

IMTO – Italian Mission to Oman
University of Pisa

PRELIMINARY REPORT

February – March 2003
(SUM03A)



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January – April 2003

During the campaign in winter-spring 2003 (SUM03A), which started on February 1st and finished on March 27th, the field activities were focused exclusively on the diggings at the ancient city of Sumhuram (**Pl. 1-2**). Excavations were concentrated at three areas: Area A (squares h10-h12, f11-e11) to the south and west of the Gate Complex, Area F (squares e5-6 – f4-5 – g4-5) near the NW corner of the city, and SUMWEST, at the ruins of a building located in *c.* 300 m north-west of Sumhuram (**Pl. 3**).

The main goal of the present campaign was to complete clearing of the buildings BA4 and BF3, parts of corresponding squares and streets of the ancient city partially unearthed during the previous campaigns, to determine the character of the early fortification of the Gate Complex, to clarify the stratigraphy of the ancient site, to identify the function of the *extra muros* building supposed to be contemporary to Sumhuram.

Area A (trench supervises V.Buffa, A.Lombardi, A.Pavan). At the squares h10-h12 the excavations of the **Building BA4**, adjacent **square A8** and **street A45** located south-east and south-west of the Gate Complex were completed (**Pls. 4-6**). At least three major constructional phases were determined.

1st phase. It seems that the Building BA4 was one of the earliest edifices constructed in the ancient city simultaneously with the city-walls. Initially it consisted of four rooms: the room A32 (completely excavated in the season SUM02A), the room A33, which NE part was occupied with one-flight stone staircase leading to the roof, and the adjacent rooms A36 and A40 served as antechamber. The entrance to the building was located in the middle of its SW wall (wall M70), and connected the building with street A45 (**Figs. 1-2**) by the pottery assemblage and numismatic finds, the dating of the 1st phase could be placed between the 4th and the late 1st cent. BC.

2nd phase. After a short period of abandonment, the Building BA4 was reoccupied and slightly rebuilt. A wide porch, *c.* 1.7x5.3 m in size and *c.* 0.4 m high, and few stone steps were added to the entrance of the building from the street A45. Most probably, the windows in the façade wall M70 were blocked. The floor level in the two adjacent rooms A40 and A36 and in the room A33 was raised up, and the second flight of staircase with supporting wall M63 was added in the room A33. It is not clear, was the room A32 still in function or its entrance was blocked and the access to the room was limited. All abovementioned changes and additions were connected with the floor US22 traced in the street A45 and adjacent square A8.

Judging by the pottery assemblage and numismatic finds, the dating of the 2nd phase could be placed between the mid 1st and the 3rd cent. AD.

3rd phase. In the last phase of function of the Building BA4, a new antechamber (room A37) was constructed in front of the façade wall M70. It significantly narrowed the width of the street A45 (from c. 3.5 m to c. 1.3 m). The floor levels in the internal rooms of the building were again raised up (it seems that two rooms A36 and A40 were functioned as a single unit, room A40). The last changes and additions were connected with the floor US29 traces in the street A45 and adjacent square A8 (**Figs. 3-4**). The dating of the 3rd phase is the late 3rd – mid 4th cent. AD.

At the squares f11 – e11 the trench along the walls M8 and M9 was completed. The major result of the excavations at the area was the discovery of the early defence tower A46 (**Fig. 5**). It belonged to the earliest phase of the Gate Complex (4th – 1st cent. BC) and protected the main entrance to the ancient city. The tower A47 was almost square in layout, c. 6.2-6.3x6.5 m in size, and was settled directly on the bedrock (**Fig. 6**). The type of the masonry is rather characteristic: the “skin” of gigantic roughly hewn stone blocks and the “body” of small and medium size unworked stones. Unfortunately, only two lower courses of the tower’s stone blocks preserved *in situ*: it seems that the construction was demolished after a short period of abandonment and used as a foundation for the new tower, smaller in size, consisted of walls M9 and M2. The additional information that the late tower M9-M2 as well as the wall M8 belonged to the last phase of the Gate Complex (3rd – mid 4th cent. AD) was obtained in the course of excavations.

Area F (trench supervises A.Sedov, C.Odierna). At the squares e5-6 – f4-5 – g4-5 the excavations of the **Building BF3** were almost completed. We were succeeded to identify it as a temple *intra muros* dedicated to the South Arabian god Syn. (**Pls. 7-9**).

The building, one of the most prominent edifices in Sumhuram, was located against the north-western city-wall (**Fig. 7**), close to the NW corner of the ancient city. It was constructed, most probably, in the late 1st cent. AD on the ruins of previously existed monumental building using these ruins as the foundation of the new structure. At least two constructional phases of the temple were determined.

1st phase. A monumental staircase designed as a square room (room A21) led to the building from the vast square A20 (**Fig. 8**). The antechamber (room A22), c. 2x3 m in size, was accessible through the wide, c. 1.5 m, entrance (both rooms were excavated during the season SUM01A). The room A22 was widely opened to the SW, to the rectangular room A39, c. 2.8x7.5 m in size, with slightly lower floor level. Two wooden pillars placed on both sides of the opening against the walls M40 and M83 once, probably, supported the roof of the building (stone bases of the pillars preserved *in situ*). Most probably, the pillars were mounted when the SW corner of the room A22 has started to collapse. The NW part of the room A39 was occupied by a big stone basin intended, probably, for ritual

ablutions (**Fig. 9**). A wide stone staircase attached to the central part of the wall M49 led to the passage connected the room A39 and the adjacent room A38 located northwards. The room A38 was c. 2.2x5.0 m in size, and had the same floor level as the room A22. A lower stone bench, 0.4 m wide and 0.2 m high, was running in the interior along the wall M83.

The core of the ancient temple was a sanctuary (room A25), rectangular in layout, c. 5.0x6.8 m in size (**Fig. 10**). The proposed entrance in the centre of its SW wall M39 (didn't preserve) connected the sanctuary with room A38. The roof of the sanctuary was supported initially by four wooden pillars (their stone bases still remained *in situ*). The pillars divided the room into three naves. A rectangular podium, 1.2x1.7 m in size and with preserved height of 0.6 m, was constructed in the central nave against the north-eastern wall (wall M78) of the sanctuary opposite its entrance. A pillar-shaped incense-burner was, probably, once stood in the centre of the room in front of the podium (the remains of its mounting were traces on the floor of the room). The southern parts of the side-naves of the sanctuary were occupied by lower mud-brick platforms, on which remains of mounting of votive objects such as offering table (in the eastern nave) and bronze sculpture (western nave) were preserved. An altar made from flat stone was discovered in the NW corner of the sanctuary. A lot of sea-shells *Chlamis townsendi* with remains of burning inside and stone incense-burners were found scattered on the floor around the altar (**Fig. 11**). Another cluster of sea-shells *Chlamis townsendi* with traces of burning inside was discovered on the floor of the eastern nave close to the podium.

