
The rise of socio-economic complexity in non-urban societies: functional organisation and social meaning of space in Early Bronze Age Eastern Arabia

Valentina Azzarà*¹

¹Archéologies et Sciences de l'Antiquité (ArScAn) – Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique : UMR7041 – Maison René Ginouvès, 21 allée de l'Université 92023 NANTERRE CEDEX, France

Résumé

This paper will focus on the arrangement and the functional organisation of domestic space as a proxy for the characterisation of elementary social and productive units, and of socio-economic complexity, in pre-protohistoric non-urban societies.

At the transition between foraging and production economy, Early Bronze Age Eastern Arabia is an ideal setting for understanding the rise of socio-economic complexity within *state-less* and *urban-less* societies. Yet, while a number of monumental graves and towers have been explored in the area, few "regular" settlements, displaying domestic contexts, have been investigated so far, and even fewer have undergone extensive research.

Thoroughly excavated in the frame of long-term research projects, the Early Bronze Age sites of Ra's al-Hadd HD-6 (*c.* 3100-2600 BCE) and Ra's al-Jinz RJ-2 (*c.* 2600/2500-2000 BCE), located in coastal Oman, will be used as case studies to present an approach that integrates the three dimensions conceptualised by Amos Rapoport – within the scope of environment-behaviour research – as *fixed-feature elements* (buildings, walls...), *semi-fixed-feature elements* ("furnishing" of all sorts – including artefacts) and *non-fixed-feature elements* (people and their activities and behaviours). As the third dimension is physically absent in the archaeological record, the material culture, i.e. the first two dimensions, must be used as a proxy to represent social actors and socio-economic structures.

This relation is investigated in a diachronic perspective by combining the analysis of structural design and of syntactical characters of buildings (integration / segregation of spaces, patterns of circulations...) with the analysis of systems of activities, examined through the distribution of ecofacts / artefacts, and including the various classes of manufacturing indicators.

Although there is much still to be done to fully comprehend how communities coped with their needs at the level of the social units and beyond, these analyses highlight the increasing complexification of Eastern Arabian societies throughout the 3rd millennium BCE. The results show the appearance of labour specialisation and economic diversification in societies where technological choices were not driven by sponsorship and control, and stress the significance of the local production / consumption strategies as one of the primary driving forces of socio-economic change.

*Intervenant

Mots-Clés: Socioeconomic complexity, Spatial analyses, Systems of activities