

## **Khor Kharfut (Dhofar). A Reassessment of the Archaeological Remains**

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### *Abstract*

The bay of Khor Kharfut, along the coast of Dhofar in southern Oman, hosts a variety of features connected with multiple phases of human occupation, including rock shelters, hut foundations, and more substantial - though heavily decayed - buildings. A survey was conducted to assess the age of these remains. Although the majority seems more likely to date to the Late Islamic period, earlier traces are present as well, including possible prehistoric graves and pre-Islamic structures. Overall the site, located at the mouth of Wadi Sayq, is a promising location for further archaeological research entailing the excavation of selected features.

### *Keywords*

Dhofar; coastal survey; Late Islamic period; painted inscriptions; rock shelters

Between the last days of April and the beginning of May 2014, a one-week field survey was conducted by the author and Carl Phillips at Khor Kharfut, a rather secluded valley at the mouth of Wadi Sayq, between the villages of Dhalkut and Rakhyut on the coast of Dhofar (Fig. 1). The work was conducted upon invitation of the private, Texas-based, Khor Kharfut Foundation - no longer existing - which arranged funding for the team, and with the authorization of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture (now Heritage and Tourism) of the Sultanate of Oman.

The reconnaissance aimed to collect data that could help establish the chronology of the different features visible at the site, as well as provide a first accurate plan of the most remarkable ones. The results are not intended to be exhaustive but rather to highlight the relevance of the site and hopefully instigate a further and more intensive investigation. The work mostly is built upon the observations made by Paolo Costa (1994) during a short visit to the site back in 1993, presented the same year at the Seminar for Arabian Studies.

The more convenient way to reach the site with a consistent load of equipment is from the sea but a few trails along the southern slopes of Jebal Qamar allow local shepherds to lead their animals to the valley and leave them to graze, thanks to the presence of a freshwater pool.

The difficult access to the valley contributed to the preservation of the unique environmental niche of Khor Kharfut, visited in 1977 by the team of the Dhofar Flora and Fauna Survey but only briefly included in their final report (Shaw Reade *et al.* 1980). The situation has since changed very little, although the effects of local development start to be appreciable (Aston 2013, 4). While two short visits by Warren Aston and P. Costa himself preceded the 1993's survey (Costa 1994, 27), the site remained untouched by most of the survey projects more recently developed in Dhofar.<sup>1</sup>



Fig. 1 - The location of Khor Kharfut along the coast of Dhofar with a detail of the main coastal centres between Dhalkut and Salalah. Bottom right, a digital elevation model of the mouth of Wadi Sayq (prepared by F. Brandolini). All other pictures and drawings are by the author, except otherwise indicated

Among these, coastal areas were included in the works of the Italian Mission to Oman but, when not limited to the plain around Wadi Dabat (Cremaschi, Negrino 2002; Cremaschi, Perego 2008), they only reached as far west as Raysut (Dini, Tozzi 2008) also including some underwater activity (Davidde, Petriaggi 1996). Much more extensive is the work of the French Mission directed by Vincent Charpentier, which since a decade is investigating the vast area going from Ras al-Hadd to the Yemeni border, not only limiting its activity to the coast (Charpentier 2021). Khor Kharfut, however, does not feature in the contributions published so far.

An exception is represented by the archaeological survey of Dhofar, conducted between 2008 and 2009 by Lynne S. Newton and Juris Zarins (2010, 247), “from Sharbithāt up to Muqshin in the east to Dalqut up to al-Hashman in the west”. Khor Kharfut, recorded in the survey database as DS-08-061 (“Kherfut”), was dated to the Iron Age, alternatively indicated as stretching ca. 1000 BC - 400 AD (Zarins, Newton 2013, 58) or 1100 BC - 600 AD (Newton, Zarins 2010, 254). Such a date, already very broad, does not seem to be strongly grounded (see below).

<sup>1</sup> For an accurate list of the survey and excavation projects developed in Dhofar, from the initial activities of the American Foundation for the Study of Man in the 1950s to 2009, see Newton, Zarins 2010, 248-249.

Khor Kharfut was also surely visited by A.A.M. al-Shahri (1991; 2000) during his extensive search for rock inscriptions and drawings throughout Dhofar.<sup>2</sup>

After the survey discussed here, the Khor Kharfut Foundation organised other expeditions at the site (W. Aston, pers. comm. February 2022). In October 2014, a team from the College of Science of Sultan Qaboos University, Muscat, studied the vegetation and flora and the non-marine aquatic environment; between 2016 and 2018, some limited excavation took place. The reports remain unpublished and will not, therefore, be discussed here.

## Survey Results

The field-walking survey covered the whole area of the bay as well as the rocky coastal cliff and terraces that are found east and west of it. All the evidence was recorded but more specific attention was paid to the features previously mentioned by Costa (1994).

Based on the geomorphology of the study area, considered together with the distribution of the identified remains, six main areas were distinguished and named KK1 to KK6: the eastern coastal cliff (KK1); the flat land east of the Wadi's mouth and the overlying hill slopes (KK3); the flat land west of the Wadi's mouth and the overlying hill slopes (KK4); the gravel terrace west of the Wadi, between KK4 and the sea (KK5) and the western coastal terraces and cliff (KK6). A substantial rock shelter located between KK3 and the higher cliffs was labelled KK2. Within each of these areas, smaller zones, specific buildings and features are distinguished by letters (Fig. 2). The correspondence table between this subdivision and Costa's labelling is provided at the end of this paper (Tab. 1).

