

## **Nizwi Cultural Role “From the Bronze Age to the Islamic Era”**

**Prof. Dr. Essam El-Saeed**

**Professor of Egyptian and the Near East History, Faculty of Arts,  
Alexandria University**

**The College of Arts and Human Sciences, Sultan Qaboos University**

**The Omani Peninsula has many sites and cultural centers, and these centers have played important roles throughout history, whether that has been done synchronically or diachronically, so the civilization roles were inherited one after another.**

**If we look at the geographical locations of these cultural centers, we will find that they were varied in terms of location. Some of them were originated on the coast of the Arabian Gulf, such as: “Umm al-Nar”, “Tal Abraq”, “Al-Dur”, “Julfar” and “Shaml”, and some of them originated on the coast of the Omani Gulf, such as: “Dibba”, “Sohar”, “Ras Al Jinz”, “Ras Al Hamra” and “Tire”, not only that, but many of them were originated in internal locations of the Omani Peninsula as well, like some areas that were near the mountains valley, and others that were in oasis.**

**If we notice this multiplicity and diversity in the cultural centers, we will find that they are reflection of the effective role of the natural environment in the emergence and formation of these archaeological sites. The environment in the Omani Peninsula varied between coastal and inland environments, and surface that characterize both of them, either mountainous or plain areas.**

**This diversity in the environment of these cultural centers, resulted in a diversity in the nature of the finds that were found in these sites, not only, but this environmental diversity was reflected in the nature of the activities**

of the inhabitants of these sites. For example, the occupations of the inhabitants in the mountainous regions focused on making stone tools, extracting and smelting copper, and building kilns.

These civilizational centers have played important economic roles in the region, and have contributed to cultural communication between the Omani Peninsula and the neighboring regions.<sup>1</sup>

In the civilized framework of the third millennium B.C, and in conjunction with the spread of "Umm al-Nar" cultural era, the area of the inner foothills of the mountains which was extending from "Buraimi" to "Ibri", and with a length of about 350 km, had witnessed the emergence of many internal settlements, such as: "Buraimi", "Hafeet", "Wadi Kabir", "Wadi Amli" and "Wadi Bahla, Nizwa, Wadi Al Athali, Wadi Ibri, and other archaeological sites.<sup>2</sup>

### Nizwi Cultural Center

Nizwi Cultural Center had a great position in the Omani Peninsula; it could be inferred through the numerous writings and historical studies that dealt with its various aspects in terms of its origin, political and religious role, its most prominent personalities throughout the history, and the population's economic, cultural and social activities. Many great historians referred to such as Al-Maqdisi, Al-Bakri, Al-Dimashqi, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Ruzaiq and Al-Azkawi.

### Location

Nizwa is located in the interior region of Oman, at the foot of the Green Mountain. Some researchers in the history and civilization of the region believe that the "Jopin" that King "Judea" referred to in his documents, is the

<sup>1</sup> - المقدسي والبكري عن بلاد عمان في: عمان في التاريخ، وزارة الإعلام، سلطنة عمان، لندن: دار إميل للنشر المحدودة، ١٩٩٥، ص ٢١ وما بعدها.

<sup>2</sup> - سامي سعيد الأحمد "الخليج العربي في التاريخ القديم"، سلسلة الموسوعة التاريخية المسيرة"، بغداد، ١٩٨٩، ص ٢٨.

area of the Green Mountain, and "Nizwa" region constitutes one of its centers of civilization. The most likely assumption is that this region was a rich source of oak trees; which were imported or exported by the rulers of Mesopotamia for industrial and construction work.

Nizwa is far about 180 km from the city of Muscat. It is bordered to the north by the green mauntain, to the south by the state of Manah, to the east by the state of "Izki" and to the west by the state of "Bahla".<sup>3</sup>

Nizwa in particular has had a unique position among all other sites and civilization centers on the Omani peninsula, due to its central strategic location between the most important production centers and export ports. The commercial caravans loaded with commodities that Majan was famous for exporting passed through Nizwa, and it might be noticed throughout what was mentioned in the records of King "Judea" (2144–2124 BC) of the second dynasty of "Leghish". The documents mentioned that he imported from the country of "Jopin" a variety of goods, including wood and diorite stones, in order to make statues of himself and his main God "Ningersu".<sup>4</sup>

Nizwa was certainly one of the most important centers of civilization through which land trade convoys carrying copper, timber and other commercial goods passed through, which Majan exports to Mesopotamia through ports linking it abroad, such as the ports of Tire, Sohar and Ras al-Jinz. and "Umm an-Nar" and "Tal Abraq". It was noted that these coastal sites were linked to many inland sites by caravan routes. Nizwa continued to play its pioneering role in the Omani peninsula during successive periods of civilization until it reached the peak of its civilizational prosperity, starting from the first Islamic eras and up to the present day.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>٣</sup> - نزوى عبر التاريخ، حصاد الندوة التي أقامها المنتدى الأدبي في نزوى، في الفترة من (٧-٨ أكتوبر ٢٠١٠)، ط ٢، مسقط، ٢٠٠٧، ص ١٣.

