

IMTO – Italian Mission to Oman

University of Pisa

SUMHURAM

Preliminary Report

August 2017 (SUM17B)



PRELIMINARY REPORT (SUM17B)

August 2017

The second IMTO's campaign of 2017 (SUM17B), under the direction of prof. A. Avanzini, started on August 5th and ended on August 24th 2017.

Excavation was performed in two areas with different goals.

In Area B, the works were focused on the building BB3, with the aim of exposing the previous structures on which it was built.

In Area G, the street A266 was excavated to have a better idea of the layout of the area and its connection with the store-houses complex.

Excavations were conducted on the field by Prof. Alexander V. Sedov and dr. Cleto Carbonara. Mr. Said al Mashani was also present on the site.

Prof. Sedov and dr. Cleto Carbonara were responsible for documentation of pottery finds and objects.

The work of IMTO has been possible thanks to the collaboration of the Office of the Adviser of His Majesty the Sultan for Cultural Affairs in Salalah and in Muscat, in particular Ghanem al Shanfari, Said al Mashani, Ali al Kathiri, Said al Amri, Said al Salmi, Hassan al Jabri. We thank them all, together with all the Museum's team, for their kind helpfulness.

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Archaeological Report

Excavation in Area B: Building BB3 and square A74 (trench supervisor A. Sedov)

During the SUM17B season excavations at the Area B were carried out. Ruins of uppermost building BB3 were excavated at the area during SUM13A and SUM13C campaigns. It consisted of two adjacent rooms A202 and A203 connected through the passage in the wall M572. The entrance to the building was from the E through the passage in the wall M577. A small room A214, probably a staircase well, occupied the NW corner of the building BB3. Vast square A74 and small narrow street or “appendix” A215, which is continuation of A74, delimited the building BB3 on the N, separating from another structure (probably the building BB5, consisted of the room A208 and separated from the square and street by the walls M586, M604, M622; the wall M619 divided the room A208 into two premises). Material discovered in the ruins of BB3 characterized the last period of occupation at Sumhuram (fragments of Aksumite wares were found).

Ruins of the “early” structures were found under floors and walls of A203 during the season SUM13C after demolition of the northern wall M587 and part of the eastern wall M577. The following walls of the earlier structures were discovered: (1) the northern wall M618, which was built as continuation of the wall M169 of the storage room A207; (2) the eastern wall M611 running parallel to the wall M591 of the A207 and against it. The room under the A203 of the building BB3 was denoted as A213.

The primary aim of the excavations at the Area B in the present season was to understand the character and purpose of the “early” structures. The following “late” walls were demolished: (1) the remaining part of the wall M577; (2) the adjacent “late” wall M590; (3) “late” wall M571; (4) partially – remains denoted as the wall M589; (5) previously restored continuation of the wall M572(?) delimited the room A214 on the E and the wall (without no.) delimited the room A214 on the N. In addition, the western part of the square A74 (in front of the wall M618) was levelled. The following structures were unearthed.

Room A213. This is the room belonging to the “early” structures. The wall M618 with the entrance from the square A74, 1,0 m wide, delimited it on the N, and the wall M611 – on the E. Recently discovered wall M831 delimited the room on the W. It has a passage, 0,80 m wide, connecting the room A213 with adjacent room A280. The width of the room is 2,25 m, the excavated length is 3,8 m. The top filling of the room was denoted as US988. Its thickness is between 1,0 m in the southern part of the room and 0,55-0,6 m in the northern part. It consisted of loose greyish loam mixed with small stones, fragments of pottery, animal bones, marine shells, flecks of charcoal. The following small finds were discovered in the US988: (1) fragment of a whetstone; (2) a stone pendant; (3) a stone net-sinker; (4) three fragments of an iron object. The filling of the room was levelled down roughly to 29.00 point.

Room A280. It's a room located west of the A213, running parallel to it and connected with it through a passage in the wall M831. The excavated length of the room is 3,8 m, the excavated width is 0,65-0,9 m. The filling of the top part of the room, with thickness of about 0,5 m, is identical to the filling in the room A213 and was also denoted as US988. The filling of the room was levelled down roughly to 29.00 point.