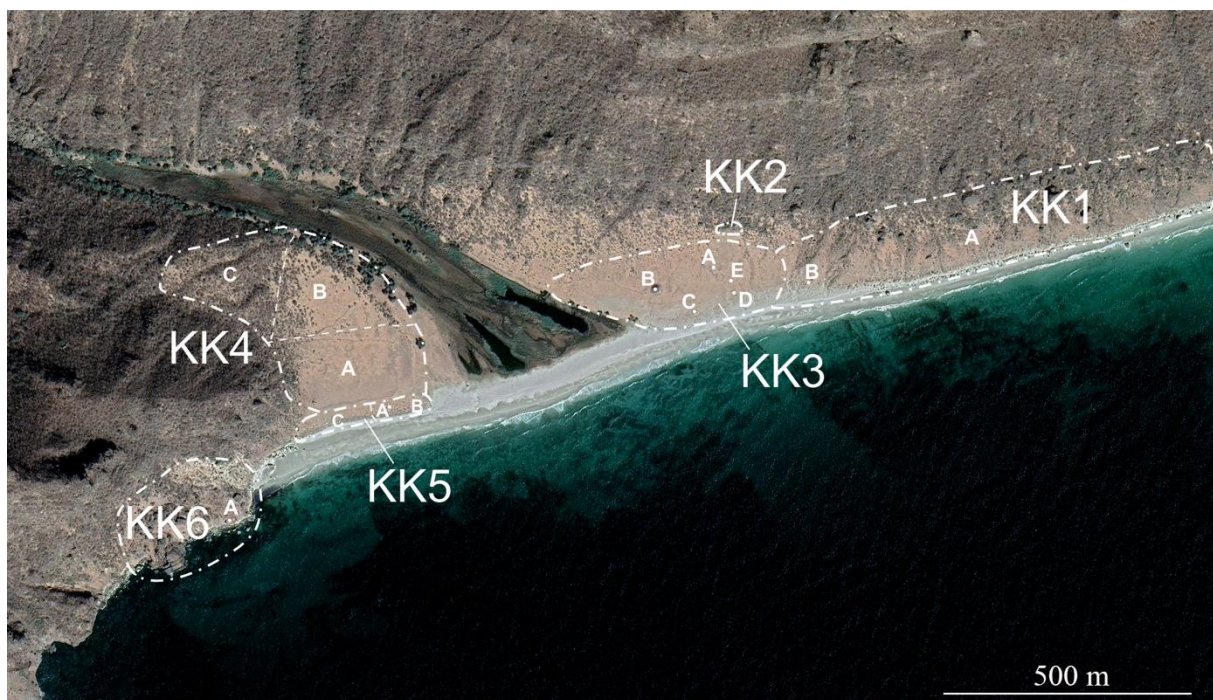


Fig. 2 - The different areas (dash-dotted lines), buildings and features (small dots) distinguished during the survey

<sup>2</sup> The author had no access to the Arabic book published by A.A.M. al-Shahri in 1994 (*Origins and Development of Civilization in the Arabian Peninsula. Dhofar: Ancient Texts and Scripts*. Dubai).



It must be stressed here that large zones within the survey area have a shallow vegetal cover (KK1, KK3, KK4, KK6) or are covered with shrubs and trees (KK2 and the upper part of KK4) so that admittedly the presence of small lithic or pottery scatters would go unnoticed.

### ***KK1***

Several structures were identified along the coastal cliff that leads east towards Rakhyut (Area KK1/A). The large number of huge boulders, also visible on satellite imagery, detached from the cliff and used as rock shelters or as the closing side of animal pens, is striking. Animal dung and minimal soil cover indicate their modern date. Shelter could also be provided by the caves piercing the upper part of the cliff's side further east, for which Costa (1994, 32) mentioned evidence of human occupation.<sup>3</sup>

Noteworthy is the presence in this same area of numerous roundish cairns now largely collapsed. Their structure, which in some cases shows the presence of a flat cover made with large stones, recalls various examples of pre/proto-historic tombs that are found throughout Oman. Their maximum diameter varies between 2 and 5.5 m, residual elevation is comprised between 0.35/0.70 m. No sherd or other anthropic artefact was found in the area.

At the western end of area KK1 (KK1/B), where the cliff joins the eastern side of the bay, stands a group of relatively small fences made of ropes and iron nets supported by squared wooden posts. The posts are set in dry stone foundations (Fig. 3). Clearly of extremely recent date, these structures are nonetheless of interest as they constitute a sort of ethnographical example of structures partly made with perishable materials, thus offering clues to interpret similar remains found in archaeological contexts.



Fig. 3 - Modern fences built upon a stone foundation at site KK1/B

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<sup>3</sup> The 2014 survey did not reach the “ruined buildings and animal pens” located 2 km east of the beach and reported by Costa (1994, 32).

**KK2**

This site comprises what is arguably the most interesting feature of the area, apparently not reported by Costa. It consists of a large shelter located below a huge rock which forms a vaulted space looking towards the sea (KK2/A, Fig. 4). Inside the shelter, leant against the rock wall, stands a modern, semi-circular stone wall only preserved for one course of randomly sized and shaped stones (Fig. 5).

Other straight walls, either one or two rows of stone wide, lay half-buried under the shelter. They surely predate the semi-circular structure mentioned above, with differences in orientation that could suggest an inner diachronic sequence. Most of the area defined by these walls would enjoy shadow from the shelter at the sun's zenith (observation made on May, 2<sup>nd</sup> 2014; see the dot and dash line in Fig. 5), although some stretches of walls extend outside the shelter, oriented at ninety degrees with the main EW wall (Wall A).



Fig. 4 - The rock shelter KK2/A (looking east)

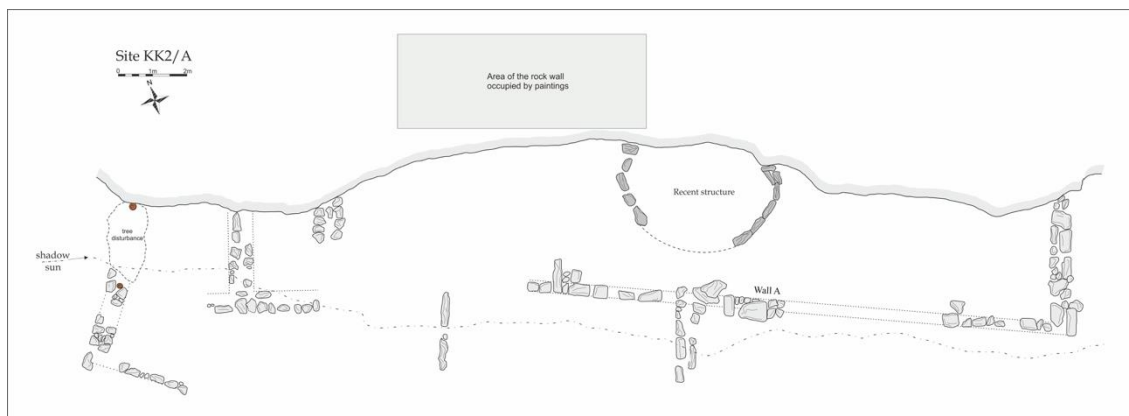


Fig. 5 - Plan of the shelter at KK2/B. The dashed line indicates the edge of the shadowed area at the sun zenith (survey made on May, 2<sup>nd</sup>)



