in the northern part of the complex (B13) has not been excavated yet, except for some limited soundings and little is known about it (fig. 3). It is covered with large heaps of collapse reaching more than five metres above the present surface and it might have had up to three storeys in some parts. It measures about 26 x 30 m and is made of rooms around a courtyard, with some kind of a tower with buttresses at the southeast corner (fig.24). The main gate was probably located in the western wall, opening onto the city side, but three more openings were found in the south wall, giving direct access to the west courtyard of the mosque. Soundings proved that the chronology of the area was similar to the one found at the mosque. The bedrock is covered with occupation layers dated to the 12th–13th centuries, over which two successive buildings were erected, the last one being contemporary with the Friday mosque, most probably built in the same architectural phase under the reign of Ayāz and Bībī Maryam. The function of this building is still unknown, but it was certainly important. As a matter of fact, it could have been the residence of the governor of the city, where Ayāz and Bībī Maryam used to live, and where Ibn Baṭṭūṭa stayed during his visit. It must nevertheless be noted that B13 has little in common with usual palaces at the time, such those in Hormuz for example, which are huge complexes featured as fortresses and including several courtyards and various buildings (armoury, stables…) and which are, generally speaking, located outside the city centre[108]. It could therefore have had another function, with another palace located elsewhere, possibly in the northeast quarter (see below).

The sūq

61 North of the complex, the area between wall B13 and the northern ridge of the depression used to be a *sūq*. The surface of this area is fairly flat, with no heaps of collapse as is usually the case at the site, and excavations there have yielded several small architectural units (B140-B141) on both sides of a west-east street leading to the beach, along with secondary lanes and back lanes (fig. 25). This was certainly the *sūq*, or one of the *sūq*-s mentioned by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. A similar area was identified west of the central quarter, about 200 m southwest of B140-141 as the crow flies, which could have had the same function. In any case, there was certainly more than one *sūq* in the city and it must also be noted that some of the houses excavated in the peripheral quarters (B21, B94, see below) include small rooms opening onto the outside only, which could have been shops.

The north complex

62 North of the *sūq*, the northern slope of the depression shows a fairly steep rocky ridge. A wide complex, including several buildings and large courtyards with surrounding walls, stands above, overlooking the sea and the mosque complex (fig.26).

The central building (B14) shows a massive fallen piece of masonry atop an arch and excavations held there by an Iranian team[109] have uncovered small rooms as cells and yielded a fragment from a carved inscription (fig. 27). This could be a *khān*, and the complex could include several public buildings, as a *khān*, a *madrasa* and a hospital, as is well-known in Islamic cities of the time and especially in Hormuz[110].

The dwellings

63 Textual information about the spatial organisation of Qalhāt city comes mostly from the Portuguese chronicles, which all describe a densely built agglomeration with narrow streets lined with high buildings. It is for this reason that Afonso decided to spend the night inside the mosque instead of pursuing the "Moors" in the dark, and risking being fired upon from the rooftops (see above).

64 As a matter of fact, all around the main edifices just described, the depression and the plateau up to the intramural *wādī*-s were densely covered with fairly massive buildings, some of them probably restructured from previous constructions. Based on the map of the cartographic project, a detailed surface study of this central quarter was made, leading to the identification and mapping of about 130 buildings (fig. 28). Two main sub-quarters may be singled out on each side of the main east-west street connecting the west gate of the city to the great mosque. North of it are very large buildings scattered in the middle of wide empty spaces, with no apparent street network. The south part is more densely built, with buildings ranging from 200 m² to 600 m². The largest are located along the beach south of the mosque and are possibly official edifices, as the customs storehouse (which in Hormuz was located on the beach near the palace[111]); most of the underwater anchors were found in front of these buildings. Other large constructions were probably the residences of rich merchants. Most buildings are roughly rectangular but often have a complex layout, with inside courtyards and oblique walls. As in Hormuz[112], many had probably two or more floors as shown by the fact that the heaps of ruins now reach up to 5 m above the actual surface. Boundaries and inside spaces are therefore difficult to ascertain from the surface survey only and it is possible that many included several housing units given the presence of several entrances leading to various courtyards. Any excavation is very difficult in this part of the city as it is mostly inaccessible to wheelbarrows, but limited soundings in a building not far west of the mosque (B91) showed that it was built in the 14th–15th centuries, with no trace left of a probable earlier occupation.

65 A dense network of main and secondary streets criss-cross this quarter. Although slightly meandering according to the position of the buildings, the general layout of the main streets in the surveyed area is roughly oriented north-south and east-west. Besides the main east-west street leading to the gate of the Friday mosque, other east-west streets, connecting the beach and the plateau, are more meandering, especially on the slopes which were sometimes landscaped with steps, cut in the bedrock or built as small terraces. Four main north-south axes have also been identified, connecting the main street to the south quarter and the southern gate of the city. These streets were interconnected by secondary pathways going around the buildings. Except for some back lanes, all those pathways, main and secondary, were as a rule fairly wide, about 4 m on average, with small squares at the main intersections. They were most probably at bedrock level, at least in the beginning before the levels rose with daily life rubbish. Given the sloppy ground of the city, many of these streets would have been used as channels for running water in case of rain and the bases of the walls were most probably protected with strong mortar or

reinforcement, as in the street excavated in the *sūq*. Some terraces are also visible, open areas delimited by low walls with a horizontal surface covered with tiny white pebbles. They are located in the middle of open areas, or against buildings and their function, either connected to the buildings or to the circulation network, is difficult to ascertain. All in all, the general aspect of medieval Qalhāt was probably similar to what is still visible in other ancient Omani towns, as at Hamra for example (fig. 29).

Peripheral quarters

66 Except probably for a graveyard to the west, the wide area between the central quarter and the fortification walls appears to have remained empty in the 6th/12th and 7th/13th centuries. The peripheral districts now visible on the surface to the south, west, northwest and northeast do not seem to have been noticeably settled before the end of the 7th/13th century (fig. 3). They are less densely built and show a different spatial organization, with buildings aligned along straight streets or organized around city squares. They are badly documented in literary sources but some of those buildings which were excavated have different plans and functions and are a testament to the social and economic daily life of the city.

The south and northeast quarters

67 Located on a narrow sloping ground between the southern intramural *wādī* and the south rampart, overlooking the beach, the south district has not been excavated yet but seems to include buildings more or less aligned along two east-west streets. As for the northeast district, it is better documented. It is also well defined from a topographical point of view, a flat elongated area between the shore, here an abrupt cliff approximately 8 m high, and a parallel rocky ridge up to 5 m high. It includes buildings on both sides of a long street running in a fairly straight line from the north end of the beach in front of the great mosque, to a gate in the northern fortification wall (fig. 30). This area was therefore directly connected both to the harbour and to the coastal plain north of Qalhāt through the mouth of the Wādī Hilm. Some of the largest buildings of the site are located here, these might have been residences and/or warehouses connected with maritime trade. Soundings in the most impressive building (B16, *c.* 1000 m²) for example proved that it was made of four quadrants, three of which were probably courtyards with surroundings rooms, and the fourth one a residential unit 300 m² centred around a large *majlis*, 12.5 m long and 3.7 m wide, with beautiful plastered niches all around, most likely topped by a cupola in the centre (fig. 31). It could have been the residence of a very wealthy merchant, with stores in the courtyards, or even possibly the palace of the governor of the city instead of the large building B13 near the mosque (see above). Excavations proved that two successive buildings were in fact built in this place. The earlier one was founded on the bedrock in the 14th century and was later ruined or deliberately erased, and the second building erected in the 15th century over the previous walls.