Square A74. A vast square or a wide street A74 separated different structures in the Area B. Before construction of the Building BB3, it continued under the room A214 and together with A215 constituted an “appendix” separating the “early” structures revealed under BB3 and the building BB5. Its length is about 2,0 m, the width – 2,7 m. The wall M832 closed the “appendix” A215 on the W. Remains of a staircase (M833) built against the external face of the wall M618 was discovered in the square A74. The length of the staircase is about 3,5 m. The staircase had 4 (?)

steps, 0,7-1,25 wide, leaned on the wall M832 and led, probably, on the top of the structure denoted as A145. The surface of the square in its western part was levelled down to the elevation 29.00 (from the elevation 29.65-29.5). The filling in the square was denoted as US985. Its thickness was 0,5-0,6 m, and it consisted of loose and hard loam mixed with small stones, flecks of charcoal, pottery fragments, animal bones and marine shells. The following small finds were found in the US985: (1) fragment of a whetstone; (2) fragment of a stone vessel; (3) an oil lamp (*Chlamys townsendi*); (4) a stone cover for vessel (amphora?): (5) a bronze coin. The filling of the “appendix” A215 was denoted as US990. It consisted of loose loam mixed with big amount of small and medium size stones, fragments of pottery, animal bones and marine shells, flecks of charcoal. The following small finds were found in US990: (1) a bone handle of a metal tool (3 fragments); (2) a bone container for needles (fragment); (3-4) two net-sinker stones.

Conclusion

Preliminary results of the SUM17B excavations at the Area B can be summarised as follows:

- 1) It's clear now that the Building BB3 was constructed above the ruins of the “early” structures built during the 1st constructional phase of Sumhuram against the city-wall. The walls of the Building BB3 were set up either above the filling of the previously existed rooms (like walls M588, M572, M577) or above the walls of the “early” rooms and constructions (like wall M571 and walls delimited room A214 on the E and N using the “early” wall M618 and staircase M833 as foundation). According to the floor levels there were at least two constructional phases of the “late” Building BB3 (see *Reports SUM13A and SUM13B*).
- 2) It seems very likely that the rooms A213 and A280 of the “early” structures were similar to the elongated storage room A207 and constituted part of the southern storage complex of Sumhuram. The staircase M833 was also constructed during the 1st constructional phase of Sumhuram and was, probably, connected with the access to the entire southern storage complex (through the construction denoted as A145). Both suppositions need further investigations.
- 3) Pottery material revealed in the US985, US988 and US990 (fragments of twin handled amphorae and *terra sigillata*) confirms the proposed dates of construction of the rooms A213, A280 and staircase M833.
- 4) During the next campaign in order to understand the real planning and character of the “early” structures it is absolutely necessary to demolish all wall of the “late” Building BB3 (walls M365, M572, M573, M588, M589) and completely expose the rooms A213 and A280. In the future it will be necessary to continue excavations of the structure denoted as A145.

Excavation in Area G: Street A266 and area to the South of BG2, with new rooms A279, A282, A283 (trench supervisor: Cleto Carbonara).

During the SUM17B archaeological campaign, the excavations in Area G have been carried on in a period of time that goes from the 5th to the 24th of August 2017. The main purpose of this operation was the understanding of the real extension of Sumhuram's storehouses complex to the South and to the West.

A266

A266 is a long street located in the southern part of the Area G, in particular between the buildings BG1 and BG2. It is 9.65 m wide and 3.57 m long, and it runs from the square A260 to the North, to the storehouses complex to the South. A266 was already partially excavated in the previous campaigns SUM16B and SUM17A. During the campaign SUM17A, the excavations in A266 stopped to the elevation of 30.05 m. and the US874 was not completely removed.