On the central part of the shelter's rock wall, several black and red painted drawings are visible, although the majority is almost fading. Unfortunately, when black and red drawings superimpose each other, it is very difficult to discern which of the two was traced later, even due to surface alteration as a consequence of water percolation. Several animal (camel) representations can be easily identified, as well as at least one stylized boat with a central mast (Fig. 6), but lines of Arabic script are also present. More enigmatic is the presence of another group of pseudo-alphabetic signs just below the Arabic script, which is discussed below (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6 - Representation of a boat with central mast on the rock

The big rock below which the shelter is located hosts other structures on its top. Walking to the western end of the shelter and then moving uphill, one enters the wooded area that climbs up the mountains. Here, a massive stone wall is preserved, which retains a sort of platform that occupies the top of the shelter's rock (KK2/B, Fig. 8).

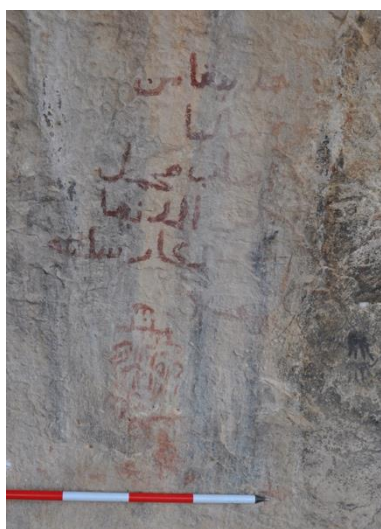


Fig. 7 - Detail of the Arabic inscription on the rock shelter's wall, above a few lines of pseudo-alphabetic signs



Fig. 8 - The massive stone wall retaining the platform KK2/B, erected on top of the large rock that hosts the shelter KK2/A

### KK3

This large area encompasses the whole south-eastern side of the bay, between the mountain slopes and the beach. Many stone structures are visible, although not all contemporary with each other. Most probably recent and likely used as animal pens are three roughly squared, dry stone structures - KK3/A - located on the higher part of the slope under KK2 (Fig. 2).

Difficult to date but most likely belonging to an earlier occupation are the other buildings and structures in the area. The most prominent feature is what in all likelihood represents the collapsed remains of a squared tower built in large unhewn stones, KK3/B (Fig. 9). It is associated with a roughly

rectangular stone enclosure standing between the tower and the sea, as well as with a long stone feature that runs slightly less than 200 meters to the east of it. This feature is defined by a double row of stones, preserved for just one course, with a few angular stones in between. Although this feature was supposed to be a water channel (Costa 1994, 31), this seems unlikely. In fact, at one point a clear interruption in the feature mostly suggests an entrance, and the structure itself should be more probably interpreted as a large fence. In support of this interpretation, one can recall the structure of the fishermen's fences reported at site KK1/B: in this case, the inner stone filling is not so evident but anyhow present and one must take into account vegetation and the accumulation of windblown soil. A similar interpretation seems appropriate for a straight feature that runs from the tower toward the sea, on a slight westward bias. Indeed, this could also be interpreted as a path bordered by a row of stones given that no stone fill is visible, but this must remain no more than a suggestion.



Fig. 9 - General views of the tower KK3/B with a) a close-up of the ruins and b) a detail of one of its surviving walls

The tower itself could have served a control function, overlooking the sea and the passing by or landing of boats. It is possibly of some significance that the building technique is the same as the massive wall seen at KK2/2; more than just the technical similarity (unhewn dry stone walls are not chronologically determinant), the fact that from the terrace on top of KK2 a good view on the sea was granted could point to the two structures being part of the same (defensive) system. Be that as it may,



the bad state of preservation and the abundant vegetation thriving on top of the tower ruins hamper any more detailed planning or interpretation, not to mention dating.<sup>4</sup>

Three other stone-built structures, KK3/C-E, were surveyed in this area, and their plan was drawn. All are more or less adjacent to two clusters of Islamic burials (KK3/F and KK3/G). Building KK3/C is a rather well-built rectangular structure with at least one transversal inner wall. On its top stand three tombs, together with other less preserved features, one of which is possibly a small fireplace. An alignment of stones leant against its southeastern corner suggests the presence of a step to access the platform (Fig. 10). No means of dating the structure is available for the time being.

Building KK3/C is located at the southern limit of an Islamic graveyard that was labelled KK3/F to distinguish it from a second graveyard, KK3/G, located more to the east. A few examples of graves from these two graveyards were planned (Fig. 11), one of them showing the three upright stones typical of Islamic burials.

