

Chapter Title: TIN ABŪNDĀ [TIN ABUNDA] (TAB)

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a) Wādī Irāwan and Western Wādī al-Ajāl (al-Wādī al-Gharbī)

SECTION 1. TIN ABŪNDĀ [TIN ABUNDA] (TAB)

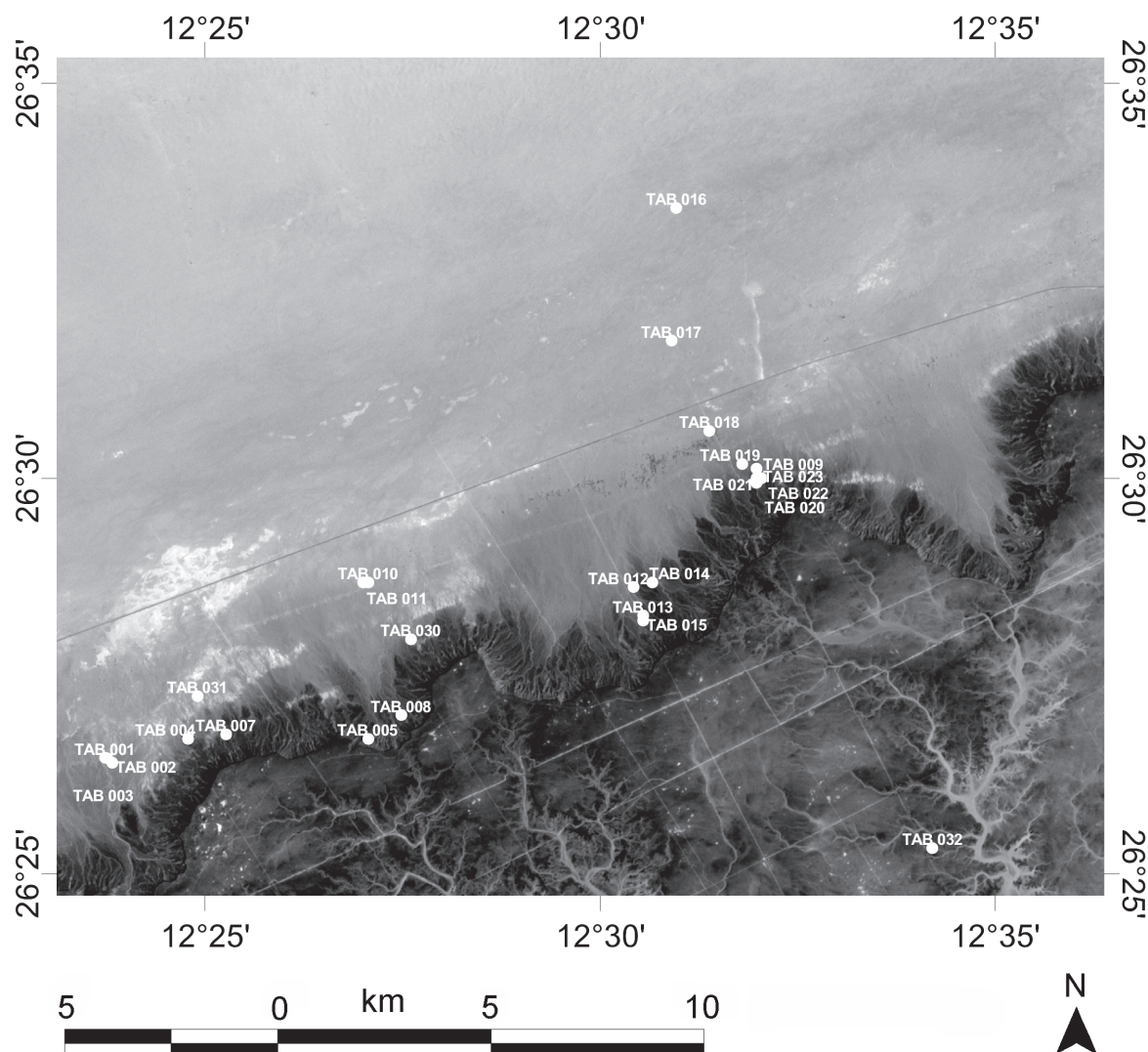


Figure 1.1. Sites in the Tin Abūndā area (FP 2000).