The works of SUM17B started with the removal of **US874**, which is a thick accumulation layer. Its thickness is *circa* 0.40 m. It is grayish brown in color and compact in consistence. Several limestone blocks were found in the southern part of A266 and in its northwestern part too. The bigger stones are located along the walls M788 and M823, delimiting the street to the East and to the West. They are surely related to the collapse of the buildings located on the two sides of the street. US874 is also characterized by a strong presence of traces of lime. US874 also returned a good amount of animal bones and marine shells. US874 floor consists of a packed soil very compact in consistence and grayish in color. Almost flat in its southern part, it shows a slope to the North, near the connection with the square A260. The elevation of US874 floor changes from 29.64 m. to the South, to 29.54 m. to the North. In A260, the elevation of US874 floor is 29.38 m. Along the eastern and western side of the street, there were two lenses of crumbled mudbricks and limestone chips. They could be interpreted as the working scraps for the construction of the masonry of the two buildings BG1 and BG2. US874 returned a good amount of pottery fragments, the major part of which belongs to storage vessels. Several objects come from this layer too: an oil lamp (Sh841), a bronze coin (Co1124), a clamp and two nails (MI335-336-337), three stone tools (S2993-2994-2995), a soft-stone vessel fragment (S2996) and an ornament (S3006).

In the South-eastern corner of the street A266, US874 floor is cut by a hole with an irregular shape. It is closed by the walls M788 of the BG1 and M214 of the store-houses complex, respectively on the eastern and southern side. This hole is 1.74 m long, 1.22 m wide and 0.34 m deep and it was filled by loose burnt loam dark-grayish in color with a clay matrix (**US989**). The bottom is made of clay medium compact in consistence and brown in color. The excavation of US989 returned few pottery shards, an iron nail (MI339), and a lot of iron slags. Several iron slags were found around limit of US989 too. It is not sure that US989 was a real furnace, but because of the big amount of slags found in and around it we can suppose it was linked to the iron working.

The south-western corner of A266 was closed by the wall M827. A probable opening at the southern end of M827 connected the street A266 to the structures located to the west. The different construction techniques and the different orientations between M827 and M822, confirm that they are not part of the same building. The higher elevation of the M822 foundation (30.28 m) confirms that it was not in use at the time when US874 floor existed as the whole BG2. BG2 was probably built on previous structures of which maybe M827 was part.

An area 5.77 m long and 2.95 m wide located to the south of BG2, to the North of the storehouses complex and to the south-west of A266 was excavated during SUM17B. It was delimited by the southern wall of BG2, M822, to the North and by the Northern wall of the storehouses complex, M214, to the South.

US890 was the first layer excavated in this area. It is an accumulation layer composed by loam very loose in consistence and light brown in color. A collapse of limestone blocks big in size and roughly worked was found in it. It is possible to suppose that the collapsed stones were part of the the storehouses' complex masonry, because of their position and the material. The stones were concentrated in the southern part of the area, close to M214, and the walls of BG2 were mainly built of sandstone slabs. As a result, it is unlikely that they could belong to it. US890 has a light slope from the west to the east. It returned few pottery fragments and two objects: a bronze tip (MB1013) and a stone weight (S2997).

US890 covered the top of M827 to the East. This wall is closing the street A266 to the south-west.

A279

The area to the the West of M827 was named A279. Here below US890, **US986** was excavated. It was found to the elevation of 30.44 m. It is an accumulation layer 0.43 m thick mainly composed by loose burnt loam dark gray/black in color. A lot of limestone blocks very small in size were found in it. In particular the small limestone blocks were found concentrated in the north-eastern corner of the area. US986 returned a big amount of animal bones too, together with 43 pottery fragments, a rubbing stone (S2998) and a fragment of a stone vessel (S3008). US986 covered the wall M835. It is made of mudbricks, oriented North-South and it was found to the elevation of 30.57 m. M835 closed the A279 to the West.