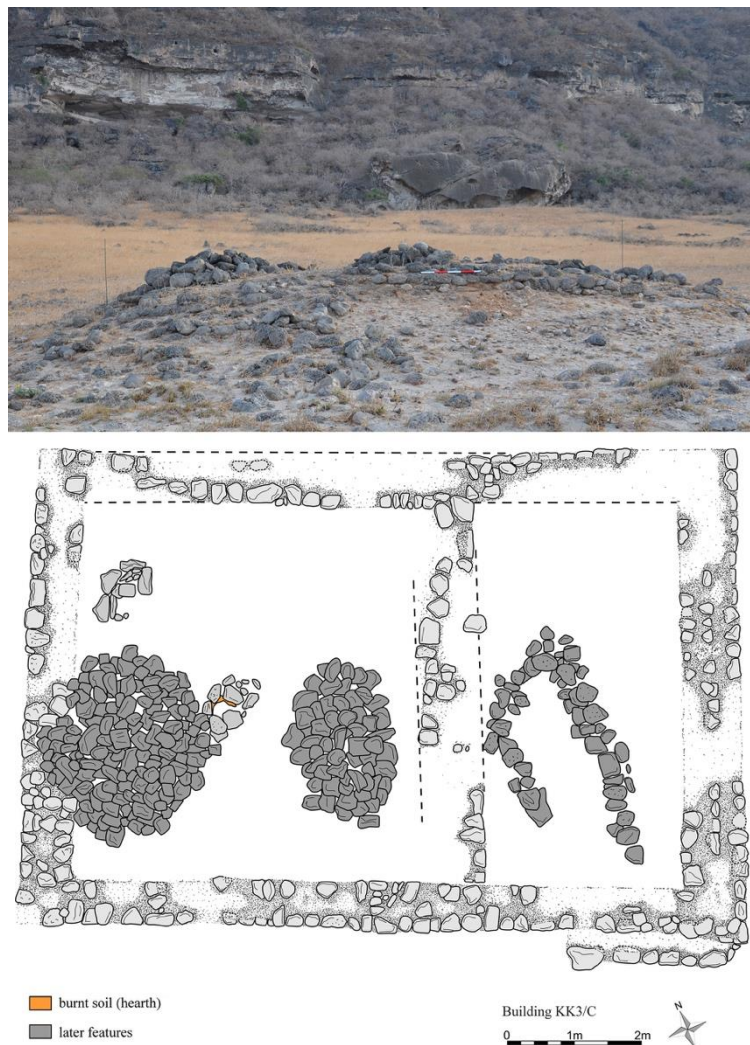


Fig. 10 - A view from the southeast and the plan of building KK3/C

<sup>4</sup> Despite describing its shape as “hardly recognisable”, Costa (1994, 31) provided a few approximate measure for the tower, currently witnessing 20 years of vegetation growth above the ruins. Today other features appear less clearly recognizable than at the time of Costa’s survey.



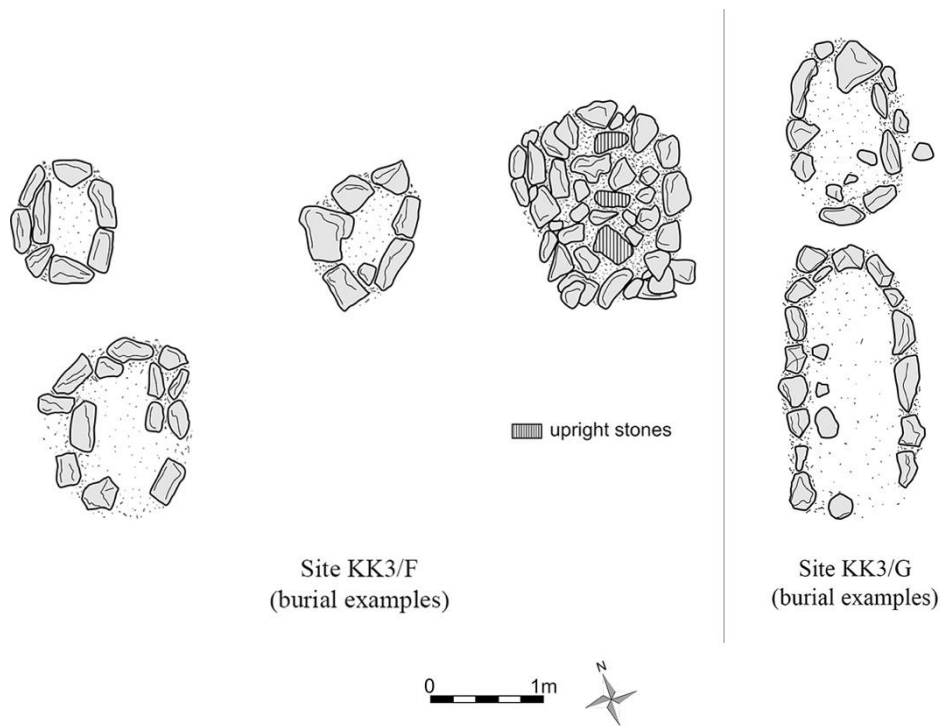


Fig. 11 - Illustrative ground plans of a few burials from cemeteries KK3/F and KK3/G