<sup>٤</sup> - G.A., Barton, *The Royal Inscription of Sumer and Akkad*, New Haven, 1929, p. 108ff.

<sup>٥</sup> - رشيد الناصوري، دور عمان في فجر التاريخ، حصاد ندوة الدراسات العمانية، م ١، سلطنة عمان: وزارة التراث القومي والثقافة، ١٩٨٠، ص ٨٥.

### Settlements in Nizwa

While Nizwa Cultural Center had been growing up, settlement was, continuous and concentrated in valleys and oases, and the settlement in this area took a character consistent with the nature of the valley's flow, which is the longitudinal style. And in locations very close to the banks of flowing valleys; This made it vulnerable to torrential damage; Consequently, its features disappear, and then: Tracing the civilizational role of Nizwi, like other inner cities, is very difficult; This is due to the extinction of the monuments due to the weather conditions, but through the few evidence.

Undoubtedly, fertile lands, abundance of water, and ease of communication were among the major factors of settlement in "Nizwa" region during its ancient times. The finding of settlements and cemeteries near palm farms indicates the residents' desire to reconcile the residential environment with the livelihood and life environment.

From this point of view, if "Jopen" was one of the areas of the green mountain while commercial caravans carrying wood and other types of goods were passing through "Nizwa". It is necessary for settlement to exist in Nizwa during that period of the Bronze Age, in order for it to play a vital role as a transit point and meeting place for various caravans.

It is possible that the first inhabitants moved from one location to another in the valley, searching for protection, water and fertile land. But the water didn't seem a major problem for the population despite the fact that many valleys dry up in the summer months. Certainly, the availability of water in "Nizwa" was one of the most important factors for agriculture. Evidence indicates that the people dug wells to obtain water. Therefore, Nizwa settlement, like other inland settlements, is considered oasis cities, which arose and developed near fertile areas with abundant fresh water and

adequate natural resources. This has made it, over time, the home of an important agricultural and commercial habitat in the region.<sup>6</sup>

There was compatibility between man and the environment in this region; he used valleys and torrential streams as roads and corridors for crossing and transportation. At the same time, many mining places were located on the banks of the valleys, so that smelting, mining, transportation, and transportation were almost all in close proximity. The residents of Nizwa and other nearby residents relied in their livelihood on hunting wild animals, trees, agriculture and raising cattle.

In fact, "Nizwa" and all the other archaeological sites in this region extending from "Ibri" to "Buraimi", despite the different environments of their places, were linked with each other by a network of land roads, which worked on the continuity of their local and regional connection, which in turn led to the occurrence of a kind of Economic integration, which resulted in a cultural unity, called the Omani Peninsula in its ancient times.<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the site of "Umm al- Nar", it was considered a commercial international port of Mesopotamia. Perhaps the dense presence of Mesopotamian pottery and the abundant material contents of the harbors are evidence of the validity of this hypothesis. It should be noted that general analysis of sea levels during the era of the prosperity of "Umm al- Nar" as a port indicate that the sea level was slightly higher than it is now, which implies that the site of "Umm An- Nar" was on an island in the middle of shallow waters, and thus; It was natural for the site to be suitable for berthing and sailing boats to and from. Especially, if we know that Umm al- Nar was in constant contact with the "Hili" oasis, which is the point from which it reaches the copper mines in "Wadi al- Jizi" and the foothills of the

<sup>6</sup> M.,Tosi, Notes on the Distribution and Exploitation on Natural Ressources in Ancient Oman", JOS, vol.1, 1975, p.187ff .

