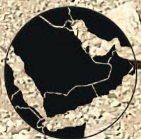


The IASA Bulletin

The latest news and research in the Arabian Peninsula

Issue 31 Autumn 2023



IASA

International Association
for the Study of Arabia

الرابطة الدولية لدراسة الجزيرة العربية

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The IASA Bulletin is an e-publication for members of the IASA. It is published twice a year, in Spring and Autumn. The Bulletin depends on the good will of IASA members and correspondents to provide contributions. News, items of general interest, details of completed postgraduate research, forthcoming conferences, meetings and special events are welcome.

Please email: bulletin@theiasa.com

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors of the articles. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the IASA or its members.

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Membership details are available from the IASA website <https://iasarabia.org>. For membership renewals contact William Deadman, IASA Membership Secretary, Department of Archaeology, Durham University, South Road, Durham, DH1 3LE, or email: membership@theiasa.com

For any enquiries:

contact@theiasa.com

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Cover photo: A careful and informed restoration allows this defensive tower to stand watch over the Shimal Plain - recorded as part of the Ras al-Khaimah Traditional Architecture survey (Photo: D.Connolly/H. Kdolska)

Welcome

Hello and welcome to a slightly delayed edition of the 2023 Autumn Bulletin. It has been an absolute pleasure to act as Outreach Consultant this year and once again edit the Bulletin. The content relies on the goodwill of our members and wider colleagues to submit information, and I thank you all for your contributions. It's always a joy to read about the fascinating and diverse areas of research which are being carried out in Arabia. I would like to thank in particular Alexandra Hirst and Marylyn Whaymand for their support in producing this edition.

This Autumn Bulletin presents our regular features including lecture reports and regional news, this time from Oman and Saudi Arabia, as well as research notices from two PhD students who have presented at the IASA Seminar over the last couple of years. There are also book reviews, expertly compiled by Alexandra Hurst, and it finishes with a fascinating look by [Sheila Russell](#) FRGS at the last king of Babylon leaving his mark in an Oasis in Saudi Arabia.

As Noel points out in his *Final Words*, the design software used for this publication is 'cumbersome' but I must admit that I find it less intimidating and more user-friendly than I did at the start of the year. It will never be simple, but going forward I would recommend that we do stick with it. Time, coupled with trial and error, goes a long way! Noel also notes that IASA must unify its brand identity. For that reason I have attempted to align the look of the Bulletin with our new website. Please do comment if you would like to see changes. I would however suggest that this seems to be a particularly busy time of year and going forward, it may be prudent to consider shifting the date of the Bulletin to ensure timely submission of material.

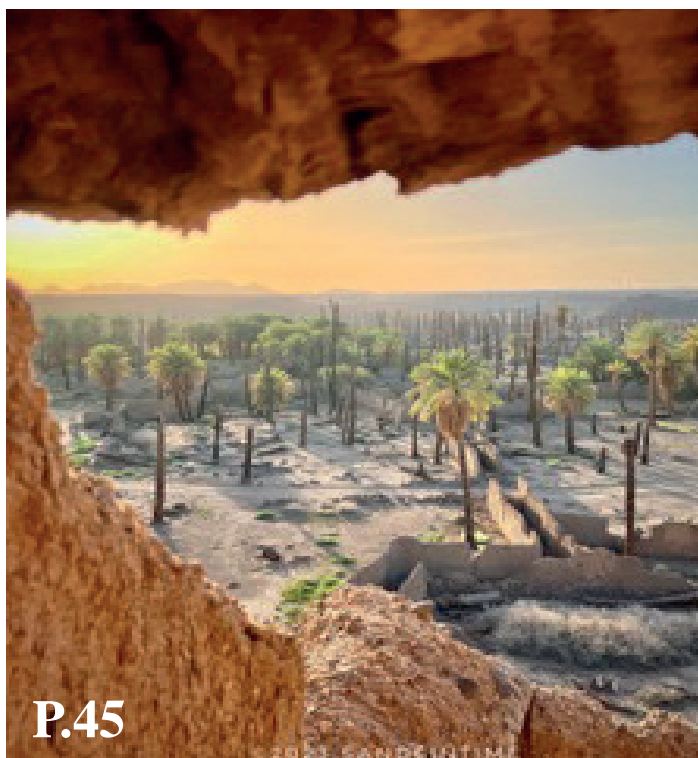
Finally, as Noel steps down, I'm sure you will join me in thanking him for his dedication and excellent direction over the last four years and I would like to extend my gratitude to him for his patience, guidance and support as I found my feet. It is an exciting time for IASA and the organisation will be in good hands with Peter and José at the helm.