The SW part of the Building BF3 was occupied with two adjacent rooms (rooms A41a and A41b), in which there is an intention to see temple's kitchen or refectory. They were accessible through the arch passage, 0.6 m wide, constructed in the NW wall M48 of the room A39. The room A41a along the interior of the city-wall M75 was irregular shape and 0.8-1.5x4.5 m in size. The passage 1.1 m wide in its SE corner connected the room with the room A41b, which was rectangular in layout and 2.0x4.5 m in size. The partition wall M94 dividing the rooms A41a and A41b was built from mud-bricks placed on stone foundation. One more passage, c. 1.3 m wide, located in the SW corner of the room A41a led to the room A42, which was not excavated in the reported season.

Judging by the pottery assemblage and preliminary analyses of the numismatic material, the dating of the 1st phase could be placed between mid/late 1st – mid/late 3rd cent. AD.

2nd phase. Some significant reconstructions were made at the beginning of the second phase of the temple's existence. The upper staircase in the room A21 was repaired and the floor level of all rooms of the temple was raised up. Due to the collapsed SE wall of the sanctuary (wall M47) three additional pillars to support the roof of the temple were mounted. The sanctuary itself was significantly enlarged: the wall M39 was completely demolished and the western and central

naves were extended by mounting of the fifth pillar. The south-western corner of the sanctuary was now occupied by a new lower platform made from mud-bricks. Two oblong cavities carefully plastered with gypsum were traced on the platform. We can suppose that a bronze sculpture of a bull, an animal manifestation of the god Syn, was once stood here.

A lot of votive objects were found scattered above the upper floor (US80) of the sanctuary: a base of a bronze candelabrum (**obj. card. 1**); a horse figurine (**obj. card 2**), bronze bells; personal ornaments like bronze bracelet (**obj. card 3**), finger-ring and pendant in form of camel; bronze coins; several stone and bronze incense-burners (**obj. card 4**), a bronze plaque with human figurine (**obj. card 5**); a complete stone vessel (**obj. card 6**); a ceramic vase with South Arabian letters; a bronze bowl with dedicative inscription (**obj. card 7**), parts of offering table, a limestone bull's head (**obj. card 8**) and sea-shells *Chlamis townsendi* used as oil-lamps and/or incense-burners. The votive inscription running along the rim of the bronze bowl indicated that the dedication was made to the god Syn in "his temple in (the city of) Sumhuran in the land of Saka'lan" (**Fig. 12**).

As was stated above, the floor level in the room A39 was significantly raised up covering now the stone basin for ablutions in the NW part of the room. The entrance leading to the adjacent room A41 was widened. The floor level in the rooms A41a and A41b was also raised up covering the partition wall M94. Now it was a single unit A41, almost trapezoidal in layout and 3.5-4.0x4.5 m in size, with two wooden pillars placed close to each other in the centre of the room (one stone base of pillars was placed above the remnants of wall M94 while another base – on huge hewn stone block dug into the filling of the room A41b). The SW wall of the room (wall M88) was enlarged by constructing a stone "skin", which closed also the entrance to the room A42. Part of the street A32 SE of the Building BF3, outside the wall M86, on the floor level US54 was filled up and closed from NE by a stone wall M87 (room A43).

The dating of the 2nd phase could be placed between mid/late 3rd and mid/late 4th cent. AD.

SUMWEST (trench supervised by A.Sedov, A.Pavan). The ruins of the isolated building located in c. 300 m north-west of Sumhuran were first recorded in the season SUM01A. The character of the masonry walls allowed to suppose that its construction was contemporary to Sumhuran, and its location – that it might be a **temple extra muros**. Both suppositions were confirmed during the course of excavations.

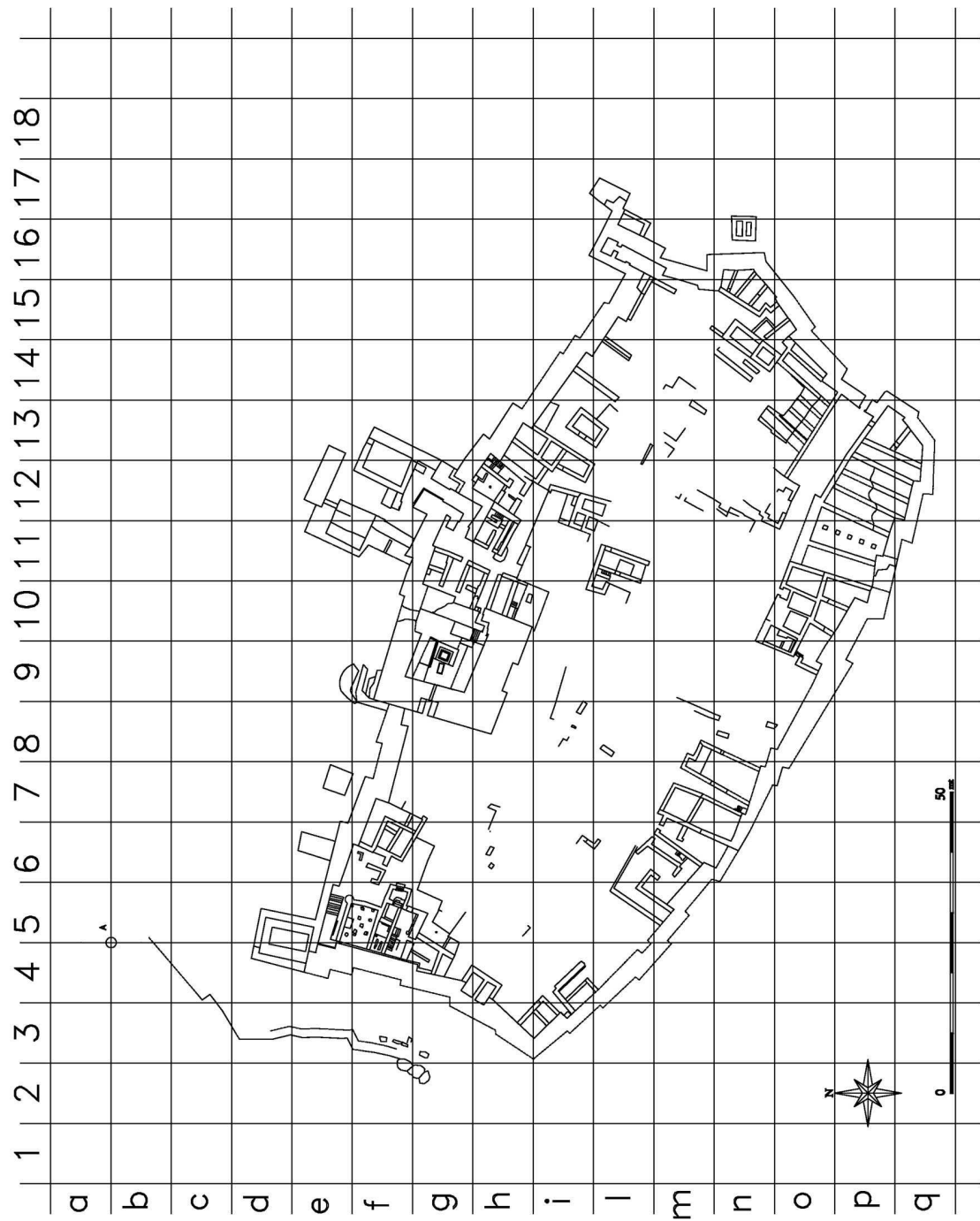
The core of the excavated building was an almost square room A1, c. 6.6x6.8 m in size (**Figs. 13-14**). An entrance, c. 1.1 m wide, was located in the centre of its SW wall (wall M4). A square podium, c. 2x2 m in size, was constructed against the central part of the wall M2 opposite to the entrance. A narrow, 0.4 m wide, and low, 0.4 m high, bench was running along the walls of the room. Two parallel

