

Oman: copper land of Magan?

Was Oman, the country strategically placed on the north-eastern edge of the Saudi-Arabian peninsula, the copper land of Magan, known from cuneiform tablets found in Mesopotamia?

It is known that Dilmun (the island of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf) was a major trading post in the 3rd millennium BC and it is possible that it was a port on the metal route from Oman through the Gulf. The Kingdoms of Ur and Sumer were barren of mineral resources and would have had to import their metal from somewhere. Did it in fact come from Oman?

The answers to these and many other questions which archaeologists and archaeo-metallurgists have been asking about this part of the world are likely to be forthcoming soon.

The Sultanate of Oman has been accessible to archaeologists only since Sultan Qaboos ibn Said came to the throne in 1970. The new sultan introduced a number of reforms and abolished many of the restrictive practices enforced by his father, whom he replaced.

For a number of years the German Mining Museum, Bochum, has been carrying out large-scale excavations and surveys in the country with the support of the Ministry of National Heritage and financially aided by the Volkswagen Foundation.

Under the direction of Dr. G. Weisgerber, the 3rd millennium habitation site of Al Maysar, with its extensive copper smelting remains, has been excavated. The finds include numerous bun-shaped copper ingots. In addition, all major ore-bearing regions and the complete range of existing slag heaps have been surveyed. Results indicate that large-scale metal production, mostly copper, continued in the area up to the 6th century AD.

The Mining Museum team, with A. Hauptmann in charge of the technological aspects of Oman archaeo-metallurgy, has already laid down some of its conclusions in several publications. Professor H.-G. Bachmann of IAMS Scientific Committee worked with the survey in 1980 and again in 1982.

Whatever the final outcome of these investigations it is clear that Oman now has to be considered among the major metal suppliers of antiquity in the Near and Middle East.

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Bronze Age mines in Ireland

Moves to initiate an archaeo-metallurgical project in Ireland were made when Professor Beno Rothenberg, director of IAMS, and Robert Rice, trustee, visited the west Cork and southwest Kerry districts recently.

Unfortunately, Dr. John Jackson, an authority on the ancient history of the district who was to accompany them, fell ill, but a brief survey was made with the aid of maps and charts which he provided.

The area saw great activity during the Bronze Age and mine timber dating to 1500 BC has been discovered at Mount Gabriel, near Mizen Head. In one of his papers, Dr. Jackson refers to the discovery of grooved and ungrooved stone mining tools at the foot of Mount Gabriel and polished stone axes were found six miles away at Ballyrizard. No smelting slags have yet been found, probably because they are now covered by peat.

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