The well of Tin Abūndā lies c.45km SW of Ubārī along the old caravan route to Ghat in the Wādī Irāwan, a broad plain that continues the line of the al-Ajāl depression to the W (Bruce-Lockhart and Wright 2000, 123-4; Richardson 1848, i, 290-91). It is one of the last major sweet water wells before a lengthy stretch of desert steppe towards Sardalas/al-'Uwaynāt c.200km to the W. There was no permanent settlement and no farming around the well in the early 20th century (Scarin 1937b). The existence of 'Garamantian' tombs here has been known since the Italian expedition in the 1930s (Caputo 1937, 314; Pace *et al.* 1951, 384-86) and Daniels may have paid a brief visit. The Italians excavated several burials here, including an antenna tomb (no finds) and a cairn, which yielded iron artefacts (Pace *et al.* 1951, 384-86). Tin Abūndā appears to mark the W limit of the escarpment cemeteries of the Wādī al-Ajāl/Irāwan (Pace *et al.* 1951, 212).

The landscape at Tin Abūndā consists of (a) slope deposits below the main escarpment; (b) a zone extending for c.2km from the foot of (a), dissected by braided dry channels and (c) a very broad sand and gravel plain extending to (d) the sand sea some 30km to the N of the escarpment. A pronounced gypsum crust was recorded close to the old well at Tin Abūndā and represents a dried up lacustrine or swamp deposit (Fig. 1.1). The flat top of the Massāk plateau is not easily accessible up the escarpment, though one or two wadis are incised back into it close to Tin Abūndā. The plain is poorly vegetated, with few trees, except near its S edge, where a band of spring mounds and a line of acacia trees indicate the presence of sub-surface water. Most of the old wells for the caravan route were dug close to this S edge of the corridor.

Reconnaissance survey here in 1998 and 2000 revealed more detail about these cemeteries and

confirmed that Tin Abūndā is the most W point for dense cemeteries, though scattered cairns continue along the N flank of the escarpment to the W. More surprising was the discovery of at least two foggaras here (TAB 005 and 010), the most W known in the Wādī al-Hayāt system. Two palaeolithic handaxes were recovered from the spoil mound of the E foggara of the pair (TAB-2), which had possibly cut through a palaeolithic surface. The work in January 2000 was carried out in connection with a review of present oil exploration by REPSOL in this area (sites numbers prefixed 'R').

Ills: AF 2, Fig. 1.1.



Figure 1.2. TAB 001, antenna tomb, from SE (photo: FP 2000).

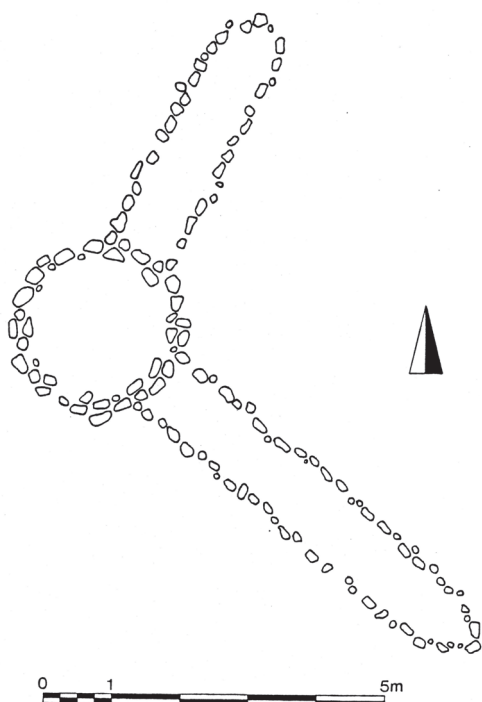


Figure 1.3. TAB 001, sketch plan of antenna tomb (FP 2000).