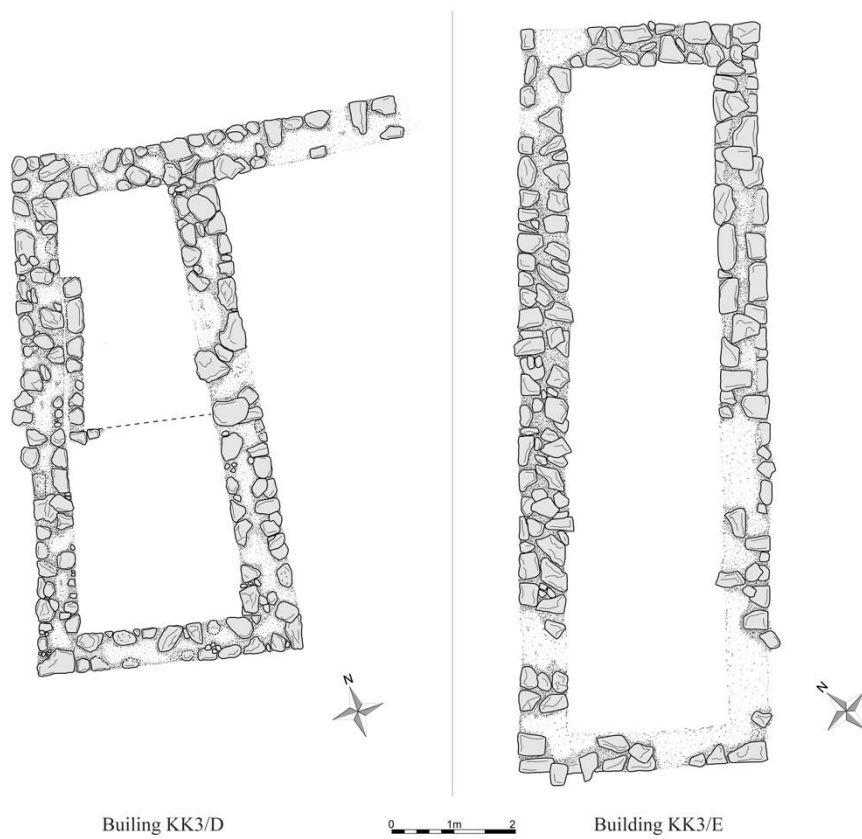


Fig. 12 - Plans of buildings KK3/D and KK3/E

Buildings D and E (Fig. 12) are much less prominent than Building C, and their layout is visible only from nearby.<sup>5</sup> They are located at the opposite ends of cemetery KK3/G, although Building D is adjacent to a few tombs while Building F seems to be more set apart. Building D has a trapezoidal plan, with the north wall extending westward. One row of small stones leant against the eastern perimeter wall could have divided the space in two, together with a similar wall at a right angle with it, the presence of which is, however, only hypothetical. Building E has a rectangular plan with no visible inner features.

#### ***KK4***

This second large area occupies most of the western side of the bay, reaching the foot of the mountains. Most of it is occupied by two large fenced areas, probably dismissed fields, KK4/A-B (Fig. 2). There is no way to date this field system, which could anyhow be very recent, as locals at Dhalkut speak of people they directly knew who used to also live at Kharfut. Ruined, unclear structures are visible in the area between the two walled enclosures. Inside the wooded area to the west of these fences, KK4/C, a few stone huts and other features are visible (Fig. 13). Their occupation is in all likelihood connected with modern shepherd activities. While such simple structures can date far back in time, their good preservation is not consistent with the dense vegetation in the area, which would have dismantled earlier constructions.



Fig. 13 - One of the round structures (huts) located in area KK4/C. Note the good preservation, inconsistent with an ancient date in such a heavily wooded context

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<sup>5</sup> It is not clear whether these same buildings corresponds to the “long and narrow” buildings reported by Costa (1994, 31) within his Site 7.



**KK5**

Located to the south of KK4's field system, this area dense in stone features occupies the low gravel terrace that immediately backs the beach (Fig. 2). All the features are Islamic burials scattered east and west of a poorly preserved buildings which could be interpreted as a mosque (see also Costa 1994, 29).

The layout of this mosque, labelled KK5/A, is extremely difficult to identify, as its walls were robbed, possibly to build the most recent ones among the surrounding tombs. As noted by P. Costa, the two groups of tombs, one east (KK5/B) and one west (KK5/C) of the mosque seem to belong to two different periods, based on the better state of preservation of the western burials.

Two different building phases can also be recognized in the mosque itself but whether this can be linked with the two phases in the graveyard's use is impossible to say. To the earlier phase of the mosque belongs at least one large, possibly rectangular building, the walls of which, albeit poorly preserved, still show a rather accurate construction (Fig. 14).<sup>6</sup> The remains of this building were later at least partially englobed in a second structure that comprised two rooms separated by an inner wall. The walls of this second structure lay in a very bad state of preservation and without proper cleaning/excavation, it is not possible to discuss its layout any further.

**KK6**

Along the western coastal cliff's terraces several stone foundations for huts, as well as animal pens and other structures, several exploiting large boulders detached from the higher cliff as noted in area KK1, are visible. A few red-fabric potsherds are visible, which appear not to have any resemblance with known archaeological typologies. Various shell middens are scattered over the area. One of the huts, located on the very edge of the cliff, was labelled KK6/A and chosen as a representative example (Fig. 15). While the pottery, although looking rather recent, is of no help in dating these structures, modern occupation is witnessed inside some of the numerous caves that dot the mountain backing the coastal cliff.

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<sup>6</sup> This is likely the wall that Costa (1994, 29) considered the *qiblī* wall.

