Integrated regional research on the south coast of Oman: the Ras al Junais Project
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Some twenty years of work by a French and Italian team in the Ja'al Alan, at the easternmost corner of the Arabian Peninsula (Sultanate of Oman) has yielded a wide array of archaeological and environmental data, mainly ranging from the 7th to 2nd millennium BC. This has allowed the reconstruction of the adaptative pathways and the evolution of human communities in a small hyper arid area, which combines on ca. 3000 km² various ecological niches such as mountains, steppes, occasional river beds, active and dry coastal lagoons. Permanent and temporary settlements have been located as well as cemeteries. Economical resources include intensive fishing along the coastline and in the lagoons with long term preservation of the catches, oasis cultivation of date palms and animal husbandry, organized in a wide network of exchanges and population mobility. Already by 3000 BC, following deep social transformations, the local society, organized on a tribal basis, is included in the wide exchange system between Mesopotamia, Iran, Central Asia, and the Indus valley, and may even have played a major role in maritime transportation. It managed to combine its already widely developed local exchange networks with foreign trade, becoming known in Mesopotamian cuneiform sources as the country of Magan. I will try to describe the main characteristics of this society, enhancing its originality among the early civilizations of the Middle East.