The northwest quarter

68 North and northwest of the central quarter is a wide area which includes buildings of different sizes and functions, organised around city squares or empty spaces. Three were extensively excavated, then preserved (fig. 32). To the north, on the north side of a square approximately 23 x 34 m, is a small mosque (B19) consisting of a prayer hall and a courtyard above a platform with retaining walls, 1.5 m high, 16.4 m long and 8.2 m wide (fig. 33). A staircase against the eastern wall would lead up to the courtyard, with an ablution basin in the northeast corner. The prayer hall was widely opened onto the outside, with a *mihrab* decorated with thin pillars at the centre of the *qibla* wall. According to the associated ceramics this mosque was built around the 14th century; it has collapsed in a strange asymmetrical way, its lateral walls both mostly falling northwards, maybe an evidence of the earthquake mentioned in some texts. Such platform mosques were clearly a very typical feature of Qalhāt's landscape as ten similar buildings have been recorded at the site so far, most of which were erected at the border between the city itself and the funerary areas. Some of them were clearly associated with funerary practices as the one excavated near the city's west gate (B29), where an erected grave was found inside the filling of the courtyard.

69 South of the square, opposite the mosque, was a large square construction (B21) measuring more than 750 m² (fig. 34). Founded on the bedrock in the 14thcentury, it was originally a building with a wide central courtyard surrounded by four aisles including 15 rooms. The rooms were either isolated or communicated with back rooms, altogether 9 units opened either onto the courtyard or onto the outside. The building was later partitioned and entirely reorganised, with three distinct but communicating courtyards, and it stayed in use until the 16th century. Except for a small *madbasa*, a structure used to make date honey, and some shallow pits and hearths, traces of daily occupation are scarce in this building and its function remains uncertain, but was probably a store (*makhzan*). It yielded a lot of ceramic material, including many Far Eastern wares.

70 South of B21 is another small square, and south of that is building B94. The first construction on the bedrock in this area may be dated to between the end of the 13th and the beginning of the 14th century. It was levelled around the middle of the 14th century to make place for a larger building of around 320 m², which was in fact made of two contiguous dwellings, each one with rooms on three sides of an elongated courtyard, now preserved up to 3.5 m high (fig. 35). Five phases of occupation were found, ranging from the 14th to the second half of the 16th century, and both houses showed many traces of activities, as basins, pits, grinding stones, *in situ* jars, a *madbasa* (fig. 36), a chopping block, an anchor, and a strange canal-shaped structure of unknown function against the wall of the northern courtyard (fig. 37). Many activities in this northern house were seemingly connected to fish processing as thick layers of fish bones were found there. In fact, the ground floor of both houses was probably mostly devoted to craft activities, as the dwelling was restricted to the first floor which was accessible through a staircase in each entrance room. Two small constructions against the northwest corner, accessible from outside only, were probably shops, and a large room with no opening at the ground floor in the southeast corner was possibly a store. It yielded a fairly rich ceramic assemblage, including Omani brown speckled and Iranian blue speckled wares, together with blue and white Chinese porcelain dated to the second half of the 16th century; this is the latest evidence of settled occupation recorded at Qalhāt until now (above, fig. 5). The style of the porcelain is typical of Chinese exports to Europe at that time and is therefore evidence that part of the city was still inhabited after 1550, and active in the Portuguese international trade networks documented in contemporary texts.

The west quarter

71 Two more contiguous construction units were excavated some distance south of B94, in the west quarter. To the north is a pottery (B41) where three successive ceramic kilns, and a workshop in a courtyard with enclosure walls, were brought to light (fig.38). The earlier kiln is a wide square construction now mainly destroyed, the later ones are of the cylindrical updraft kind, with a fire chamber and ventilation holes in the floor. In the late 13th and early 14th century, they produced various kinds of vessels, bowls, plates, jugs and jars, glazed, unglazed and painted, some of them in imitation of the well-known Blue speckled Iranian ware which was also imported to Qalhāt in large quantity[113]. Ceramic wasters were also found on the surface of the south and north districts and it is more than probable that several potteries workshops were active in the city.

72 About 20 m south of the pottery was a rectangular building 13 x 10 m, made of three contiguous rooms, with a staircase leading to a terrace (B39). It yielded vestiges of handicraft activities as two bronze weights, several fragments of semi-precious stones, a stone cast mould, a small pearl, shells, and traces of the use of pigments. It was probably a jeweller's workshop, dated to the 15th century. This building was erected over the erased walls of a previous construction dated to the end of the 13th or beginning of the 14th century, with several basins, perhaps the south extremity of the pottery. It was destroyed by fire and was possibly one of the “principal houses of the city” where the “Moors had the greater portion of their supplies” and which were sacked and destroyed by the Portuguese in 914/1508[114].

The funerary area

73 The town of Qalhāt was bordered on its west, northwest and southwest sides by a wide funerary area which takes up the entire intramural area and extends westwards outside the walls, up to the foot of the mountain. Topographic plotting of the cartographic project have recorded more than 2,000 funerary structures, such as mausoleums, funerary terraces and isolated graves of different kinds, which can be grouped into eight graveyards (C1-C8, fig. 39)[115]. The main graveyard was located in the western part of the intramural area against the west and southwest walls (C3), and it is interesting to note that the Portuguese chronicles do not mention this empty area. Although they give quite a detailed description of the intramural struggles with the inhabitants and spent several days guarding the mountain gates, they only mention the narrow streets and densely built character of the city. It is even astonishing that they did not mention the Bībī Maryam mausoleum which stood isolated immediately in front of one of these gates[116].

74 As a matter of fact, the most prominent feature of the funerary area was this mausoleum, the only edifice still standing in Qalhāt[117]. Located in the western corner of the city at the foot of the mountain, and near the coastal track, it is one of the most famous tourist spots of Oman and was recently restored by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture[118]. The mausoleum now stands isolated, a Seljuk style monument with a square base of about 8 x 8 m crowned by a now partly collapsed cupola on a drum, but it was clearly part of a large complex now nearly entirely destroyed (fig 40-41). It was in its heydays highly decorated as noted by Wellsted when he visited the site in 1835: ‘only one building remains in a state of tolerable preservation. This is a small mosque (…). Its interior is covered with party-coloured glazed tiles, on which are inscribed, in relieve, sentences from the Koran’[119]. Nothing is left now of this decoration except for traces of a mosaic of star- and cross-shaped plain blue glazed tiles on the east jamb of the southern entrance. But Wellsted’s description possibly witnesses the presence of inscribed moulded friezes with glazed tiles from Kāshān, as several fragments of Kāshān turquoise and

lajvardina tiles were reportedly found in the vicinity of the mausoleum (fig. 42). The presence of these plain and Kāshānī tiles, similar to those used in the decoration of the great mosque, confirms that both monuments belong to the same architectural period, although it is not clear whether it is the burial place of Bībī Maryam herself or the one which, according to tradition, she built for her husband Ayāz, or both[120]. However, the fact that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa does not mention it could also mean that it had not yet been built at the time he visited the city in 1331.