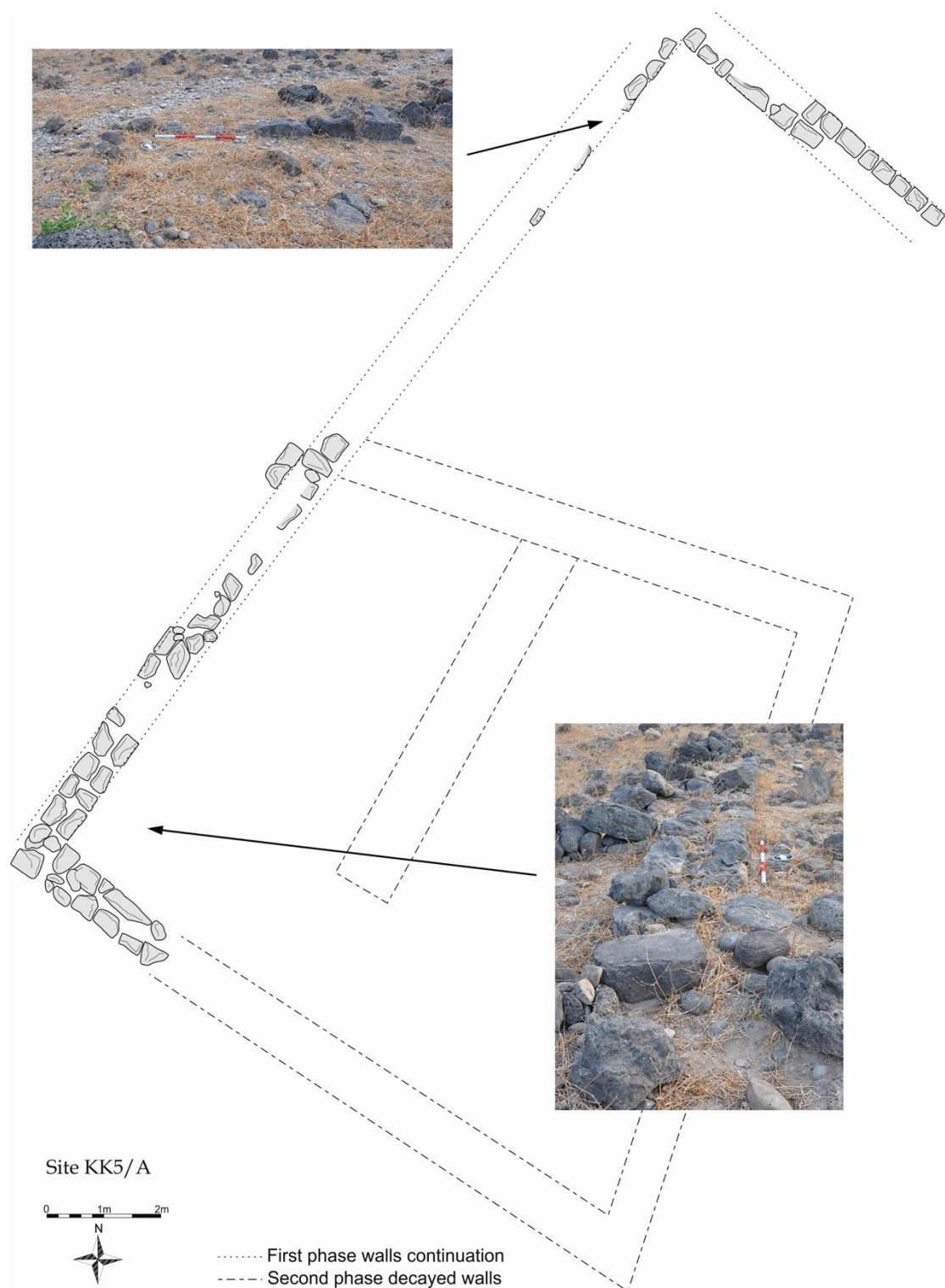


Fig. 14 - Plan of mosque KK5/A with detail photos of two well-preserved wall stretches



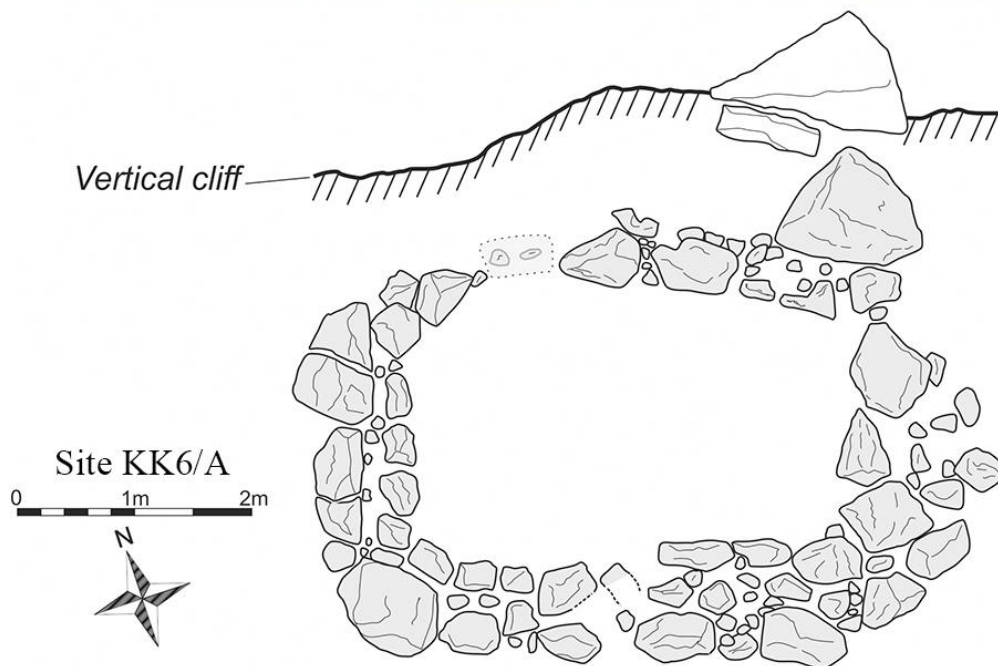


Fig. 15 - View and plan of a hut foundation at site KK6, labelled as KK6/A. The structure stands at the very edge of the coastal cliff

## Discussion

The survey conducted at Khor Kharfut allows a reassessment of the chronology for each site, which the extreme paucity of dating evidence, however, compels to consider tentative.

On the eastern coastal cliff, a series of cairns are possibly the most ancient features in the area (KK1/A). By their shape, they recall prehistoric tombs from other areas of the Arabian Peninsula and notably from northern Oman and Dhofar itself, usually dated between the third and the second millennium BC. In the absence of excavation or other dating evidence,<sup>7</sup> and considering the rather common aspect of the cairns, the hypothesis of a prehistoric date must be taken with the greatest caution.

The whole western side of the bay, from the beach to the mountain cliff (KK4 and KK5), is rather densely occupied by features that can all be connected, by way of a general point, to modern and very recent shepherd and fisherman activities (huts, animal pens, fenced areas, as well as cave shelters) or the presence of a small mosque (KK5/A) with its associated graveyards (KK5/B-C). Apart from the already noted existence of two constructional phases of the building, possibly mirrored in the different ages of the two burial areas (with the western one possibly continuing after the mosque's decay), there is no solid ground to suggest a chronology for these structures. A Late Islamic or medieval date can anyhow be suggested.

A similar chronology can also apply to most of the visible structures at site KK3. This is more evident for the walled compounds at KK3/A and the two clusters of Islamic burials KK3/F-G, while in the case of Buildings KK3/C-E a date remains more elusive. Buildings KK3/D-E seem to be possibly coeval with the graves, while Buildings KK3/A surely predate those placed on its top. One cannot dismiss the possibility that Buildings KK3/A were intentionally erected as a platform to host those graves, but its building technique is indeed more accurate than that of the other two buildings, and its careful shaping appears to be at odds with the inaccurate layout of the graves.

The "tower" at KK3/B is arguably the most interesting feature of this area (Fig. 9). It surely represented a definite landmark in the bay, probably overlooking sea activities in connection with the terrace at KK2/B, on top of the rock shelter. Even in this case, one is left with no dating evidence, and a medieval or Late Islamic date appears the most probable.