TAB 001 Antenna tomb **26°26.47/12°23.73**
 A circular low mound cairn c.2.5m diameter with two diverging stone alignments outlined in small stones set vertically in ground. The arms run approximately NE

for 4m and SE for c.6.1m. This is a small example of the so-called antenna tomb type and displays the normal E orientation (bisecting the angle between the two arms) (= R[EPSOL].22.1). **LPAST**

Ills: AF 2, Figs 1.2-1.3.

TAB 002 Antenna tomb **26°26.39/12°23.80**
 A larger example of the antenna tomb type, c.160m S of TAB 001, with SE arm c.35m long and NE arm c.47m long. (= R22.2). **LPAST**

TAB 003 Cairn **26°26.45/12°23.77**
 An isolated cairn of 2m diameter to S of TAB 001 (= R22.3). **LPAST? GAR?**

TAB 004 Antenna tomb, cemetery **26°26.68/12°24.77**
 Antenna tomb with an isolated orthostat (a marker?) due E of it. This tomb lies within a cemetery of small cairns distributed over c.200m of the lower escarpment slope (= R22.4). **LPAST**

TAB 005 Foggara **26°26.68/12°27.05**
 This is the westernmost foggara recorded in the Wādī al-Hayāt system, traceable over c.0.4km from 26°28.86/12°27.01 to 26°29.06/12°27.08, running S-N from near the foot of the escarpment to an area of evaporite crust. It may originally have extended further S, but that area has been bulldozed recently. It converges at one point (26°28.92/12°27.07) to within 30m of the near parallel foggara TAB 010. Occasional individual spoil rings and shafts were discernible in the S sector, while its N course was traceable as a continuous bank of spoil. In a band of acacia trees (26°28.86/12°27.03) large palaeolithic cores were noted on the surface. (= R22.5). **GAR [PAL]**

TAB 006 Cemetery **No co-ordinates**
 A large cairn cemetery directly below a projection on the escarpment. (= R22.6). **GAR?**

TAB 007 Cemetery **26°26.80/12°25.26**
 Large concentration of cairns seen from old Ghat road. Not visited. (= R22.7) **GAR?**

TAB 008 Cemetery **26°27.00/12°27.46**
 Large concentration of cairns seen from old Ghat road. Not visited. (= R22.8). **GAR?**

TAB 009 Antenna tomb, cemetery **26°30.00/12°32.04**
 This is a very well preserved example of the antenna-type tomb within an extensive area of cairn graves (TAB 020). The monument consists of a c.3m diameter circular kerbed cairn (apparently robbed) set at the centre of an oval setting of irregular upright stones. Most of these outer stones are plate-like flat slabs set edgewise in the

ground, projecting *c.*30 cm above the modern surface. However, on the E side a group of taller orthostats was used, originally standing *c.*50-60cm, with a matching group of two similar orthostats on the W side. The line of sight over the two sets of stones is more or less due E and there are other cairn burials at 50-70m distance that align both to E and W. The space between the central cairn and the outer 'circle' had been carefully paved with irregular flat slabs of *c.*30-30cm length. On the E side of the central monument there was a small squarish arrangement of stones, again set edgewise in the ground, defining a box of *c.*1.8 x 2m, open to the E. It is unclear whether this represents a separate burial or could have served as a place for offerings to be placed. From the 'grave circle' two sinuous arms project 40m to NE and 43m to SE. These arms are defined by lines of small stones set edgewise in the ground and standing *c.*20cm above the modern surface. The width of these arms varies from *c.*1-4m and they were mostly unpaved – with the exception of a short length adjacent to the circle, the NE terminal and a small section in the middle section of the SE arm where a rough paving of small slabs (*c.*10cm