75 Other than Bībī Maryam, a dozen other mausoleums in various stages of decay were recorded in the funerary area. Two of these, located close to Bībī Maryam's on the opposite side of the track are now totally destroyed and hardly discernible on the surface but it seems they were fairly large and also included into a wider complex. The others are small structures ranging from 2.5 m to 4.5 m in dimensions, square or octagonal in shape, and are scattered in the funerary area inside and outside the southwest fortification wall (fig. 43). Most burials at Qalhāt are simple graves, which could be either isolated or grouped into crowded graveyards. Five main types are recorded: simple graves indicated by two standing stones, often limited with an oval line of small blocks; raised oval or rectangular graves, with one or two courses of large blocks with small pebbles on their surface; raised rectangular plastered graves with degrees; and graves marked by a narrow cist made of sandstone cut slabs, often with an inscription on standing slabs at both extremities. But the most distinctive funerary structures found at Qalhāt are the funerary terraces. These are raised areas of various shapes, sizes and heights, limited by one or two courses of stones, up to 1.5 m in one case, with small white pebbles or gravels on their surface (fig. 44). Pairs of small standing blocks are often still preserved on the surface, indicating the presence of burials underneath. This peculiar funerary practice seems distinctive and its significance, whether practical, social or religious, is still under debate. In any case, it is hoped that the current study of the spatial distribution of the various kinds of burials at the site will yield some information about the social organization of medieval Qalhāt population.

76 One last structure (B67) also seems associated with funerary practices in Qalhāt, located in the western side of the city near intermediary wall B6. It was in the beginning a simple mosque with a wide courtyard, built in the end of the 13th or the beginning of the 14th century in connection with a grave, probably that of a pious man (fig. 45). The courtyard was later surrounded on three sides by raised platforms or terraces covered with gravels, which were possibly used for preparing the bodies before burial, although this kind of funerary mosque does not seem listed elsewhere. Finally, the prayer hall of the mosque was shortened on the south side to create a separate room, possibly devoted to the same purpose. Three funerary terraces with several burials were progressively built outside, leaning against the wall of the courtyard, and the building was eventually abandoned around the end of the 15th century.

Conclusion

77 All literary sources concur to emphasize the importance of Qalhāt as a hub of maritime trade, a city with a cosmopolitan population, the place where 'ships from all direction, through every inlet, came', and 'where most vessels bound to India were at anchor'. These international connections are also well attested by excavations which have yielded a large amount of imported material, both ceramics and objects originating from China and South-East Asia[121], Iran and Arabia, and above all from India. It is worth noticing in this respect that imports from Eastern Africa are very scarce in Qalhāt, when the Hormuzi

Blue speckled ceramic ware is well attested on contemporary African coastal sites. This brings interesting information on the various trade networks of the kingdom of Hormuz, as the harbour of Qalhāt clearly specialized in trade with the Orient and especially India. Foreign influences are also obvious, through the architecture and decoration of the great mosque, and funerary practices, as in the production of ceramic wares.

78 Altogether, the historical and archaeological data now give a fairly vivid image of medieval Qalhāt. Due to budgetary cuts in Oman, only two and a half seasons of QDP excavations were fulfilled and the project now focuses on conservation works. It is to be hoped that further investigations and excavations will be performed to get a more precise and detailed knowledge of the history, town planning, domestic life and various activities of this major heritage site of Oman[122].

Fig. 1. Location map of Qalhāt (© QP/QDP).

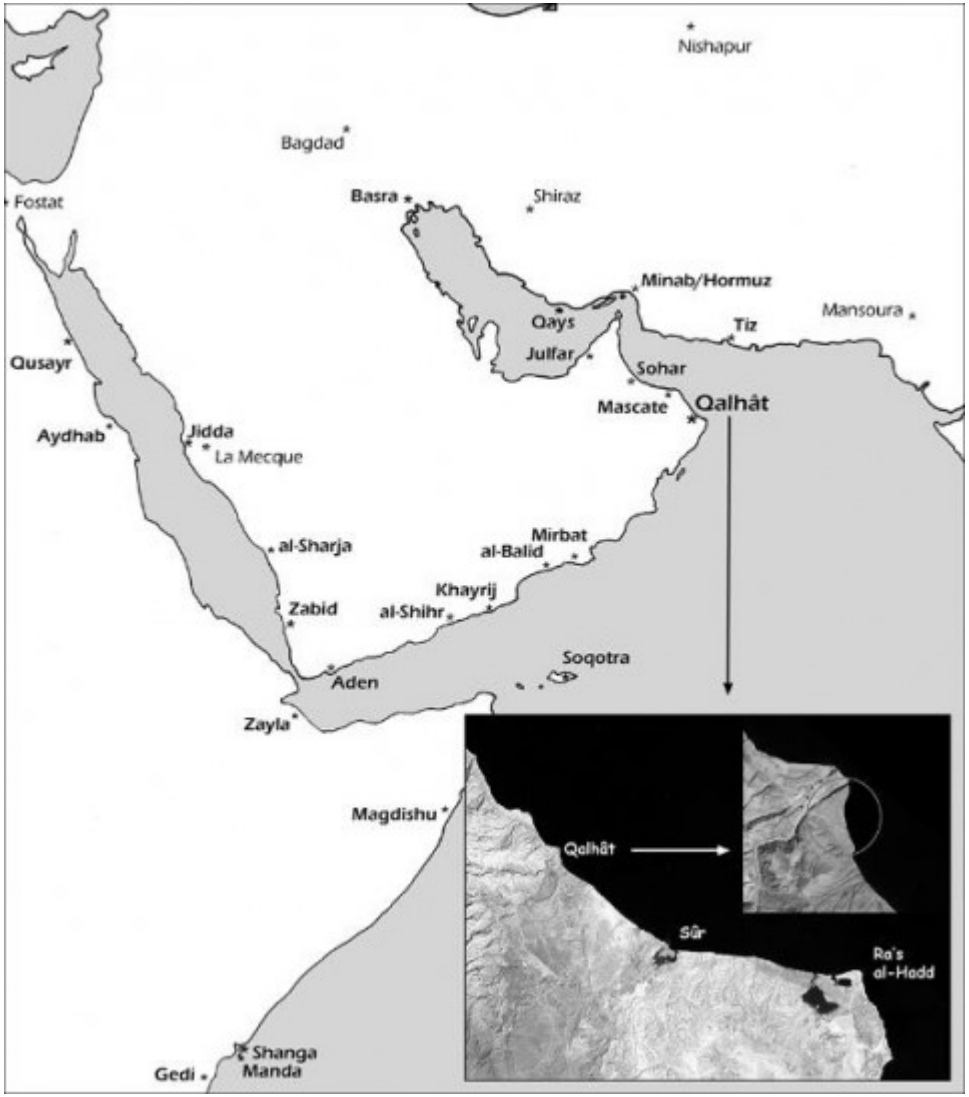


Fig. 2. Aerial view of the site before excavations (© MHC).

Fig. 3. Tentative preliminary map of the ancient city in its heydays, *c.* 15th century, showing the different quarters and main excavated buildings (© QP/QDP).