Below US986, **US987** was excavated. It was found to the elevation of 30.01 m. It is an accumulation layer mainly composed by loam reddish in color and compact in consistence. It has a clay matrix and a lot of collapsed and crumbled mudbricks. US987 returned very few animal bones and marine shells. It rests on a packed soil grayish brown in color and very compact in consistence with a light slope from North to South. US987 floor was found at the elevation of 29.64 m. US987 returned 31 pottery fragments and a sandstone incense burner (S3009). US987 covered the wall M832 which is made of mudbricks and it is oriented North-South. It was found to the elevation of 29.90 m and together with M835, forms the western side of the room A279. After the removal of US987 it is clear that A279 is a long rectangular room oriented North-South. It is closed by M214 to the South, M827 to the East, and M832/M835 to the West. It is not clear the real extension of A279 northward because of the presence of the late building BG2.

In the area located to the West of the walls M832 and M835, the same layers were excavated. To the North; US986 covered the walls M833 and M834. They are made of mudbricks and are respectively oriented East-West and North-South. Together with M835 they delimit a space named **A283**. It is impossible to understand the real extension of A283 northward because the presence of the late building BG2. The excavated part of A283 is 1.80 X 1.40 m and the excavation in this room stopped to the elevation of 30.43 m.

To the South, the excavation of US986 and US987 below it revealed the presence of another room, **A282**. It is located immediately to the South of A283 and to the West of A279. It is delimited by walls M832 to the East, M836 to the North and M837 to the West. The excavated part of A282 is 1.30 X 0.81 m and the excavation stopped to the elevation of 29.72 m.



Fig. 1. Area B, general view from the N before excavations



Fig. 2. Area B, Building BB3, room A203/213, view from the N before excavations



Fig. 3. Area B, Building BB3, view from the E before excavations



Fig. 4. Area B, Building BB3, wrongly restored part of the wall M572



Fig. 5. Area B, “appendix” A215 of the square A74 under the room A214, view from the NE



Fig. 6. Area B, “appendix” A215, the wall M571 of BB3 setting up on the top of the wall M618 of the early structure



Fig. 7. Area B, “appendix” A215, the external face of the wall M618 after demolition of the “late” wall M571, view from the N