<sup>7</sup>G., Weisgerber, "Copper Production During the third Millemmum B.C in Oman and the Question of Makkan", JOS, 6, 1983, p.44ff.

mountains of Oman, through the road network that connected the interior regions with the marine settlements, including Nizwa.<sup>8</sup>

The settlements of Nizwa date back to the late Bronze Age and the beginning of the Iron Age (1300–1100 BC), but they were located in the cluster near the valleys in which water flows, so they did not withstand various environmental factors, but they were inferred, during the archaeological finds on the site of Al-Hawra mountain at Bu Ali Fort, which is located east of Nizwa on a giri cliff, near Sharjah Al Hudira. This site was settled also in the Islamic era; this conclusion is based on the glazed pottery sherds that were found in the site.

As for their homes, they were constructed from untrimmed stones; the walls are built in two parallel rows. Some of these settlements were surrounded by towers as in the settlement Some of Nizwa, where K. Frevelet found. So we can conclude extent to which Nizwa was important<sup>9</sup>.

They had an economic, military and political good position, so the remains of a building were found, consisting of a circular tower similar to the tower which remains were found in "Hili 1", "Bat" and "Maysar". In fact, such tower buildings, which were built from the available stones near the slopes of the mountains, represent defensive buildings for the place, due to the enormity of their dimensions, including the Ajam Dam, which was built to repel Persian attacks on the settlement, as well as the fortifications in which the houses were built<sup>10</sup>.

The settlements have evolved from the open area to the fenced area that includes all civil, religious and military installations, which are the old lanes in Nizwa, such as Haret Siba and Al Aqar.

<sup>8</sup> - أحمد خليفة الشامسي، الإمارات العربية منذ الألف الثالث ق.م وحتى نهاية الألف الثاني ق.م، دراسة حضارية، رسالة ماجستير غير منشورة - كلية الآداب، جامعة بيروت العربية، ٢٠٠٠، ص ١٢٢.

<sup>9</sup> K., Frifel, "On Prehistoric Settlement and Chronology of the Oman Peninsula", *East and West*, 4, No. 25, p. 368 ff.

<sup>10</sup> - *ibid.*, p. 188ff.

The civilizational role of Nizwa could be noticed in the context of comparing the archaeological finds with their counterparts in Amman and its neighborhoods. The archaeological finds distinguished their industry from other archaeological finds from the same time period, which were found in: Samad, Bat, and Maysar. And “Wadi al-Jaza”, and “Wadi Suq”, or in “Al-Qusais”, “Jarn Bint Saud”, “Hili” and other similar sites, where we see their uniqueness in the shape and style of the piece and the decorations on it. For example, the ax of “Al-Hawra mountain ”by being closer to straightness than the prevailing crescent shape, and the back side of the cutter is straight in shape, and is characterized by strength and durability, which in turn connects to the hollow or the ring in which the ax arm is inserted, and this ring is distinguished by its uniqueness in terms of shape and decorative element, as it has a conical shape In contrast to the cylindrical shape that was prevalent in ax-making techniques during the Bronze and Iron Ages.<sup>11</sup>

### Cemeteries

Cemeteries were another indication of the existence of settlements, and their archaeological finds were an important source for understanding some of the beliefs of the societies as well as the position and profession of the tomb owner. A war ax, three daggers, and twelve arrowheads were found in one of Nizwi’s graves. A number of steatite vessels were also found, in addition to pottery vessels, and a circular seal made of limestone containing decorations and inscriptions inside a cemetery near "Al-Hawra Mountain" settlement. It dates back to the Wadi Suq era. These uncovered finds reflect the position of the cemetery owner, who enjoyed a prominent one among the settlement's residents. It is worth noting that the funeral attachments that were found inside "Al-Hawra Mountain" cemetery – with some of them

---

<sup>11</sup> - نزوى عبر التاريخ، مرجع سابق، ص ٢٣-٢٤.

being looted and vandalized – all indicated that the settlement residents believed that there was another life after death.

These finds inside the cemetery also indicated the existence of commercial and cultural links are linking "Nizwa" to other sites and cultural centers in the southeastern region of the Arabian Peninsula in particular, and Mesopotamia and the Indus Valley in general, as the steatite pots found, we see the repeated decorative pattern of the circle. Semi colons, and streaks that take the form of repeating parallel lines or triangles. Perhaps the reference for this civilizational similarity is due to the fact that "Nizwa" is a settlement area that constitutes a special importance as a crossing point for the convoys on the road connecting it with "Bahla"

As for the site of "Tal Abraç", it was also one of the important ports through which Magan carried out its international trade, especially those that were with Mesopotamia. "Dr. Potts" assumes that the site was located at a point to which the paths adjacent to the foothills of the mountains lead after a short journey through the desert or the paths that follow the rather easy valleys, which cross these mountains to the Indian Ocean at the same latitude.