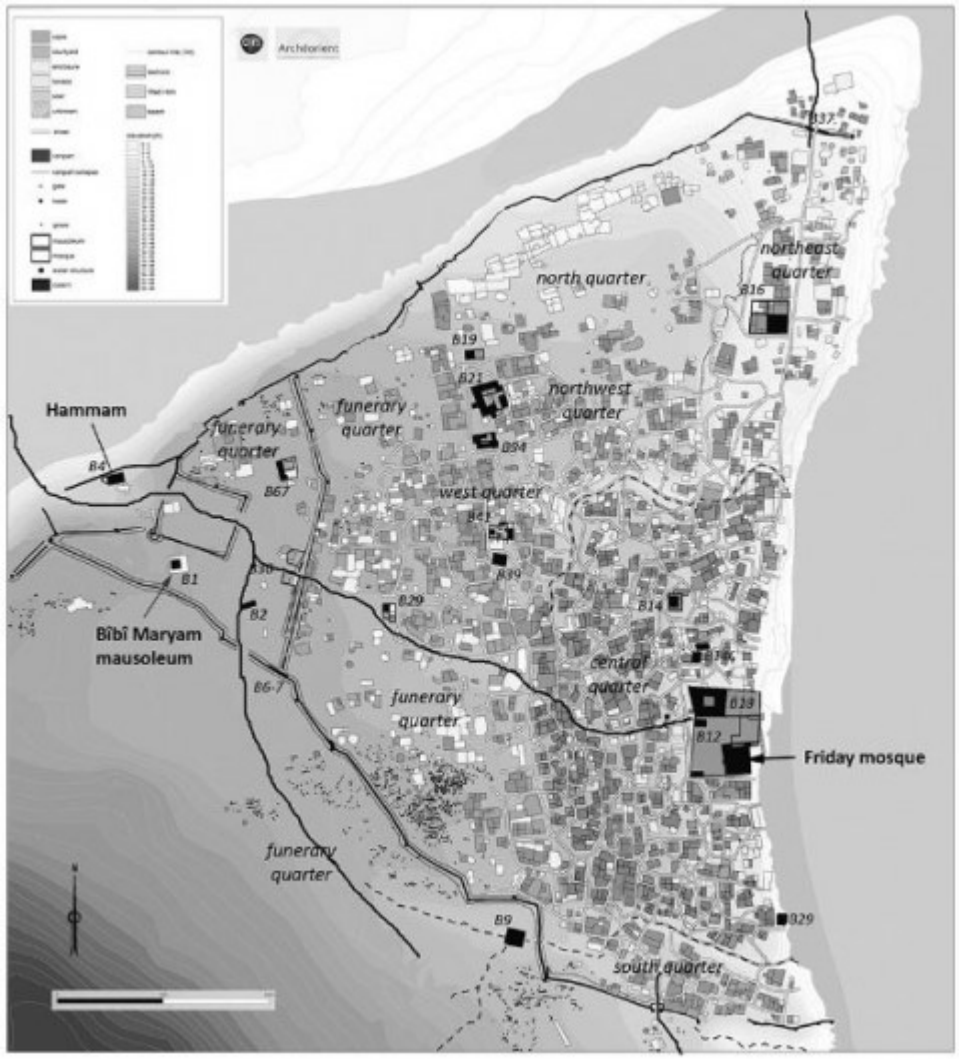


Fig. 4. An Indian style engraved slab, from twin houses B94 (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 5. Local and imported ceramics of the second half of the 16th century, from twin houses B94 (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 6. Satellite view of the area of Qalhāt (© Google).

Fig. 7. View of the central quarter and the beach, with the south fortification wall in the foreground (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 8. The city of Qalhāt around 1230 CE according to Ibn al-Mujāwir (from Smith 2008, p. 271).

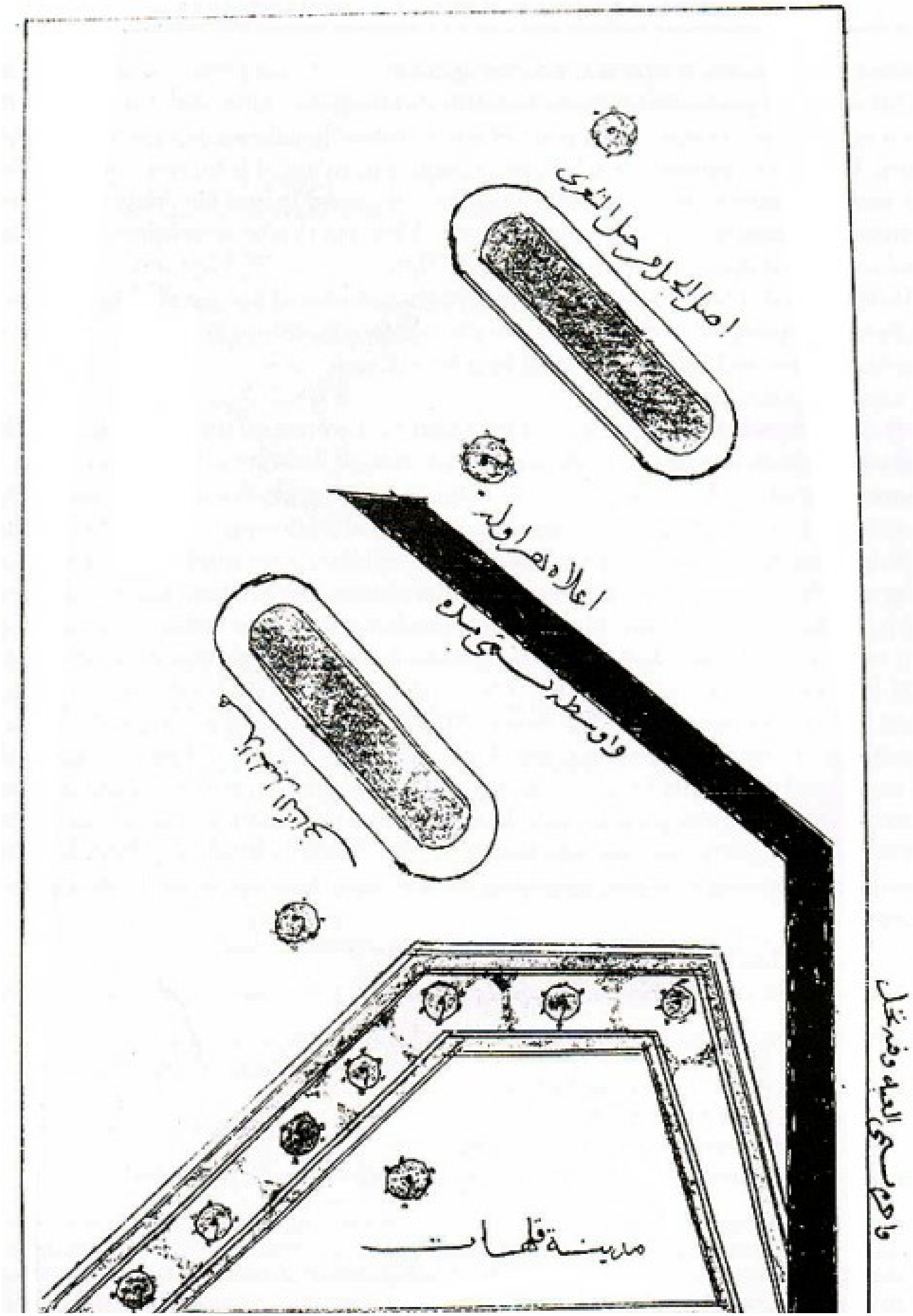

مدينة قلهات

Fig. 9. Section of the B6-B7 soundings showing the five successive phases of the fortifications (© QP/QDP).