benches, 0.7 m wide and 0.4 m high, divided the interior of the room into three naves. It seems quite probable that the abovementioned benches were used also as foundations for four, possibly wooden, pillars supported the roof of the structure. Two more benches, c. 0.5-0.7 m wide, 4.7-4.9 m long and 0.4 m high, occupied the side naves of the room. A prismatic-shaped stone base of pillar-like incense-burner was found in the centre of the room A1. Several stone incense-burners, sea-shells *Chlamis townsendi* used, most probably, for the same purpose, a necklace of sea-shells *Oliva bulbosa* and *Cyprea*, fragment of a glass beaker and a coin of 'Amdan Bayin, king of Saba' and dhu-Raydan (c. 80-100 AD) were found in the filling of the room. Judging by its layout and character of the finds we can suppose that the room was served as a sanctuary.

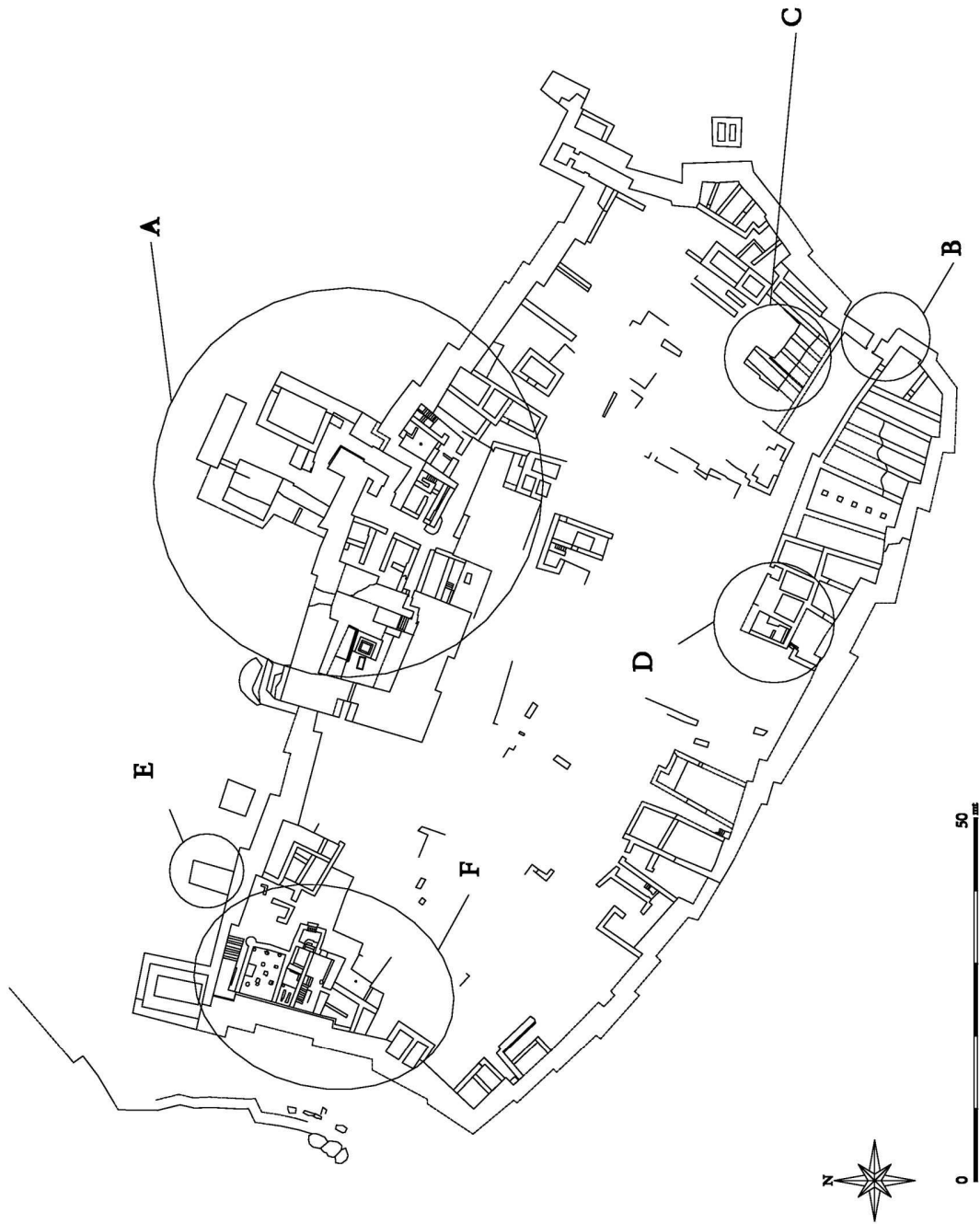
The passage connected the room A1 with antechamber A2, which had, probably, L-shaped layout (its SE part was not excavated during the present campaign). The room A2 was 2.1-2.0 m wide and c. 10.5 m long. A passage, c. 0.8 m wide, located close to its SW corner, led to a tower-like small room A3, c. 1.5x2.2 m in size. A complete stone incense-burner (**obj. card 9**) with rich dental decoration on one of its faces was found in the filling of the room against its SW wall M10.

The location of the main entrance to the temple was not determined. We can suppose that, most probably, it was situated against the external façade of the wall M10 and was designed as multi-pillar portico or propylon with a wide staircase leading to the SW towards the flow of Wadi Dharbat.