Perhaps the importance of the port of "Tal Abraç" because it lies on land, which provided it with protection – something that was not available in the case of the port of Umm al-Nar – in addition to its proximity to the interior region of the Emirate of "Fujairah", where diorite deposits abound, that stone that was One of the priorities of free exports to Mesopotamia, and cuneiform texts referred to it in more than one place.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding the "Ras al-Jinz" site, it was an important site for fishermen, rather than an international port that practiced its activities in the field of international trade, in the manner of the sites of "Umm al-Nar" and "Tal Abraç". Dr. Potts notes that "Umm al-Nar" and "Tal Abraç" were linked

---

<sup>12</sup> - D.T., Potts, Ancient Magan, the secrets of Tell Abraç, London, 2000, p.14ff.

internally with the same socio-economic patterns of life that linked Ras al-Junais and Ras al-Hadd with the agricultural settlements in the Batha Valley<sup>13</sup>.

Among the phenomena worth noting is the availability of large mining workshops in the areas of Wadi al-Jizi system in northern Oman, "rich in copper," Wadi Smile, and southern Nizwa. Work in these workshops has been carried out since the third millennium B.C. In addition, large mining workshops dating back to the same era were found. Time in the valley of "Endam" and the valley of "Ibra". It seems that the inhabitants of these places were dependent on the exploitation of copper and its export to Mesopotamia, which is indicated by Mesopotamian texts, especially texts covering the time period of the third millennium B.C.<sup>14</sup>

It should be noted that the copper of Magan – "the strategic product of free exports – during the second millennium B.C., was no longer as important to Mesopotamia as it was during the third millennium B.C. Perhaps the reason for this is attributed to several factors, including: the emergence of other areas of copper production such as the island of "Cyprus", which soon began to supply Mesopotamia with what it needs of copper, in addition to that, Magan copper no longer reached directly to Mesopotamia, but rather what It was emitted from it through Dilmun, whose people had a monopoly on what was left of Magan's copper. This is why the late Assyrians recorded in their annals that Dilmun was the source of copper instead of Magan. The people of Dilmun became activists and trade brokers in the Arab Gulf region.

From this point of view, the Mesopotamian records starting from the second millennium B.C, mention "Dilmun" as being the main financier for what Mesopotamia needs of copper and neglecting to mention Magan, but

<sup>13</sup> - Ibid., p. 144ff.

<sup>14</sup> عمان في فجر الحضارة، سلسلة تراثنا، ع ٦، سلطنة عمان: وزارة التراث القومي والثقافة، ١٩٨٥، ص ٢٧ - ٢٨.

this historical projection on Magan did not prevent it from fulfilling its civilized role, as It did not affect its copper production, so it remained the main supplier of copper, but through "Dilmun". From here emerge the economic relations that joined the Magan region with Dilmun, relations that Mesopotamia was the main axis in its inception<sup>15</sup>.

.Undoubtedly, the commercial contact between "Majan" and each of "Mesopotamia", "Dilmun", "Malukha" and others, has led to the establishment of rules for commercial transactions, organized by laws and governed by commercial custom and common interests. Perhaps one of the most prominent commercial rules is that of the special system for regulating dealings and exchanges on the basis of bartering for various products, because the currency had not yet been silenced at that early time.

The grains were taken as the basis of barter, and they remained the standard until copper, silver and gold were used, and these materials were weighed by measures. It is noticeable that southern Mesopotamia has known several types of these weights, including Shqil, Mana and Zanah. These weights soon became the basis of the systems of trade.

With regard to the actual mechanism of copper trade in the Omani Peninsula region (Majan) in the third millennium B.C, researchers in the history of the region face many research problems related to that economic axis, including: How was mining for copper carried out either, whether by individuals or institutions, And what was the nature of the trading regimes at that time, and did the Sumerians establish commercial colonies in the Omani Peninsula along the lines of other sites, or did the merchants on the

---

<sup>15</sup>- D.T., Potts, "Towards an Integrated History of Culture Change in The Arabian Gulf Area : Notes on Dilmun, Makkan and the Economy of Ancient Sumer", JOS, 4, 1978, p. 46ff.