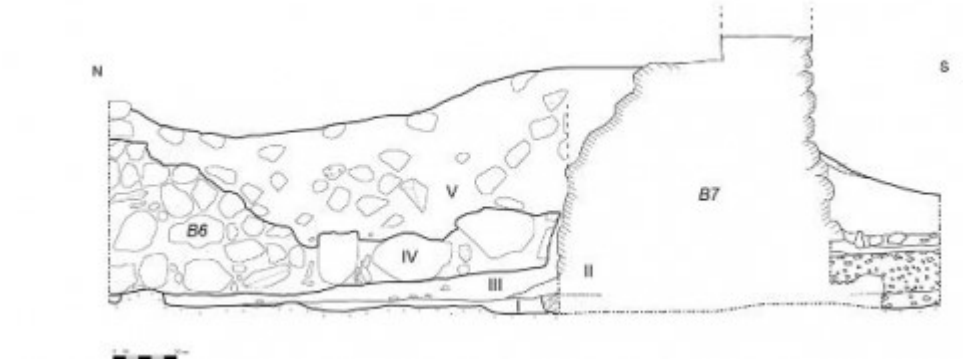


Fig. 10. A staircase leading on top of a tower in the southwest fortification wall.

Fig. 11. Plan of hammam B4 showing the water distribution systems (in red: hot water; in blue: cold water; in pink: waste water) (© QP/QDP).

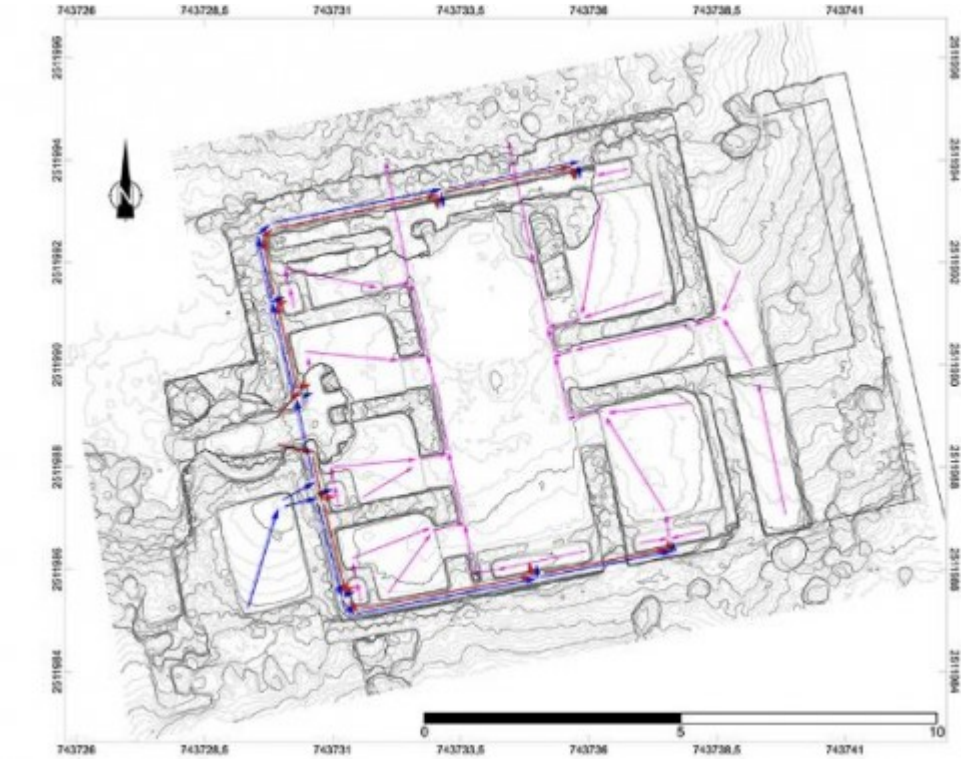


Fig. 12. The south coastal plateau, with the city in the foreground and the advanced fortification wall in the background (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 13. The advanced fortification wall B10 (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 14. The northern lookout (B103-105) over the city (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 15. Vertical view of the great mosque unit (B12) after excavation (QDP/Iconem 2017).

Fig. 16. Preliminary restitution of the great mosque seen from the north (QDP/Iconem 2014).

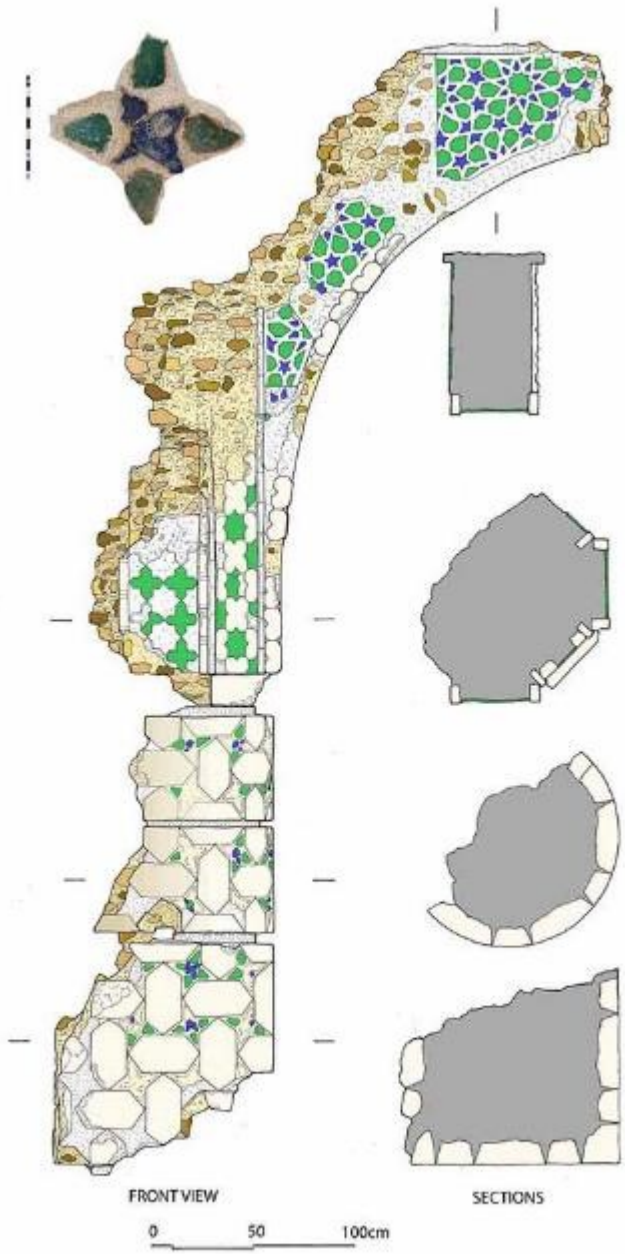
Fig. 17. Plan of the great mosque unit B12 (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 18. A fragment of a Kāshān lustre glazed tile from the great mosque (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 19. Fragments of polygonal plastered columns of the entrance hall, collapsed inside the basement (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 20. A cylindrical stone column of the prayer hall, collapsed inside the basement (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 21. Restitution of a column and arch under the cupola, with a detail of a decorative element inlaid in the column (© QP/QDP).


FRONT VIEW
SECTIONS
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50
100cm

Fig. 22. The *qibla* wall and west part of the prayer hall on top of the filled western spans of the basement (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 23. Fragment of an inscription from the area of the *mihrab* (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 24. The tower at the south-east corner of B13, overlooking the great mosque courtyard (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 25. The *sūq* (B140-141) (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 26. Standing ruins in the north complex B14 (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 27. Fragments of an inscription from the north complex (ICHTO excavations).