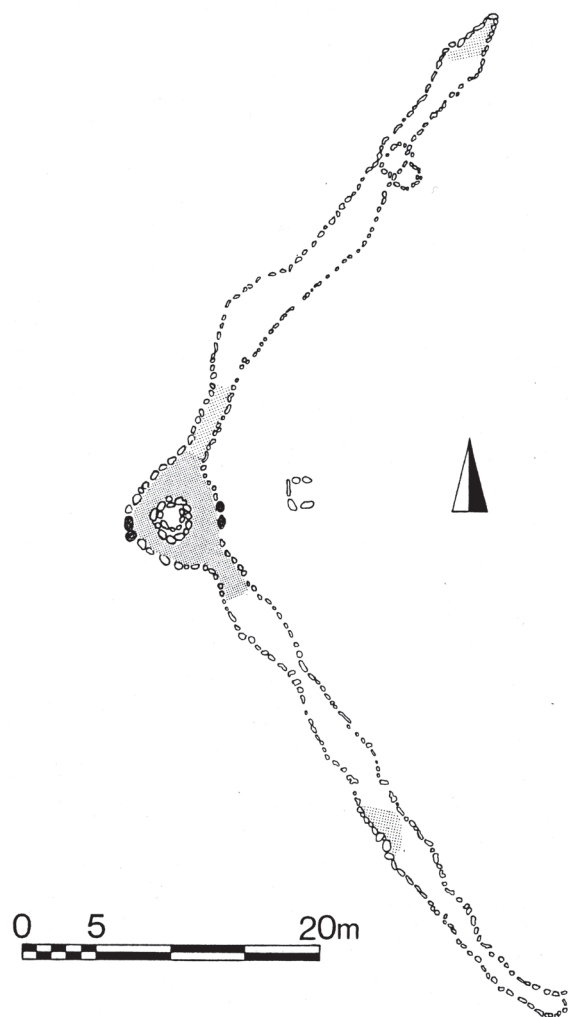


Figure 1.4. TAB 009, plan of antenna tomb (FP 2000).

length) was used. No diagnostic finds were recovered from the structure, apart from elements of general palaeolithic scatter that occurs right along this part of the escarpment (TAB 021). (=R23.9). **LPAST [PAL]**
Ills: AF 1, 202; AF 2, Figs 1.4-1.6, 1.8.

TAB 010 Foggara 26°28.67/12°27.05

The E of the two foggara channels recorded at Tin Abūndā. Like TAB 005 it appears to have delivered water to an area of evaporite crust (26°29.50/12°27.02) near the location of the Tin Abūndā well. It is possible that this area of evaporites represents the zone irrigated by these foggaras. The foggara was traced across a distance of 1.25km from 26°28.67/12°27.05 to 26°29.34/12°27.13 and clearly originated further S towards the escarpment. At 26°28.88/12°27.06 the channel evidently converged with the near parallel course of foggara TAB 005. In one section the roof of the channel appeared to have collapsed (26°28.84/12°27.06), suggesting an original depth at that point of *c.*1m below the surface. Palaeolithic cores and bifaces from the spoil heaps suggest that the shafts have cut through palaeolithic deposits in places (=TAB 011). There are also at least two post-classical graves of Islamic type overlying the spoil heaps (26°28.72/12°27.04). **GAR**
Ills: AF 2, Fig. 42.1



Figure 1.5. TAB 009, view looking due E (to L of ranging pole) over sighting stones either side of tomb (photo: FP 2000).



Figure 1.6. TAB 009, view of central burial and SE arm (photo: FP 2000).

TAB 011 Lithics scatter 26°28.67/12°27.00
Palaeolithic bifaces and cores from a possible activity site cut by shafts of foggara TAB 010. **PAL**

TAB 012 Cairn 26°28.59/12°30.40
A medium cairn (c.2m diameter) standing in isolation on the pediment c.0.8km from the foot of the escarpment. (= 21.1) **LPAST? GAR?**

TAB 013 Stone alignments 26°28.26/12°30.52
Two sets of stone alignments on the boulder-strewn fans at the foot of the escarpment and c.400m of the cliff face. The lines run parallel with the escarpment and transversely to the slope. The alignments are each c.3-6m in length and set parallel to one another at a distance of 2-3m apart. It is possible they represent traces of old camp sites (tent bases), but there is no indication that they are of recent origin. (= R21.2-3).
Ills: AF 2, Fig. 1.7.