Kate Ayres-Kennet

If you do not already follow the IASA on social media, please do so. You do not need to have a Facebook account to see our page, and as well as posting our own news and information about events and lectures etc., we repost articles and items of interest from the news and from other organisations. It's a great way of keeping up with what is happening in the Arabian Peninsula. As well as [Facebook](#), we are on Twitter (@IASArabia), Instagram (@theiasarabia) and [LinkedIn](#).

We also welcome any items of interest to share, or even just your photographs of sites, museums, the natural landscape or flora and fauna of Arabia. Just message us via any media!



Contents

Final words from our outgoing Chair	5	Country News	22
		Oman	22
Welcome from our new Chair	9	Saudi Arabia	25
Welcome from our new Vice Chair	9	Research Notices	27
Meet our new Trustees	10	The British Library/Qatar Foundation Partnership	34
Trustee news	12	Lives Remembered	37
IASA Lectures	12	New Publications on Arabia	41
Forthcoming Lectures	18	Book Reviews	42
Seminar for Arabian Studies	19	Final Word	47
Paris 2024	21		
IASA Publications	21		
IASA Research Grants	22		

Thank you to our members for your continued support, and to all of the contributors to this edition of the IASA Bulletin.

Final words from our outgoing Chair

I stood down at the AGM on 21 September as Chair of IASA. When I was asked by Carolyn Perry if I would stand for election as chair of IASA in 2019, I was surprised since my career and personal interests in the Arabian Peninsula were in the contemporary political scene. However, I had been a Trustee for a few years of BFSa/IASA so knew what to expect. Discussing the future with colleagues in 2019 in the margins of the Leiden Seminar we decided that the priorities for the next three to four years were to make sure that IASA became truly international, and not simply a British organisation, and to establish the Seminar in its new peripatetic form – we could no longer rely on the prestige of the British Museum to attract the high level of participation of previous seminars. At the same time, we needed to raise the IASA profile to attract new members and help with fundraising to enable IASA to continue to support research in the Arabian Peninsula. That led us to create the position of Outreach Consultant in 2020 to manage our messaging on social media editing the Bulletin and setting up and then managing a new website. What we did not know in 2019 was that we would have to implement these changes during the challenges posed by COVID.

Much of what we set out to do is still a work in progress but thanks to the effort of the Seminar Committee and in particular to Derek Kennet, BFSa's first chair, we have organized with host institutions successful seminars in Cordoba (virtually), Berlin (hybrid) and this year – again hybrid - at the Moesgaard Museum and Aarhus University in Denmark. Preparations are already under way for the 57th Seminar which will be held in Paris in June, earlier than usual to avoid the Olympic Games. We hope to announce the venue for the 2025 Seminar before the end of the year. What is encouraging is the number of institutions that now would like to host the Seminar. The Seminar has long been and will remain our most important activity. It seems to be thriving and our financial position is now much healthier.



Zoom and its equivalents have enabled us to run a greater number of lectures than before 2019 and attract much larger audiences than were possible in the past. In the process our membership though still modest is at its highest number ever with an ever-increasing proportion now outside the UK. We have recruited more non-British trustees, a process that will continue under the new IASA leadership.

I am delighted that members have elected as my successor Professor Peter Magee, who is not only a distinguished archaeologist but also is the Director of Zayed National Museum and the Head of Archaeology with the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi. He is also a former professor of archaeology at Bryn Mawr College in the US. Peter has been an active trustee for the last three years. Trustees also wished to fill the long vacant position of Vice Chair and nominated Dr José C. Carvajal López, who has been a very active trustee since 2019 and always willing to find time to deal with IASA matters despite his heavy academic workload. Both Peter and José are making contributions to this Bulletin and biographies of them and of new trustees can also be found in this Bulletin.