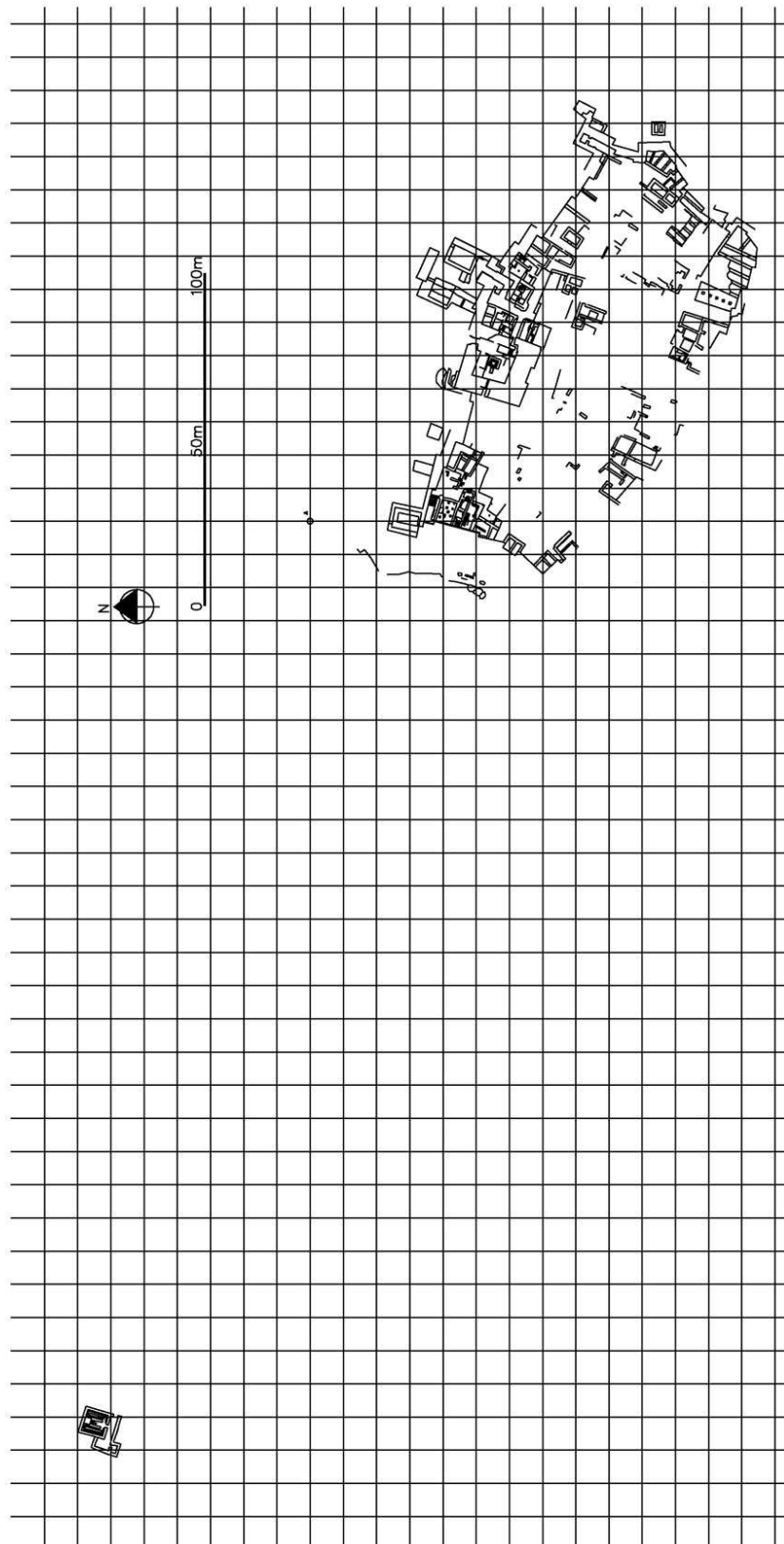
Judging by the preliminary analyses of the material found in the ruins of *extra muros* temple at Sumhuram, we may assume that the date of its construction must go back to the 4th-3rd cent. BC. It was abandoned in the late 1st cent. AD, and after that was repeatedly destroyed by flood from Wadi Dharbat. Later, till the recent times, the ruins of building were used as temporary shelters by Bedouins and local villagers (remains of several open fire-places, *madhbah*, were traced in the rooms A1 and A2).



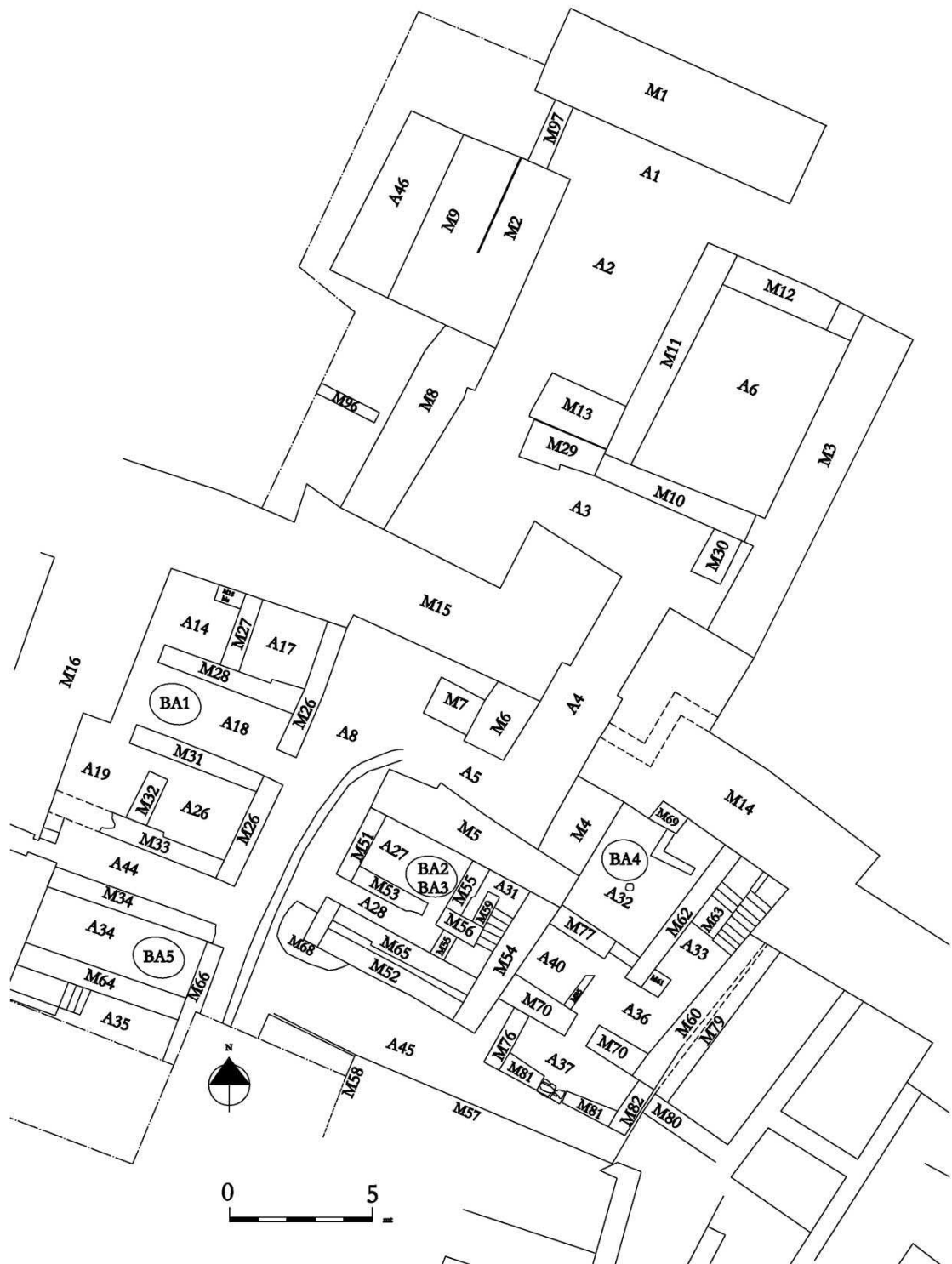
General plan of Sumhuram with reference grid