Fig. 8. Area B, “appendix” A215 between BB3 and BB5, remains of a staircase M833

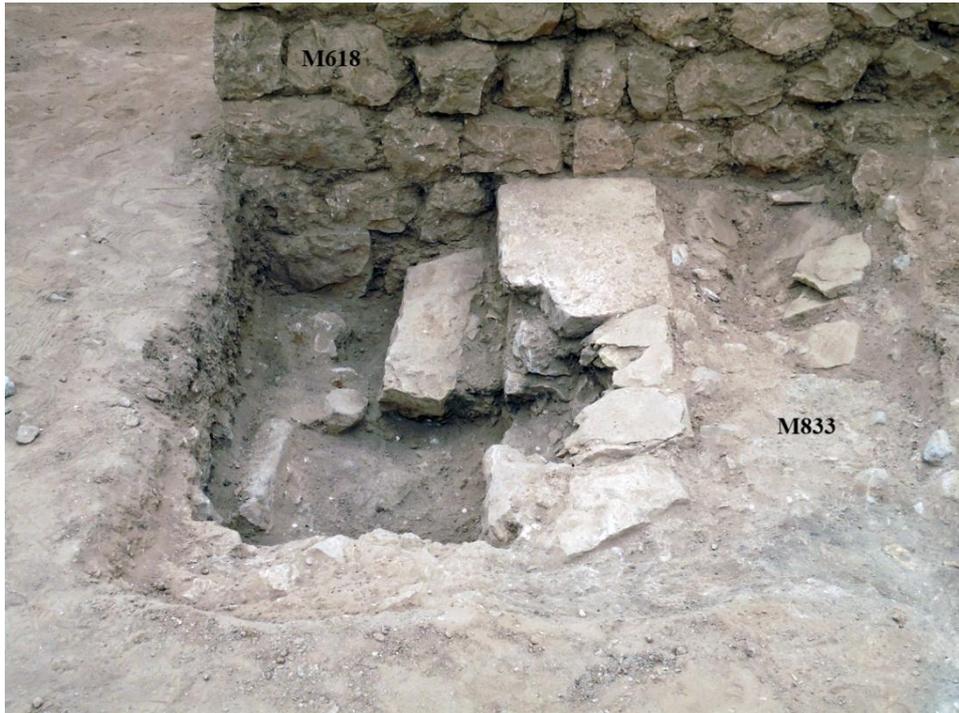


Fig. 9. Area B, “appendix” A215, remains of lower steps of the staircase M833



Fig. 10. Area B, room A213 of the early structure, view from the N

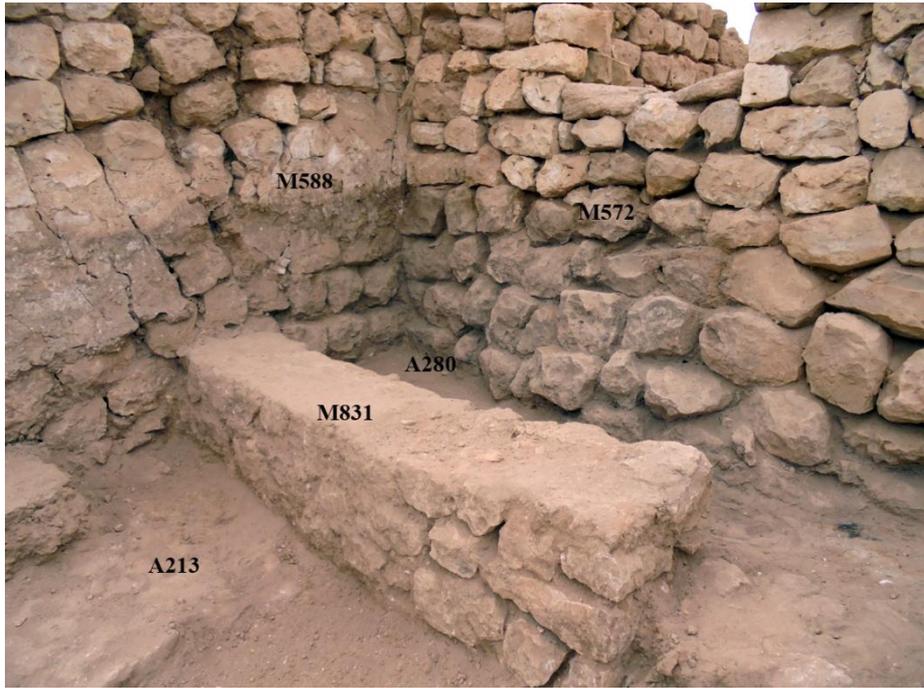


Fig. 11. Area B, wall M831 between rooms A213 and A280 of the early structure



Fig. 12. Area B after excavations, view from the NE



Fig. 13: Street A266 before excavation



Fig. 14: Street A266 after excavation



Fig. 15: US989 before excavation



Fig. 16: US989 after excavation



Fig. 17: M827 with opening at southern end



Fig. 18: Area to the south of BG2 before excavation.



Fig. 19: Area to the South of BG2 after excavation



Fig. 20: North-western corner of storehouses complex

Object Index Card

Registration Nr. SUM17B, M214,1; S3011			
Provenance Area B			
Drawing code Nr.			
Definition Incense Burner	State of preservation Fair	Measures l. w. 10.9	Shape Squared
Material Limestone	Preserved part Half complete	h. 9.6 th. diam.	Section Trapezoidal
Description Half complete limestone incense burner, squared in shape. The rim is squared with its top flattened and delimit a censer squared in shape and trapezoidal in section. On the bottom of the censer there are traces of chippings and traces of burnt. Only one face is completely preserved. It is well smoothed and it is covered by red painting. It is decorated by incised lines, crossed to form a pattern of small squares. The two half-preserved faces are well-smoothed too. There are no traces of painting and here the incised lines forming a pattern of lozenges. The base has four small squared legs. Only two of them are preserved. Traces of painting are on the legs too.			
Responsible C.C.		Date 23/08/2017	