Fig. 28. Plan of the central quarter, from the Cartographical Project and detailed surface survey (in black: buildings; in white: courtyards; in grey: terraces) (© QP/QDP).

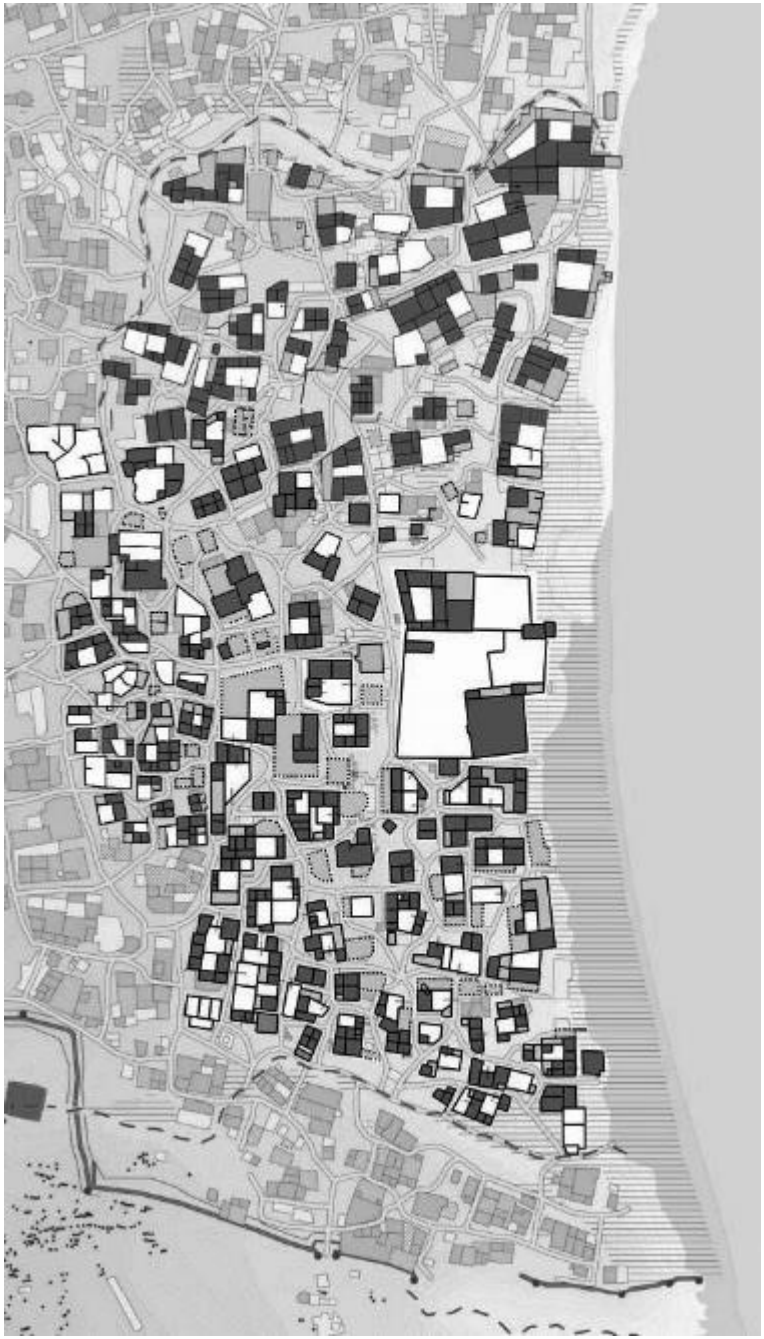

Fig. 29. Ancient houses in Hamra (from SALIMI, GAUBE & KORN 2008, p. 185).

Fig. 30. Kite view of the northern part of the site, the northeast and northwest quarters (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 31. Northeast corner of the *majlis* in building B16 (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 32. Excavated area in the northwest quarter (B19, B21, B94) (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 33. The platform mosque B19 (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 34. The large store B21 in phase I (a, 14th century) and III (b, 15th–16th centuries) (© QP/QDP).

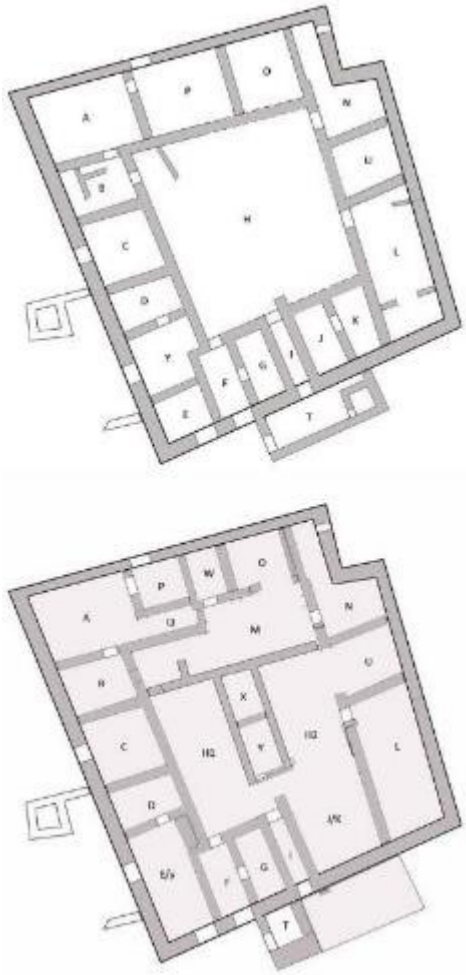

Fig. 35. Twin houses B94: a, plan; b, general view after conservation works (© QP/QDP).

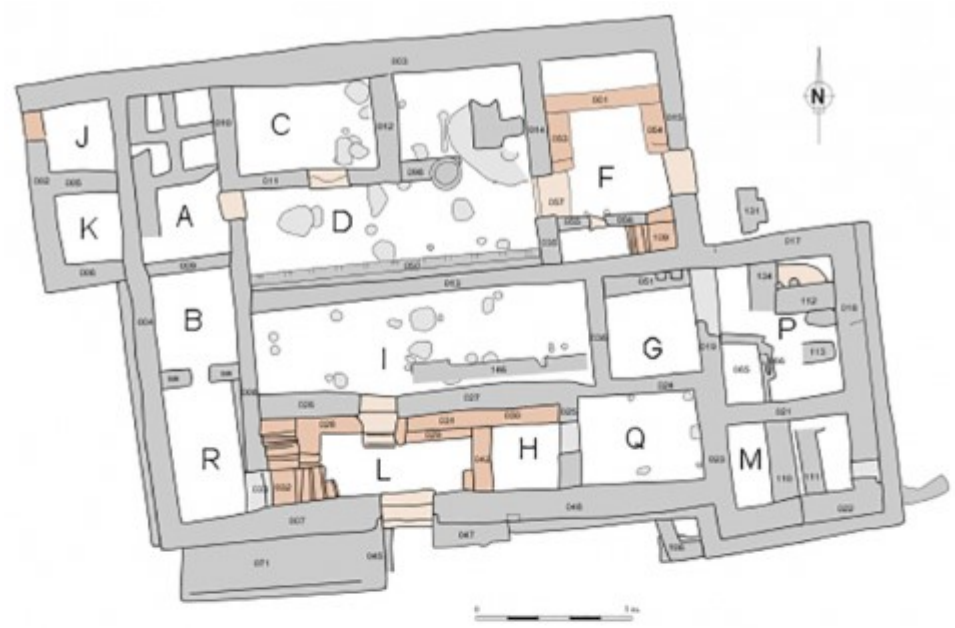
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Fig. 36. B94, the *madbasa* in the south house, room B (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 37. B94, the courtyard of the north house, with the chopping block in the foreground and the canal-shape structure against the south wall (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 38. The ceramic factory B41: a, plan; b, general view (© QP/QDP).