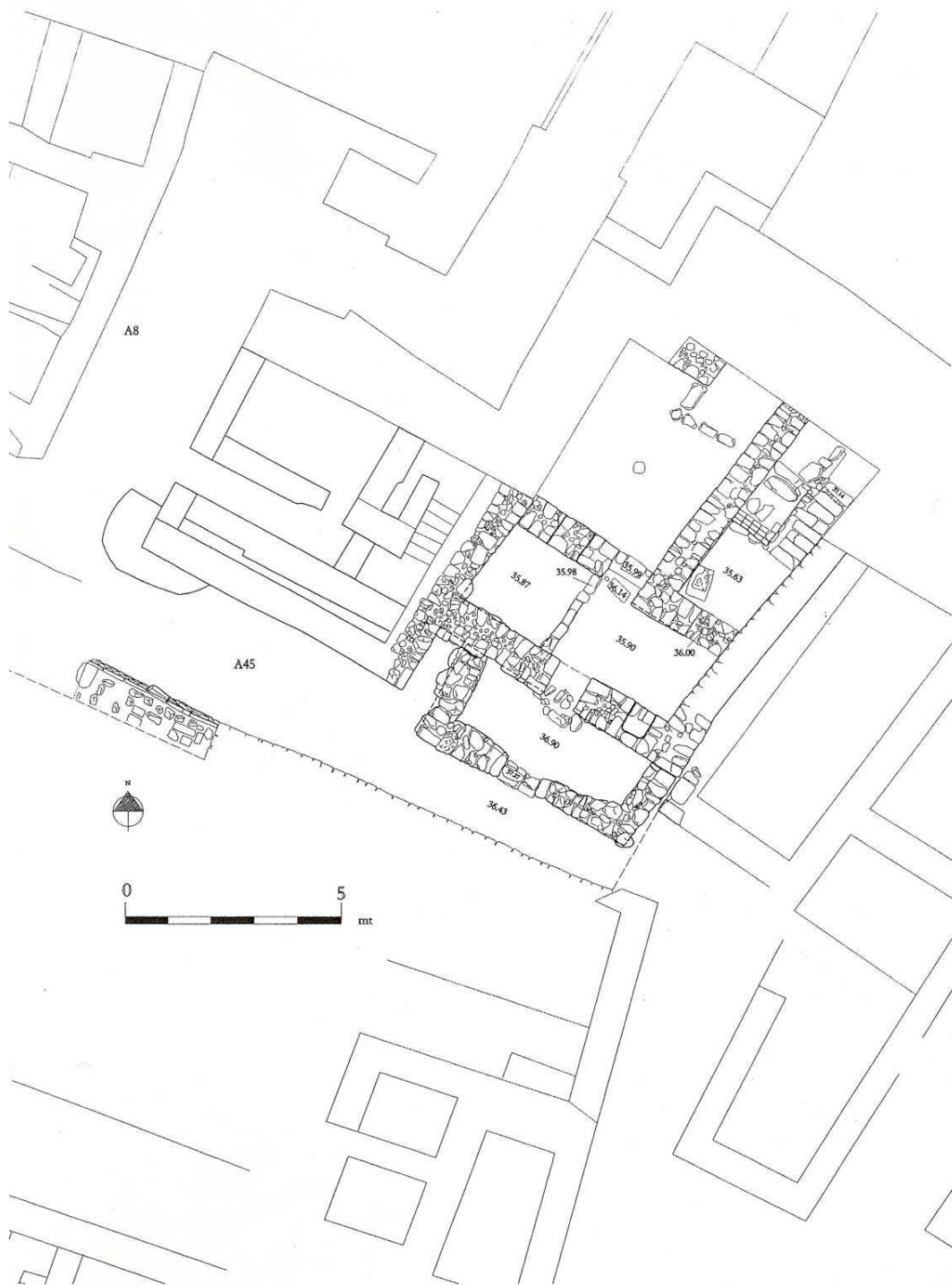
Plan of Sumhuram with investigated area by IMTO



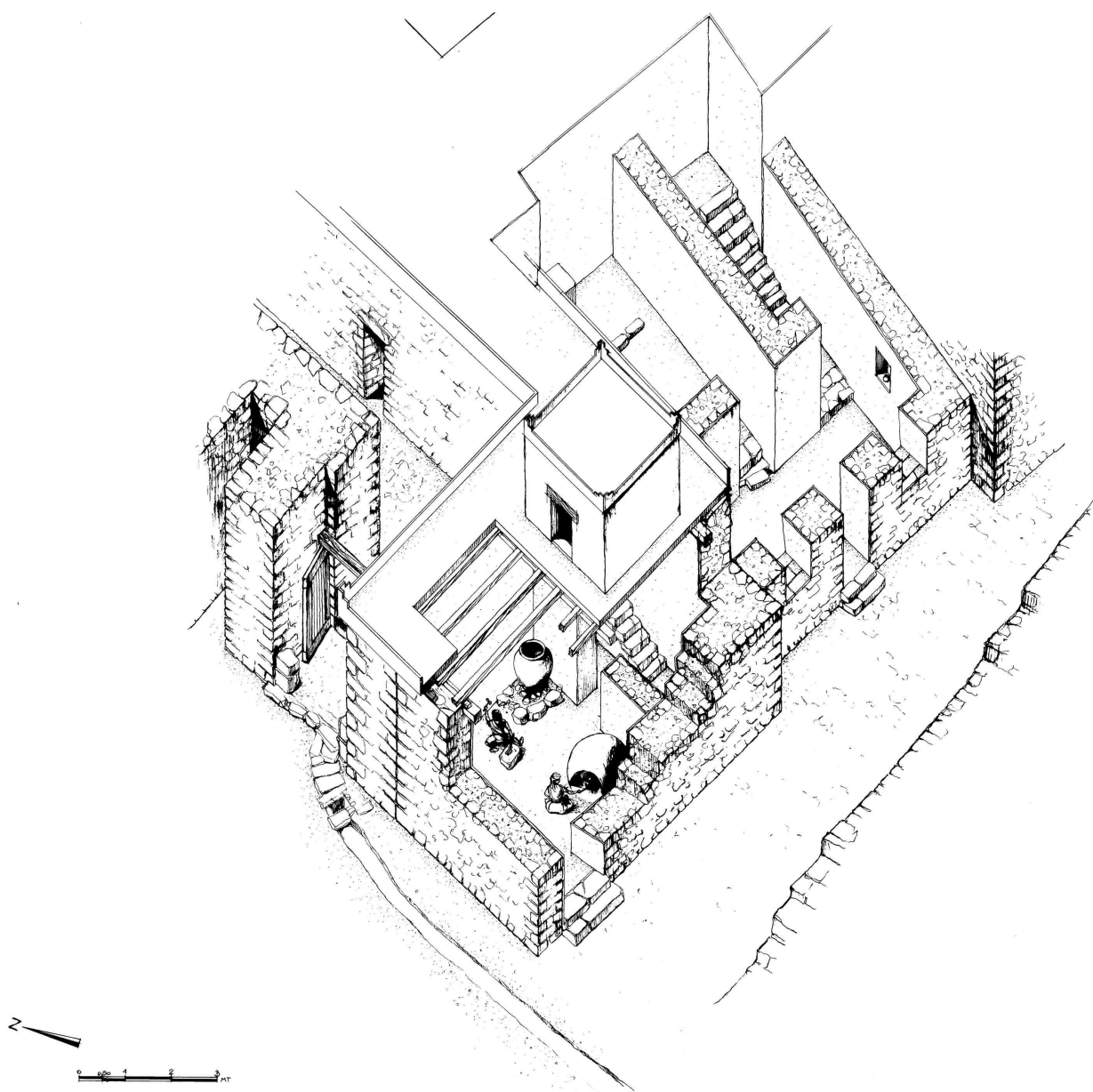
The city of Sumhuran and the temple *extra muros*