An indirect *terminus ante quem* for the mosque KK5/A and the tower KK3/B, features that would have represented outstanding landmarks for ships passing by, is provided by the reports originated by the journeys of the Indian Navy's Brig "Palinurus", who sailed along the coast of southern Arabia at several occasions between the 1830s and the 1840s (Haines 1839; 1845; Saunders 1846; Carter 1852). While the fact that only the brig's assistant surgeon, Dr Henry Carter (1852, but referring to the 1844-1846 expedition), explicitly mentioned the site ("Kharifot") provides another indication about its limited visibility from the sea, that no building is mentioned might indicate that both the tower and the mosque had already fallen into disrepair and/or had been dismantled by that time.

Apart from the platform KK3/C with the overlying graves, the only site where several phases of occupation are witnessed is the rock shelter KK2/A. The superficial evidence speaks of modern occupation (shepherd or the occasional fishermen), but the few walls partially buried in the sandy soil could date to any period. The pottery collected in the surroundings of site KK2 is not easily datable but generally appears to be of a rather recent date as it finds parallels (like all the other collected potsherds) in the contemporary stray potsherds one can collect along the streets of Dhalkut.

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<sup>7</sup> No pottery or other anthropic artefact was discovered.



The paintings on the shelter's wall belong to a typology already known in the literature (al-Shahri 1991; 2000; Le Quellec *et al.* 2018). A fairly recent date is assured for the lines of Arabic script and figurative paintings. Similar animals can be found painted in black at several locations in the surroundings, one of which was also visited on the way back from the survey (Fig. 16). Boat representations are also quite common in Dhofar (al-Shahri 1991, 183; Zarins 2001, 134 and fig. 64) and, apart from rock surfaces, they can be found incised on the house's plaster (like for example at Mirbat), which accounts for their very recent date.

Some mention is deserved by the lines of script that stand below the Arabic text at KK2/A. This type of writing is considered to represent an otherwise unattested variety of South Semitic script (al-Shahri 1991, 179) which a diffused though unfounded opinion tends to connect to Hymiaritic (*Ib.*, 175) and, therefore, date to the last centuries before the advent of Islam or immediately thereafter. In the specific case of KK2/A, there is no stratigraphic ground to discuss such a hypothetical chronology. A test excavation could help in that, if no ancient context was revealed, it could lend support to the modern date of these pseudo-alphabetic signs, and vice versa.



Fig. 16 - Painted drawings found in a small shelter not far from Khor Kharfut, similar in every way to those found under the shelter KK2/A

The pottery collected during the survey, generally very scarce, is of no help to establish the site chronology (Fig. 17). The sherds are made in a reddish-brown fabric with small grits and sparse white inclusion. The interior surface is often black, and some sherds show burnishing on the exterior and interior. The thickness varies between 2 and 10 mm. Only one thicker sherd (12 mm) was collected, characterised by the presence of vegetal temper, and small brown and white grits.

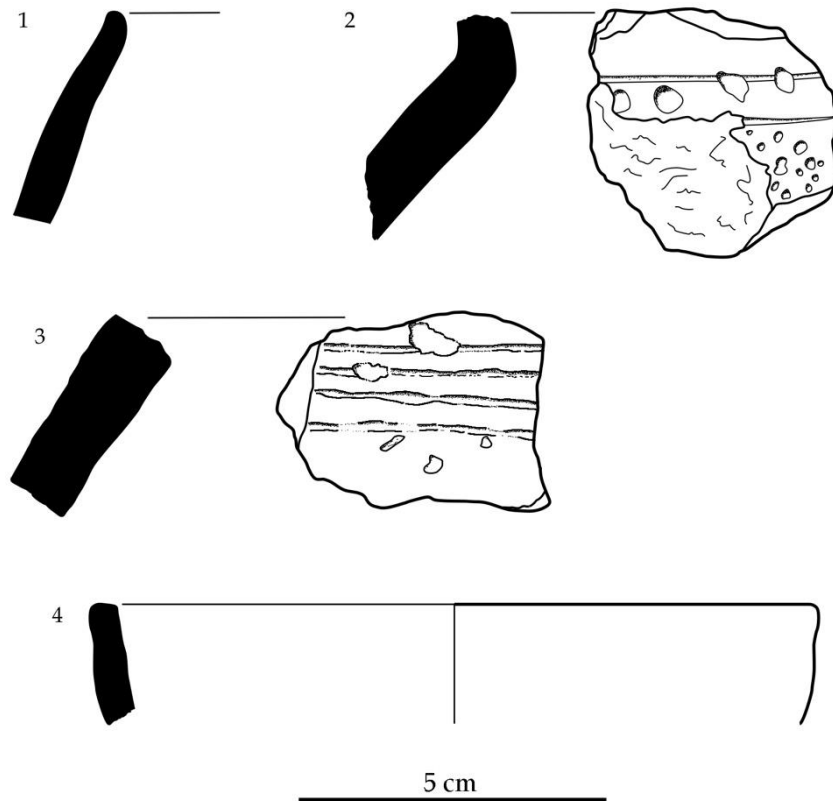


Fig. 17 - A sample of the little pottery collected during the survey. 1) Hole mouth vessel. Medium/coarse red-brown fabric with small grits, vegetable temper. Handmade, black exterior. Traces of burnishing on rim's interior, probable burnishing on exterior; 2) Coarse brown fabric with abundant small angular grits. Handmade, black interior, orange-brown exterior. Burnished exterior and interior. Shallow incised lines around the shoulder and punctuate decoration between them (diameter 4 mm). Possible finer punctuated decoration below. 3) Medium/coarse red-brown fabric with sparse tiny red, brown, and white grits, vegetable temper. Traces of incised horizontal lines on exterior. 4) Medium brown fabric with small black and white grits. Possibly burnished on exterior and top of the rim. 1-3 from the area between KK2 and KK3; 4 from KK6

This ware appears to be very poorly distinctive. The preliminary data from a recent study of Dhofar's local pottery indicate that what appears to be a comparable "Red Ware" is a minor component of 9th-11th century assemblages and becomes dominant between the 14th -18th century AD (Lischi *et al.* 2020, 17), and in general, the pottery of the region is reckoned as being largely conservative from the Iron Age until 1600 AD if not until modern times (Newton, Zarins 2017, 88; Lischi *et al.* 2020, 17). Moreover, Newton and Zarins (2010, 260) admit that the Iron Age is the "least understood of the periods" in Dhofar; it is difficult to understand, therefore, on which basis they list Khor Kharfut among the sites dating to this specific period in the reports of their survey (2010, 254; Zarins, Newton 2013, 58). It was mentioned above that comparable pottery can be found nowadays on the streets of Dhalkut.