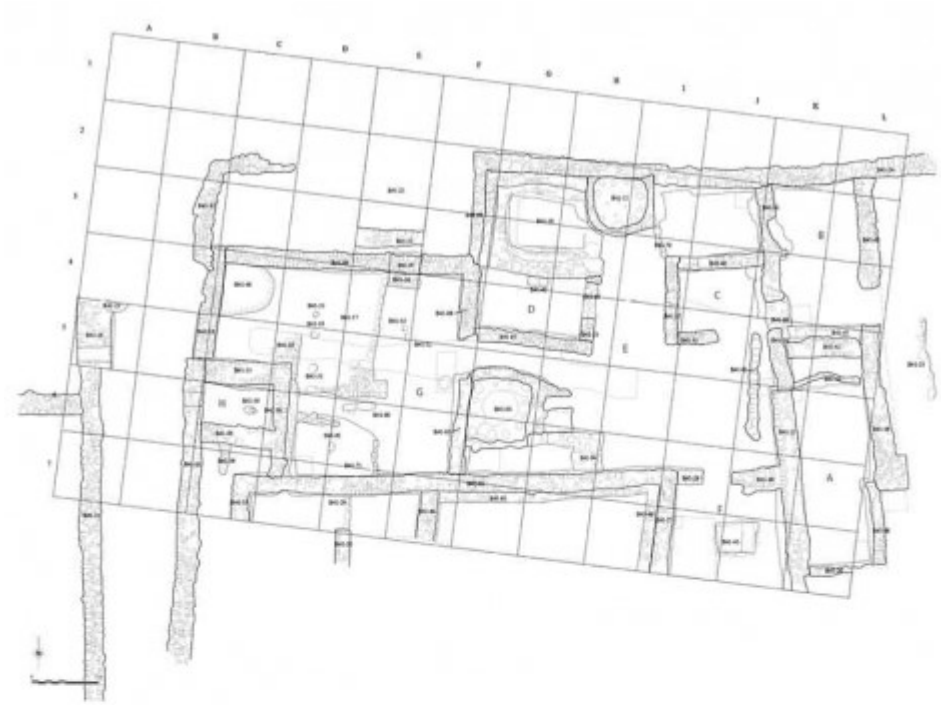

Fig. 39. Map of the funerary areas (© QP/QDP).

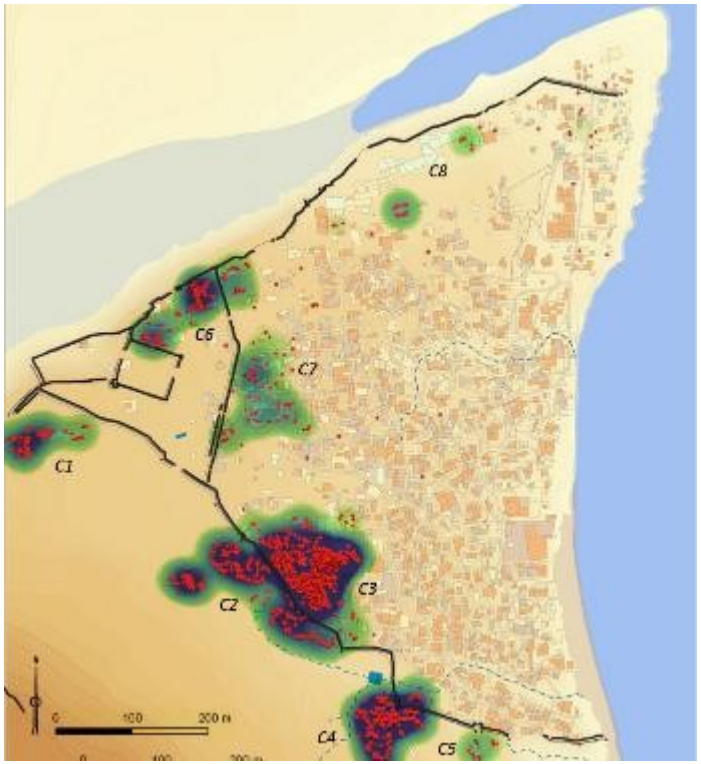

Fig. 40. The Bībī Maryam mausoleum (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 41. East-West photogrammetric section of Bībī Maryam mausoleum (QDP/Iconem).

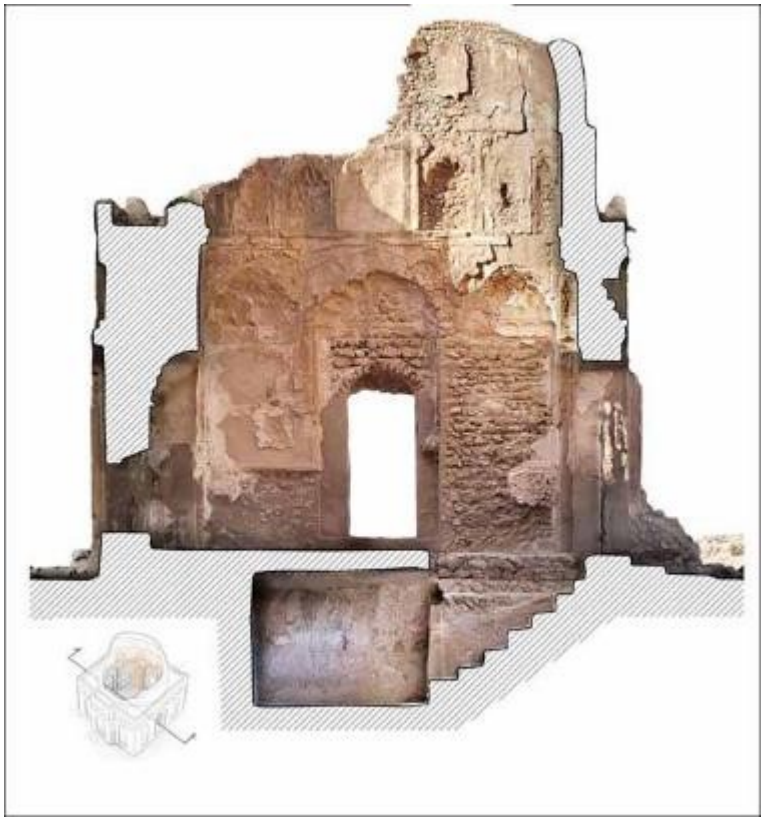

Fig. 42. Fragment of a turquoise glazed tile reportedly found in the area of the Bībī Maryam mausoleum (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 43. The small mausoleum B112 in the extramural graveyard C2 (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 44. A funerary terrace in graveyard C5, near the south gate of Qalhāt (© QP/QDP).

Fig. 45. Mosque B67 in graveyard C6 (© QP/QDP).

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Notes

1 VOSMER *et al.,* 1998; IBRAHIM & ELMAHI, 2000, p. 130-135; COSTA, 2002.

2 VOSMER 2004.

3 For a discussion about the origin and dating of this text, see ULRICH, 2008.

4 For details and references about the pre-Islamic Azd tradition, as on many other literary sources on Qalhāt, see BHACKER & BHACKER, 2004.