Plan of working area A



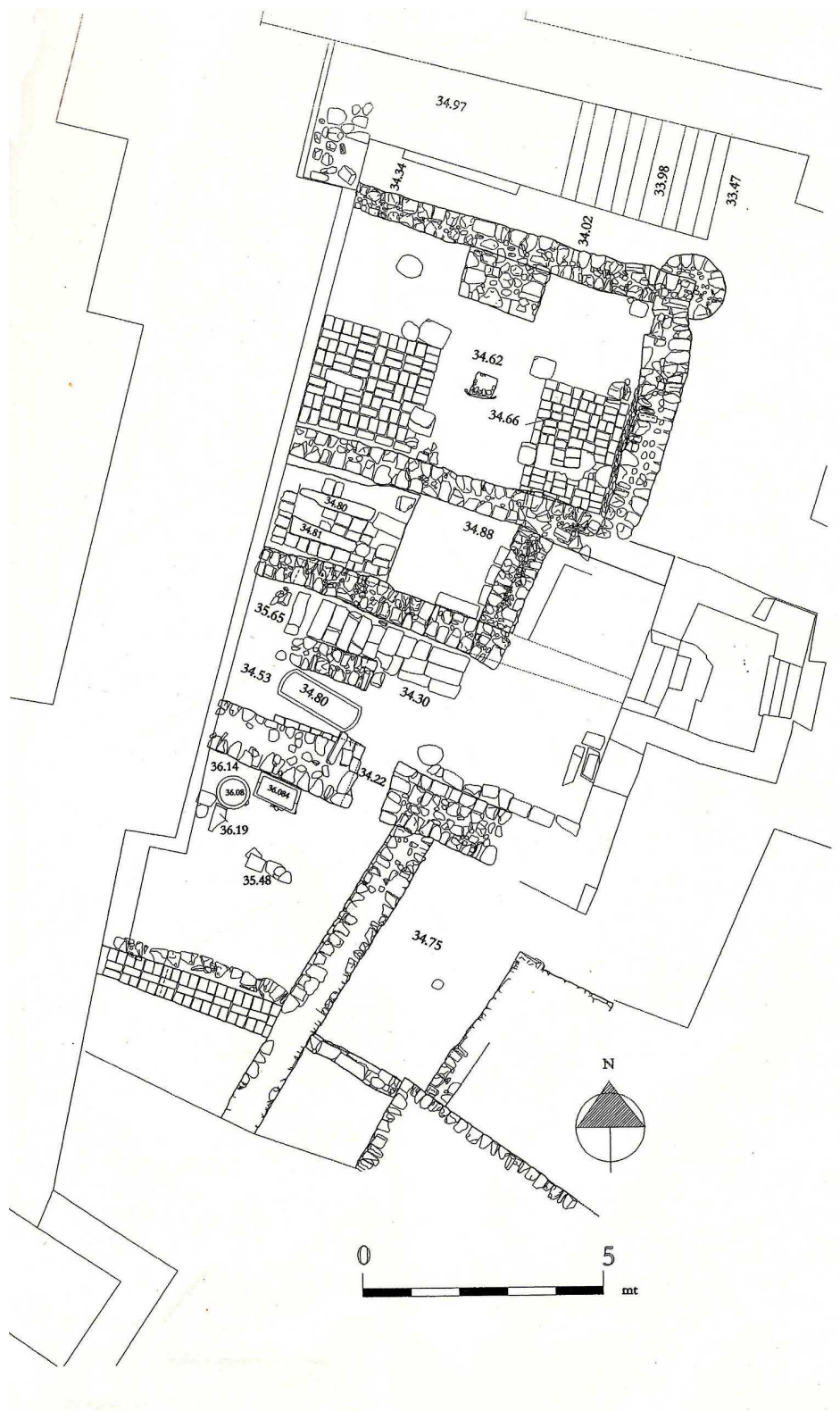
Area A: detailed plan of building BA4



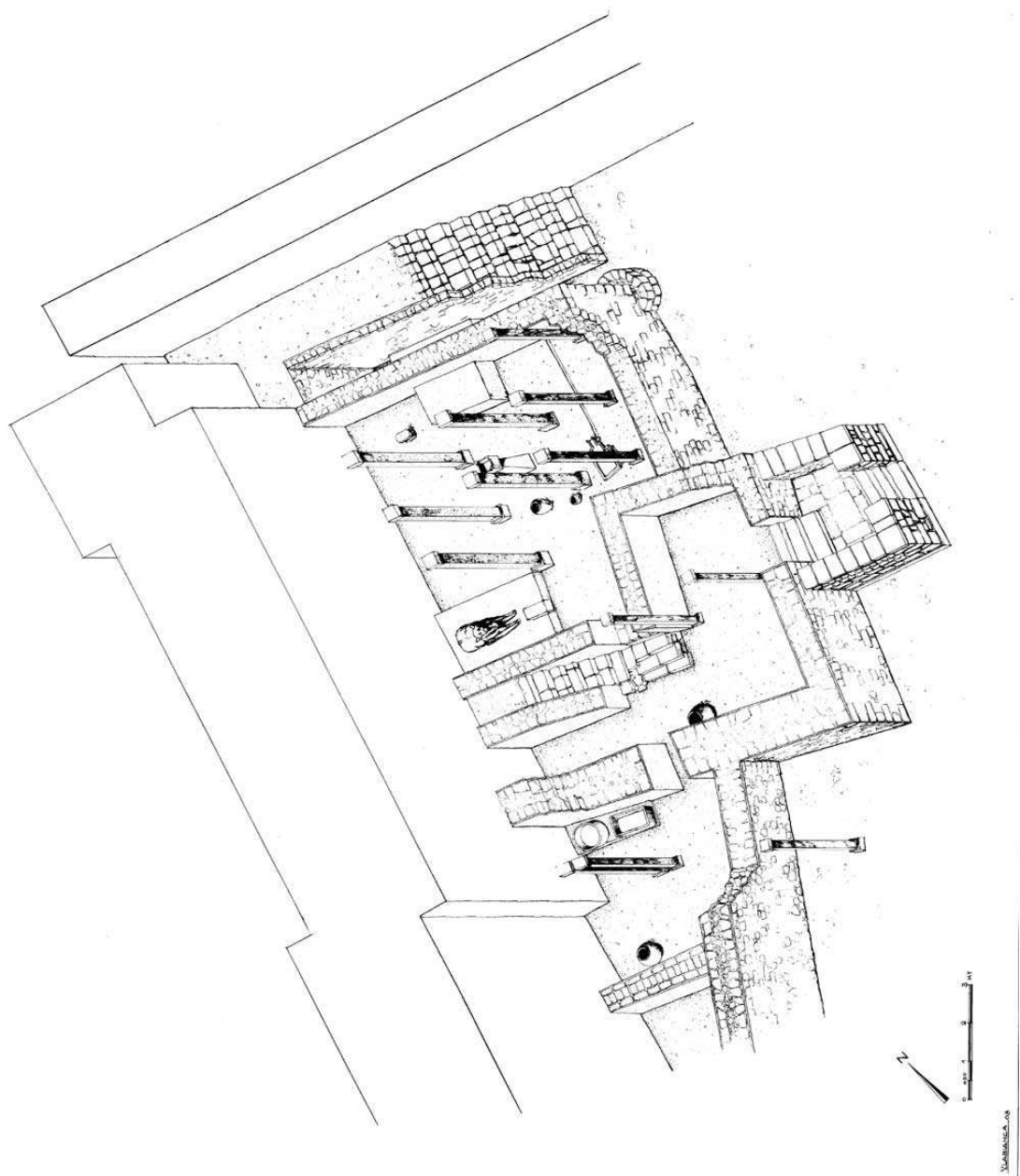
Reconstruction of buildings BA2 and BA4



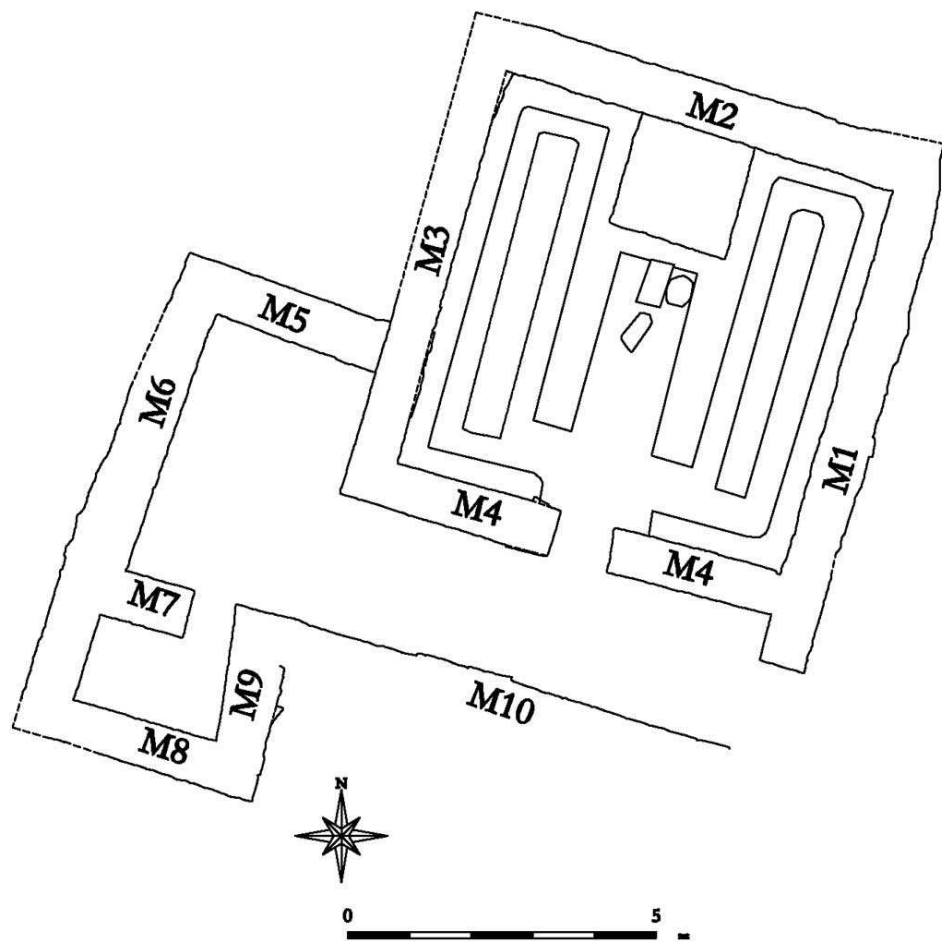
Plan of working area F



Area F: detailed plan of the temple BF3



Reconstruction of the temple BF3



Plan of the temple *extra muros*



Fig. 1: Area A. General view of the building BA4: the entrance door from the street A45. On the façade the two (later blocked) windows. On the right the staircase leading to the roof.



Fig. 2: Area A. Particular of the entrance to the building BA4.



Fig. 3: Area A. View of the street A45 from the East. On the right the entrance door to the building BA4.



Fig. 4: Area A. View of the street A45 and the corner of square A8. On the left the corner (with rounded structure) of the building BA3.



Fig. 5: City Gate. The foundation of the old tower A47 and the western side of later smaller tower (A9-A2). The towers are built with gigantic roughly hewn stone blocks with the body” of small and medium size unworked stones.



Fig. 6: City Gate. The foundations of tower A47, with the emerging bedrock.



Fig. 7: Area F. General view of the temple BF3 from the North. On foreground the sanctuary A25; on the right the city walls.



Fig. 8: Area F. General view of the temple BF3. On foreground the monumental stepped entrance.



Fig. 9: Area F. Temple BF3: room A39 with the limestone big basin for ritual ablutions. On the right the staircase leading to the upper storey.



Fig. 10: Area F. The sanctuary (A25) of the temple BF3 with the podium, the altar and the stone bases of wooden pillars.



Fig. 11: Area F. The sanctuary of the temple BF3: the altar with the *Chlamys townsendi* shells with remains of burning inside scattered on the floor around the altar.



Fig. 12: Area F. The sanctuary of temple BF3: the bronze basin with dedication inscription to the god Syn during the excavation. Visible also the bronze incense burner found inside the basin.