It would seem that the idea of Khor Kharfut being occupied during the Iron Age (in this case intended as between the 3rd/1st century BC and the 5th century AD) stems from a more or less implicit

correlation with the South Arabian trade along the coast (Costa 1994, 32) when the Hadrami and later Hymiarite hegemony reached as far east as Khor Rori/Sumhuram. Another element that can stimulate such correlation is the accurate masonry of the buildings KK3/C-E and, to some extent, the probable watching function of the tower KK3/B, which would fit the inclusion of the site into a network of smaller harbours or way-stations scattered between the main port towns. Indeed, Khor Kharfut was also included by N. Groom in the area where one should search for the location of the port of Moscha, mentioned in the 1st century AD *Periplus Maris Erythraei* (Groom 1995, 186). This idea, however, was based on the assumption that Sumhuram did not yet exist around 50 AD (*Ib.*, 185), while now extensive excavation by a team of the University of Pisa has proved Sumhuram to have been founded around the end of the 3rd/beginning of the 2nd century BC (most recently Buffa 2019, 266), thus confirming its identification with Moscha.

Besides, although one could think that, like what happened at Khor Rori and much later at al-Balīd (Hoorn, Cremaschi 2004), Khor Kharfut was once opened to the sea and later blocked by sandy beach formation, this seems not to be the case. Direct communication between the bay and the sea has probably always been linked to the episodes of heavy rains causing water to flow and cut its way to the sea across the beach, thus more likely during the monsoon season (Costa 1994, 32). This situation is also consistent with the absence of fossil beach rock at the site (I. Ahmed, pers. comm. May 2014). This does not exclude the site from the possibility to be part of the coastal trade network, for example with smaller boats unloading goods from larger ships anchored offshore, but surely excludes its role as a safe harbour.

Overall, one cannot dismiss the possibility that the structures at KK2/B and KK3/B-E were part of a small settlement linked with pre-Islamic (coeval with Sumhuram) or Early to Middle Islamic (coeval with al-Balīd) coastal network, but these hypotheses would need supporting archaeological evidence.

Site	Description	Suggested chronology	Costa's site name	Costa's suggested date
KK1/A	Cairns	Prehistoric	8	pre/proto-historic
KK1/A	Rock shelters, pens	Late Islamic to Modern	8	pre/proto-historic
KK1/B	Fences with stone foundations	Modern	-	-
KK2/A	Rock shelter	pre-Islamic (?) to modern	-	-
KK2/B	Walled terrace above rock	pre-Islamic (?) to modern	-	-
KK3/A	Stone enclosures	Late Islamic to Modern	7	pre-Islamic
KK3/B	Stone tower	pre-Islamic (?), Medieval to Late Islamic	5	Medieval to modern
KK3/C	Stone building with Islamic graves on top	pre-Islamic (?), Medieval to Late Islamic	6	pre-Islamic
KK3/D	Stone building	pre-Islamic (?), Medieval to Late Islamic	7?	pre-Islamic



KK3/E	Stone building	pre-Islamic (?), Medieval to Late Islamic	7?	pre-Islamic
KK3/F	Cemetery close to KK3/C	Medieval to Late Islamic	6	Islamic
KK3/G	Cemetery close to KK3/D-E	Medieval to Late Islamic	-	-
KK4/A	Large walled enclosure	Late Islamic to Modern	4A	Medieval to modern
KK4/B	Large walled enclosure	Late Islamic to Modern	4B	Medieval to modern
KK4/C	Huts and other stone features	Late Islamic to Modern	2	pre/proto-historic
KK5/A	Mosque	Late Islamic to Modern	3	Medieval to Late Islamic
KK5/B	Cemetery (east)	Late Islamic to Modern	3B	Medieval to Early Islamic
KK5/C	Cemetery (west)	Late Islamic to Modern, later than KK5/B	3A	Late Islamic to modern
KK6	Shelters, pens, hut foundations, middens	Modern	1	pre/proto-historic

Tab. 1 - Tentative chronology for the sites and structures identified during the survey and comparison with Costa's (1994) suggestions

## Conclusions

Anthropogenic traces are abundant and varied at Khor Kharfut, consistently with the characteristics making the small valley a favourable place for human occupation (protected landing point; the presence of natural shelters and stone suitable for construction; rich ecosystem comprising sweet water). Suggesting clear dates for the different episodes of human activity proved extremely difficult, but it seems that, after a possible prehistoric occupation mainly witnessed by funerary structures, the main occupation occurred during the medieval and Late Islamic periods. Many structures that could recall prehistoric features merely by their simple construction cannot be uncritically assigned to that period. Indeed, the vast majority appear to reflect simple lifeways rather than remarkable antiquity.

At the same time, a few elements that could date to the late pre-Islamic period stand out for the building technique (the tower KK3/B; the platform KK3/C) and the presence of pseudo-alphabetic signs (the rock shelter KK2/A). In the lack of solid evidence, however, their inclusion in the context of the South Arabian culture of the late centuries BC and early centuries AD must remain just a fascinating hypothesis.

Undoubtedly, a few contexts would be worth further research, specifically with the possible opening of a few test trenches or at least a thorough cleaning from recent soil cover and vegetation.

Test excavation can be suggested for the cairns at KK1/A, where it could provide useful information about the date and degree of preservation of the possible remains, and under the rock shelter

at KK2, to exclude or confirm ancient occupation. Extensive cleaning and test trenching would also be advisable against the perimeter walls of the tower at Site KK3/B and the buildings KK3/C-E in the same area.

Overall, the small bay of Khor Kharfut is a promising site to investigate human occupation and exploitation of a unique environmental niche and yield fresh data on the ancient history of Dhofar.

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