5 ULRICH, 2008.

6 WHITCOMB, 1975, p. 126 and fig. 8-9; READE, 1989; and personal documents.

7 SINCLAIR & FERGUSON, 1902, p. 154-155.

8 *Ibid*., p. 257.

9 BHACKER & BHACKER, 2004, p. 30-31.

10 YAQŪT, 1868, IV, p. 393, transl. G. Ducatez.

11 SMITH, 2008, p. 148-149, 269. Due to a corrupt manuscript, G. R. Smith translated 'Abyan' instead of 'al-Tīz', see VALLET, in press.

12 MILES, 1919, p. 129-130; BHACKER & BHACKER, 2004, p. 30.

13 SMITH, 2008, p. 269.

14 AL-IDRĪSĪ, 1970–1984, p. 155.

15 This is described as a poor village mostly deserted except during summer when it turned into an important wealthy city thanks to pearl fishing, whose beauty was famous; the place is not located.

16 DA10207-10209, displayed in the National Museum.

17 ROUGEULLE, 2010, p. 308-310.

18 KERVRAN, 2004, p. 343.

19 IBN ḤĀTIM, 1978, p. 131.

20 Unit of weight equal to about 800 to 1,000 grams, VALLET, 2010, p. 449.

21 SMITH, 2008, p. 277-278.

22 *Ibid*., p. 270, 278.

23 *Ibid*., figure 13.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 279.

25 Yaqūt, 1868, IV, p. 393, transl. G. Ducatez.

26 Bhacker & Bhacker, 2004, p. 33.

27 Polo, 2016, § 197, p. 190.

28 Aubin, 1953, p. 83-85; Bhacker & Bhacker, 2004, p. 35-36.

29 Aubin, 1953, p. 85.

30 See Bhacker & Bhacker, 2004, p. 34, the genealogical table of Hormuz princes.

31 Sinclair & Ferguson, 1902, p. 160-161.

32 Kervran, 1994, p. 343-344.

33 Aubin, 1953, p. 92-97.

34 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 2016, p. 225; Bhacker & Bhacker, 2004, p. 37 and note 40.

35 Sinclair & Ferguson, 1902, p. 172-173; Aubin, 1953, p. 103.

36 Yaqūt, 1868, IV, p. 393, transl. G. Ducatez.

37 Polo, 2016, § 197, p. 190-190.

38 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 66.

39 Vallet, 2010, p. 552.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 555.

41 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 2016, p. 224.

42 *Ibid.*, p. 113.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

44 Aubin, 1953, p. 120.

45 Kervran, 1994, p. 348; *id.* 2004, p. 342-343.

46 Tibbetts, 1971, p. 227.

47 On the importance of horses in medieval India and the trade of Arab horses from Yemen and the Gulf countries in the 13th century see Lambourn 2016; on the horse trade in Qalhāt see also Bhacker & Bhacker, 2004, p. 39-41.

48 Corsal, 1830, p. 365-366.

49 Vallet, 2010. p. 556.

50 *Ibid.*, p.552.

51 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 66.

52 De Barros, in Miles, 1919, p. 155.

53 Sinclair & Ferguson, 1902, p. 182.

54 Aubin, 1953, p. 119.

55 Bhacker & Bhacker, 2004, p. 38-39.

56 Aubin, 1973, p. 112, note 199.

57 Tibbetts, 1971, p. 213-214, 225-227.

58 Mountain & Prell, 1990.

59 Wilkinson, 1990, p. 500.

60 Aubin, 1973, p. 89, 112; Ambraseys & Melville, 1982, p. 181.

61 Aubin, 1973, p. 112.

62 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 66.

63 Aubin, 1973, p. 113, with numerous references.

64 Barbosa, 2010, I, p. 68-69.

65 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 66-67.

66 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

67 *Ibid.*: 63.

68 *Ibid.*: 66.

69 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 217.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 221.

71 Aubin, 1973, p. 115; Miles, 1919, p. 155.

72 Corsal, 1830, p. 365-366.

73 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 221.

74 Agius, 1999, p. 179.

75 Floor, 2006, p. 34, with references. On the Portuguese presence at Qalhāt, see Couto, 2011, p. 138-140.

76 Agius, 1999, p. 179.

77 Figueroa, 1667, p. 11-12.

78 Cited in Bhacker & Bhacker, 2004, p. 20.

79 Wellsted, 1838, I, p. 41.

80 Miles 1919, p. 473-475.

81 Vosmer 2004, p. 400-401, and personal communication.

82 Rougeulle, 2010, p. 308-309.

83 Smith, 2008, p. 278 and fig. 13.

84 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 217-218.

85 *Ibid.*: 218.

86 *Ibid.*: 218-219.

87 *Ibid.*: 219.

88 *Ibid.*, p. 66.

89 A wide square enclosure (B3) was built on this breach after Qalhāt was abandoned, destroying part of the Bībī Maryam complex, probably for the same purpose.

90 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 63.

91 Three openings are in fact visible in this wall but the northernmost was opened in recent times by a bulldozer, although it could have reused an older passage now totally destroyed.

92 Vosmer, 2004, p. 396-398; Rougeulle 2017.

93 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 2016, p. 225.

94 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 221.

95 *Ibid.*, p. 219.

96 Vosmer *et al.*, 1998, p. 20 and fig. 25; Agius, 1999, note 9 p. 196.

97 Ibrahim & ElMahi, 2000, p. 131.

98 Costa, 2001, p. 176-177; *id.* 2002.

99 Rougeulle, 2010, p. 308-312; Rougeulle, Creissen & Bernard, 2012.

100 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 217.

101 Goulart, 1581, p. 225.

102 A preliminary description of the mosque according to the 2008-2011 excavations is given in Rougeulle, Creissen & Bernard, 2012, now outdated on some points.

103 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, 2016, p. 225.

104 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 219.

105 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 221.

106 Komaroff & Carboni, 2002, p. 52, 94-97, fig. 49.

107 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 219.

108 Aubin, 1973, p. 86-90.

109 **A**n excavation season was carried out at Qalhāt in spring 2008 by an Iranian team of the ICHTO, under the direction of Mr Mohsen Javeri. Other than excavating part of B14, it also did restoration works on two small mausoleums in the extramural graveyard.

110 Aubin, 1973, p. 88.

111 *Ibid.*, p. 90.

112 *Ibid.*, p. 93.

113 Rougeulle *et al.,* 2014.

114 De Albuquerque, 1875–1880, I, p. 220.

115 The spatial distribution of the various types of burials is currently under study.

116 It is sometimes hypothesized that the mausoleum was not destroyed by the Portuguese as they thought it might be a Christian shrine, given the name of Maryam. It is also possible that the mausoleum was in fact outside the area under their control, which would have stopped at intermediary wall B6.

117 Costa, 2001, p. 178-182.

118 As many of the conservation projects of the MHC, this restoration was held under the direction of Mr Enrico Derrico. A digital virtual visit of the mausoleum was realized in 2014 by the Iconem agency as part of the Qalhāt Cartographical Project, https://sketchfab.com/models/a0c8bae4d03548e695c4e71a5b96f2b5.

119 Wellsted, 1838, I, p. 41.

120 Costa, 2001, p. 176.

121 Simsek *et al.*, 2014.

122 The submission file to add Qalhāt to the UNESCO's World Heritage List is currently under evaluation.

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Auteur

Axelle Rougeulle
CNRS-UMR 8167 Orient & Méditerranée

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