Fig. 13: Area West of Sumhuran. The *extra muros* temple: general view from the North of the sanctuary, with the altar, the parallel benches and the axial entrance door.




Fig. 14: Area West of Sumhuran. The *extra muros* temple: view of the sanctuary from the South: the podium, with the altar and the benches.

Object Index Card 1

Registration Nr. SUM03A; US80, 4 MB95	Measures l. 15 w. 13,5 h. 14	
Provenance (f5) BF3 – A25 US80	Shape composite	
Material Bronze	State of preservation good	
Definition Candelabrum	Preserved part complete	
Description Complete base of bronze candelabrum. The object is composed by a rectangular thick lamina folded in vertical sense with 4 legs at its corners. The base rises in its central part to form a conical swelling, which, after a triangular-shaped bulge, ends with a cylindrical element (diam. 6,2) with a central hole (diam. 2,1), used to insert the bronze pole supporting the plate for the light. The base is made in a unique casting. The internal of the object is completely empty.		


Object Index Card 2

Registration Nr. SUM03A; US80, 8 MB98	Measures w. 4,4 h. 5,9 th. 2,4	
Provenance (f5) BF3 – A25 US80	State of preservation good	
Material bronze	Preserved part complete	
Definition horse figurine	Shape composite	
Description Anterior part of a bronze <i>rhyton</i> , with a stylised horse figurine. The object contains the animal head and the anterior part of the body with the legs. The legs are folded and the animal is lain down. The muzzle of the horse is well characterized, with the large nostrils, the prick ears and the stylised mane. The eyes are sketched by two lateral and symmetrical small cavities. The anterior part of the body shows a large hole (diam. 0,9), used for libations. The posterior part of the <i>rhyton</i> is not preserved, the drinking horn being completely missing. This object is probably complete. The <i>rhytons</i> in fact were usually composed by two elements, minted together.		