Omani Peninsula travel by themselves to Dilmun and from where the copper trade moved to Sumer<sup>16</sup>

The Danish archaeological mission at the site of the ancient port of "Sahar" found some cubes of different sizes of polished flint stone, and others spherical in shape with two flat faces, both of which represent different weights similar in shapes and sizes similar to the "Indus Valley" civilization.<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, a number of these weights were found in the sites of "Shaml" and "Tal Abraq," while in "Umm an-Nar" weights were found, possibly to be cut to be used for weights and measures. More than thirty seals of various kinds, dating back to the Bronze Age, were also found. In fact, these seals are truly distinctive signs of commercial systems and commercial exchange transactions. Although the idea of using seals was borrowed from abroad, it has adapted to local needs and ideas, and its presence in various locations on the Omani Peninsula indicates the prevalence and spread of administrative tools at all levels of transactions and commercial exchange.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, we can say that there are several factors that helped Magan to play its civilized role, not only in the field of trade between East and West, but also in the development and advancement of its civilization, by absorbing and spreading the culture that accompanied trade and helped its transfer and passage.

Magan economic dealings with the civilizations of Mesopotamia, Dilmun and the Indus Valley provided the way for the inhabitants of these civilizations to visit Magan, and to transfer their civilization to them. Equally, the people of Magan were able to visit these areas, bringing with them their culture. Perhaps this is what Lamberg Karlovsky argued that

<sup>16</sup> - عمان في فجر الحضارة، صناعة التعدين في عمان القديمة، سلسلة تراثنا، العدد السادس، وزارة التراث القومي والثقافة، ص ٣٥ - ٣٩.

<sup>17</sup> - D.T., Potts, *Ancient Magan*, p. 198ff.

<sup>18</sup> أحمد خليفة الشامسي، مرجع سابق، ص ١٢٧.

trade was one of the main motives in the revitalization of the great parallel renaissance towards urban agglomerations in Mesopotamia, Magan, Dilmun and the Indus Valley<sup>19</sup>.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize the close link between the ancient centers of civilization that arose on the land of the Sultanate of Oman and the United Arab Emirates, which led to an interaction between them, whether socially, economically or politically, until these centers became by the advent of the third millennium B.C., representative of hotbeds of cultural radiation of one entity mentioned by the records of Mesopotamia and Persian records under the name of "Magan" civilization. And "Nizwa" city part of the whole which affected and was effected. Nizwa has actively contributed to writing the history of the region as a whole, and the archaeological remains discovered so far confirm the effectiveness of Nizwa's civilizational role.

---

<sup>19</sup> - , L., Karlovsky "Trade Mechanism in Indus Mesopotamian Interrelation", JAOS, 4, 1972, p.229ff.

## **Bibliography**

- أحمد خليفة الشامسي، الإمارات العربية منذ الألف الثالث ق.م وحتى نهاية الألف الثاني ق.م، دراسة حضارية، رسالة ماجستير غير منشورة - كلية الآداب، جامعة بيروت العربية، ٢٠٠٠.
- المقدسي والبكري عن بلاد عمان في: عمان في التاريخ، وزارة الإعلام، سلطنة عمان، لندن: دار إميل للنشر المحدودة، ١٩٩٥.
- رشيد الناضوري، دور عمان في فجر التاريخ، حصاد ندوة الدراسات العمانية، م ١، سلطنة عمان: وزارة التراث القومي والثقافة، ١٩٨٠.
- سامي سعيد الأحمد "الخليج العربي في التاريخ القديم"، سلسلة الموسوعة التاريخية المسيرة"، بغداد، ١٩٨٩.
- عمان في فجر الحضارة، سلسلة تراثنا، العدد السادس، سلطنة عمان: وزارة التراث القومي والثقافة، ١٩٨٥.
- نزوى عبر التاريخ، حصاد الندوة التي أقامها المنتدى الأدبي في نزوى، في الفترة من (٧- ٨ أكتوبر ٢٠١٠).
- D.T., Potts, **Ancient Magan, the secrets of Tell Abraq**, London, 2000.
- G.A., Barton, **The Royal Inscription of Sumer and Akkad**, New Haven, 1929.
- G., Weisgerber, "**Copper Production During the third Millennium B.C in Oman and the Question of Makkan**", JOS, 6, 1983.
- K., Frifel, "**On Prehistoric Settlement and Chronology of the Oman Peninsula**", East and West, 4, No. 25, 2000.
- L., Karlovsky "**Trade Mechanism in Indus Mesopotamian Interrelation**", JAOS, 4, 1972.
- M., Tosi, **Notes on the Distribution and Exploitation on Natural Ressources in Ancient Oman**, JOS, vol.1, 1975.