TAB 014 Cairn 26°28.10/12°30.64
A medium cairn (c.2m diameter) standing in isolation on the pediment at the very foot of the escarpment. No associated finds (= R21.5). **LPAST? GAR?**

TAB 015 Lithics scatter 26°28.19/12°30.52
A thin general scatter of palaeolithic flakes spread over several 100m of the escarpment base in the area of Sites TAB 013-014. (=R21.4). **PAL**

TAB 016 Hearth, occupation? 26°33.4/12°30.96
A possible temporary campsite indicated by a small piled-stone hearth (D: c.1m, H: 30cm) and fragment of a grindstone (= R23.10). **PAST**

TAB 017 Occupation? 26°31.76/12°30.92
A possible domestic site, perhaps an encampment, indicated by fragments of handmade pottery, grindstones and scattered stones. The material was concentrated at the edge of a band of spring mounds running parallel to the escarpment (=R23.1). **PAST**



Figure 1.7. TAB 013, stone alignments (photo: FP 2000).

TAB 018 Occupation? 26°30.62/12°31.39
A possible domestic site, indicated by fragments of handmade pottery, grindstones and scattered stones. The material was encountered within a band of acacia trees running parallel to the escarpment (=R23.2). **PAST**

TAB 019 Cairns 26°30.16/12°31.82
Two piled stone type 1a cairns, one c.6m diameter x c.1.5m high, the other 2m in diameter (=R23.3). They are N outliers of the TAB 020 cemetery. **LPAST? GAR?**
Ills: AF 1, 198

TAB 020 Cemetery 26°30.00/12°31.81
An extensive cemetery of dispersed graves, spread over c.200m of escarpment pediment (cemetery morphological type 2), encompassing numerous cairns (TAB 020 and antenna tomb TAB 009). Some of the tombs are piled stone cairns (mostly type 1a, some corbelled 1b) of varying dimensions (2-4m diameter), others are more carefully built drum cairns (type 3a). At least one example had a centrally placed stone stele, while a number of cairns had attached structures, outlined in small stones ('altars' or associated burials?). (=R23.4). **LPAST? GAR?**
Ills: AF 1, 198; AF 2, Fig. 1.8.

TAB 021 Lithics scatter 26°30.10/12°32.00
A general spread of palaeolithic material (mainly flakes) along the lower slopes of the escarpment and underlying cemetery TAB 020, etc. (=R23.5). **PAL**

TAB 022 Stone alignments 26°29.95/12°31.96
A series of short stone alignments c.5m long and 3-4m apart. These are essentially similar to TAB 013 above. (=R 23.6).

TAB 023 Cemetery 26°29.97/12°31.99
A cluster of well-preserved cairns and drum tombs, some with crude stele, within the extensive cemetery TAB 020 (see above) (= R23.7-8). **GAR?**

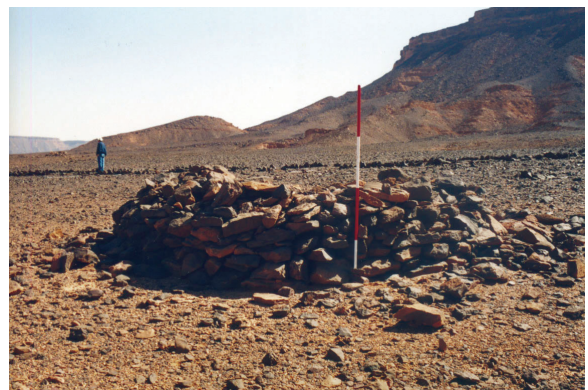


Figure 1.8. TAB 020, view of drum tomb in cemetery, with NE arm of antenna tomb TAB 009 in rear (photo: FP 2000).

**TAB 030 Lithics scatter, 26°27.94/12°27.62
antenna tomb**

Lithics, including Acheulean biface, a 'berber' pot, graves and an antenna tomb. The site is on a Pleistocene lake shoreline about 530m above sea level. Sample of lake sediment collected for OSL dating. **PAL, PAST**

TAB 031 Lithics scatter 26°27.25/12°24.93

The scatter was located on Pleistocene lake sediments

at an altitude of approximately 527m above sea level. Other finds included fragment of stone rubber/grinder. Melanoides shells were collected for dating. **PAL, MPAST?**

TAB 032 Lithics scatter 26°25.34/12°34.22

Late Acheulean site, c.80m diameter area with eroded bifaces and levallois cores and other débitage. (= R23.14). **PAL**