Object Index Card 3

Registration Nr. SUM03A; US120, 6 MB127	
Provenance (F4) BF3 – A39 US120 (fireplace)	
Measures w. 0,5 h. 0,6 diam. 5,6	
Material bronze	
Description Almost perfectly circular bracelet, open to be inserted. The bracelet is constituted by a twisted rod, circular in section and slightly flattened and enlarged at the two ends.	


Object Index Card 4

Registration Nr. SUM03A; US80, 7 MB97	State of preservation good	
Provenance (f5) BF3 – A25 US80	Preserved part complete	
Definition incense burner	Measures h. 8 diam. 12	
Material bronze	Shape cylindrical	
	Section circular	
Description <p>Complete tripod incense burner. The three animal-shaped legs (h. 3 cm) are projecting from the external circumference of the cup. The straight wall (h. 5 cm) is deformed, the base is flat, with 2 small triangular cavities and one rounded small boss. The internal cavity is completely encrusted of a black material.</p> <p>The three legs appear minted together with the small cup and not added separately. On the edge of the base is visible a prominence which could be an ancient repairing.</p>		


Object Index Card 5

Registration Nr. SUM03A, US127 3 MB183	State of preservation good	
Provenance (g4) BF3 – A41 US127	Preserved part almost complete	
Measures l. 8,5 w. 5,6 h. 0,2	Shape rectangular	
Material bronze	Section flat	Definition plaque with image
Description <p>Almost complete votive bronze plaque, slightly damaged at two of its corners. The corners, slightly rounded, show the hole for hanging the plaque.</p> <p>In the centre of the plaque (in vertical sense) is represented a human frontal figure, with a long pleated dress. The pleats of the skirt are vertical and straight; the pleats covering the figure's bust are oblique. The left shoulder is uncovered. The right arm is raised in plea's gesture; the left arm is placed along the bust. The hair are long with lateral curls. The legs are represented in profile. The figure could be female.</p> <p>The figure is in relief (th. relief 0,7); the back of the plaque shows the cavity in correspondence of the human figure.</p>		


Object Index Card 7

Registration Nr. SUM03A; US80, 6 MB96			
Provenance (f5) BF3 A25 US80			
Material bronze	State of preservation good	Measures h. 10,5 th. diam. 34	Shape convex profile basin
Definition basin with inscription	Preserved part almost complete		Section circular
Description Almost complete bronze basin, with a large break along the rim. The convex base could have been restored in old times because of the presence of a breakage and a series of nail's heads. The basin contains a dedication inscription of two lines on the exterior side, running along its rim. The inscription contains the dedication to the god Syn, in "his temple in Sumhuran in the land of Saka'lan".			


Object Index Card 6

Registration Nr. SUM03A; US116, 26 S475			
Provenance BF3 - A25 US116 (floor)			
Material soft-stone			
Definition cooking pot	State of preservation good	Preserved part complete	Measures h. 16 cm th. 2 cm diam. 25 cm
Description Cooking pot with slightly inverted, rounded rim, two ledge handles and slightly convex base. External surface grey, partly blackened; internal surface greenish grey.			



Object Index Card 8

Registration Nr. SUM03A; US80, 39 S441	State of preservation fair		
Provenance (f5) BF3 – A25 US80			Preserved part fragments
Material limestone			Measures l. 16 w. 13,4 h. 6
Definition bull's head			
Description Two fragments belonging to the same object. They could be part of an offering table or altar. The larger fragment shows, on its lateral side, a bull's head profile. Clearly visible the triangular-shaped ear (w. 3; h. 2,8; th. 2,2) and the eye (w. 4,3; h. 3), made out of a double incision. The object is not finished on all its side, but only on one lateral side. The frontal view is not possible. In the frontal part the stone is flat and clearly not worked. The view is only lateral. The other smaller fragment (l. 10,5; w. 12,7; th. 6,8) is not added with the first. It could be placed on the opposite side of the same structure. We can suppose that the two fragments were some architectonical elements decorating a cultic furniture, like an altar. Surfaces smoothed.			

Object Index Card 9

Registration Nr. SUMW03A; US3, 6 S10	Measures w. 20 dp. 17 h. 36	
Provenance <i>extra muros</i> temple room A2, US3	State of preservation good	
Material limestone	Preserved part complete	
Definition incense burner/altar	Shape composite	
Description Incense burner/altar composed by a truncated pyramidal-shaped base (h. 18; w. base 16,5; dp. base 16; w. top 11,9; dp. top 11,5) surmounted by a parallelepiped-shaped element (w. 20; dp. 17). The top element is slightly sloping towards the back side, where the base is shorter (17 cm) and shows a deep squared cavity (max. dp. 5) roughly worked and a flat rim (w. 2,5). On the back of the top cavity the wall is shorter (dp. 3,6) in comparison with the frontal wall (dp. 5 cm). In fact the rim shows at about the centre of the lateral sides a kind of step (1,5 cm), whose ending part is missing on both sides. The frontal part of the upper element shows a carved architectonical decoration composed by a central plain listel (w. 12,2; h. 3,3) with two corner higher elements (h. 5,6; w. 3,5), one of which is broken. The listel with the two corner merlons surmount three rows of dentils. From the top the first and the third rows have 5 dentils of different sizes (about 3x3 cm). The second row has 4 complete dentils with two lateral half dentils. The decoration of the frontal side ends with a rows of rounded elements (diam. 1,5) hung to a thin stem (l. 2; w.1). Preserved only 4 lateral elements on the left part and two (only the stems) of the right part. The other three sides of the upper element are plain. The surfaces of the object are well smoothed.		

Coin Index Card 1

Registration Nr	Provenance	 
SUM03A; US121, 1	Area F (f4) BF3 – A39	
Co159	US121	
Material Bronze	Measures	
State of preservation good	Diam. 24 mm	
Die-axis 11.00 o'clock	Weight 12.0 g	
Series Eastern Arabian imitation of Alexander's tetradrachm		
Obverse Head of Alexander as Herakles wearing the lion's skull to right, very much stylised		Reverse Seated figure of Zeus on chair r., shoulders and hands facing front, a long stick in right hand, a bird (eagle) in left hand, traces of vertical legend on l., traces of ornamental signs on r., very much stylised
Observations The coin belongs to the very well-known series of Eastern Arabian imitations of Alexander's tetradrachm minted in the last centuries BC – first centuries AD in the Arabian Gulf countries. The series are well studied by D.T. Potts in his monographs <i>The Pre-Islamic Coinage of Eastern Arabia</i> , Copenhagen 1991 and <i>Supplement to the Pre-Islamic Coinage of Eastern Arabia</i> , Copenhagen 1994. Similar pieces were found, for instance, in Mleiha oasis and at ed-Dur settlement (both in U.A.E.). The Sumhura piece is the first registered find of such series in South Arabia in the course of excavations, in the precise archaeological context.		

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