

## Jebel al-Mutawwaq

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Jebel al-Mutawwaq is an Early Bronze Age I (EB I) site, characterized by a walled settlement with hundreds of double-apsed houses, a sacred area (the Temple of the Serpents), and some large public buildings used for productive and storage activities. The site, investigated since 2012 by a Spanish-Italian expedition, has also a huge megalithic necropolis with several dolmens located in clusters outside the EB I village. In the past seasons, the investigations have been conducted first in the eastern sector and then in the central sector of the settlement, inside the Great Enclosure (Polcaro-Muniz 2019), and in the northern area of the village, where recently excavation of a new house has begun.

In the 2018 and 2019 seasons, relevant discoveries were also related to the excavations in the megalithic necropolis, in the portion close to the southern settlement wall, near area C. Here at least two large dolmens, partially violated, were identified: dolmen 535 (Fig. 1) and dolmen 11. The former is located just below the Great Enclosure, along the southern slope of the mountain, and the latter close to the southern settlement door, both outside the settlement wall. The two dolmens have similar architectonical characteristics, such as an inner megalithic chamber large enough to be split vertically into two spaces for burials through a separation floor, of which only the traces of the grooves engraved on the lateral stone slabs have survived. Moreover, around the central trilithon structure, each has a huge stone platform made of squared stone blocks definitively larger than the small, roughly worked stones of the other excavated dolmen platforms, such as the one belonging to dolmen 317 (Polcaro et al. 2014). Furthermore, in both cases there are traces of activities performed after the closure of the megalithic monument. In particular, dolmen 535 had a circular installation to the left of the entrance of the funerary chamber, while dolmen 11 had, to the right of the entrance, an area with a standing stone, a cupmark, and a carved rock bench, around which several basalt grinding stones were collected. The pottery sherds discovered on the floor and inside the burial chambers of the two dolmens suggest that both dolmens were built and used during the EB IA, but dolmen 535 had a second phase of use in the EB IB.

Finally, both the dolmens were connected to artificial underground caves. While the cave connected to dolmen 11 (cave 1210) was violated in antiquity and its excavation is not yet finished, cave 1012, connected to dolmen 535, was discovered sealed and containing several well-preserved secondary burials, with the skulls located against the back of the chamber and the long bones piled in the center of the hypogeum (Fig. 2a). Several miniature vessels (e.g., Fig. 2b) are the only funerary gifts discovered associated with





a

b

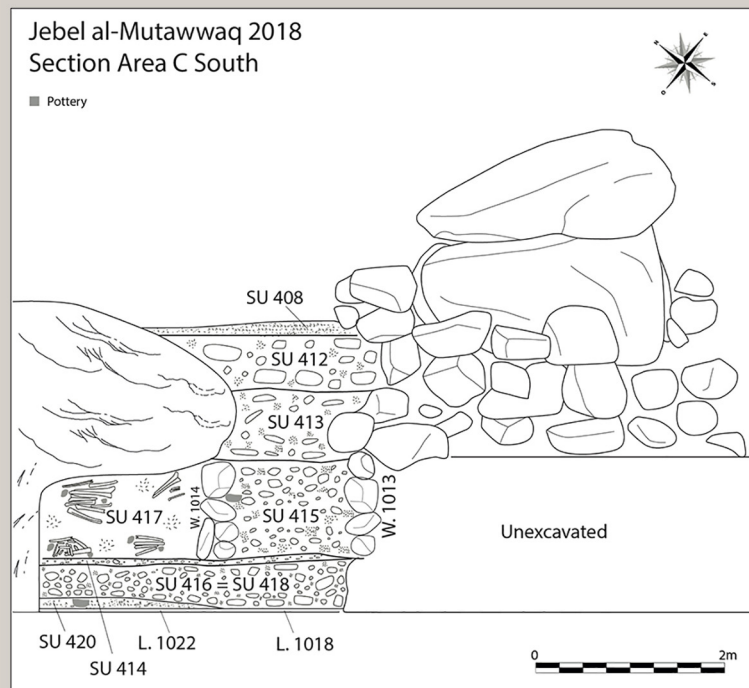


Fig. 1. a: Dolmen 535;  
b: elevation of dolmen  
535 with cave 1012.



Fig.2.a. Interior of cave 1012 connected to dolmen 535. b. Two miniature vessels found in cave 1012.

the secondary burials in cave 1012. The archaeological and anthropological data seem to confirm that the hypogeum was used to store the bones of bodies that had been previously buried inside the dolmen and then, after decomposition of the soft tissues, were moved and rearranged inside the cave. Although not yet fully excavated, it seems that cave 1210 had a similar connection with dolmen 11.

These recent discoveries in Jebel al-Mutawwaq suggest that this system of a dolmen used for primary burials and a nearby cave for secondary burials was typical, at least for the southern sector of the necropolis, which is closer to the settlement and is characterized by dolmens larger than those of the other funerary areas.

## References

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