The new members of the Executive Committee

Professor Timothy Insoll FBA is Al-Qasimi Professor of African and Islamic Archaeology at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, who also delivered the 2023 IASA Beatrice de Cardi Lecture at the Society of Antiquaries in London after the AGM on 21 September. Dr. Salman Almahari is currently serving as the Director of Antiquities and Museums in Bahrain. Dr William Deadman, who as membership secretary, has been a de facto member of the committee for several years and has played an invaluable role in building our membership. Dr Noel Brehony – for one year only - to help with the transition. Dr Julian Jansen Van Rensburg had completed three years as a trustee and was elected another three years. I am delighted that Simon Alderson, our Honorary Treasurer, and Amy Crossman, our Honorary Secretary, were re-elected for a further year. They deserve the gratitude of us all for the time they give to IASA.

There are some vacancies on the committee and the new leadership will make proposals on filling these in due course.

Finally, I would like to thank all IASA members, the trustees and friends of IASA for all the help and support they have given me. They have made the last four years highly enjoyable as well as, I hope, useful.

The following are points from the report presented by the Chair to the AGM on 21 September.

Outreach

Kate Ayres-Kennet took over the role of Outreach Consultant from Sarah Campbell in November 2022. In that role she has been producing the now on-line Bulletin, managing our events, updating our new website, and expanding our presence on social media. None of this has been easy. The design system that we have used for some years to produce the Bulletin is cumbersome and we will examine if we can find a system that is easier to use without affecting the current look of the bulletin. The trustees are immensely grateful for all that Kate has been doing in addition to her role as Seminar Secretary. We originally set up the Outreach Consultancy under Carolyn Perry in 2020 as a three-year trial. It has proved to be worthwhile, but the new committee will want to review it in the light of the strategy for the next three years or more. We also need to do more to unify our “brand” across our external communications whether via social media, the Bulletin, or the website. We need to expand our presence in social media and do more in Arabic.

The Autumn 2023 IASA Bulletin should be available by early November. Like the Spring edition, it has been edited by Kate Ayres-Kennet with support from Alexandra Hirst (Book Reviews) and Marylyn Whaymand. I would like to thank them for producing such splendid issues and thank all who took the time to share information on their activities or to write articles, reviews, and contributions. Please do continue to send information on research, new publications, conferences, exhibitions, events, or other items of interest to bulletin@theiasa.com as we will continue to disseminate these to members and a wider audience.

Social Media

Our Facebook and Twitter accounts can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/IASArabia/> and The IASA (@IASArabia). Since last November we have also been on Instagram (theiasarabia), LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-international-association-for-the-study-of-arabia/>) and YouTube https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCS_9Wc-v_oOKuJGQZ92IKDA. We aim to translate the key messages into Arabic – and the new chair is keen for IASA to do much more in Arabic in the future. Most of our lectures are available on YouTube.

Lectures and Events

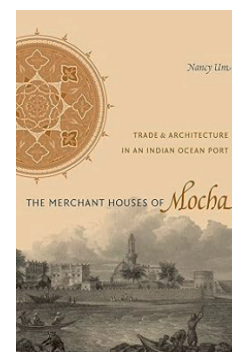
Most of our lectures are now given by Zoom to ensure that they reach the widest possible audience. Our aim is to organise at least one hybrid lecture per annum to provide an opportunity for members to meet each other, usually in London.



The 2022 Beatrice de Cardi lecture was held as our first in-person event since the outbreak of COVID on 17 October. Professor Hugh Kennedy discussed his new translation of Al-Baladhuri's Account of the Muslim Conquest of Arabia. A video of the lecture is available here:

<https://youtu.be/9j42PQ8Kmmc?feature=shared>

On 12th December 2022 Mocha in the 17th and 18th Centuries: Yemen's Age of Coffee was presented by Dr. Nancy Um, Associate Director for Research and Knowledge Creation at the Getty Research Institute and a faculty member in the Department of Art History at Binghamton University 2001-2022. This was a joint lecture with the British Yemeni Society and The MBI al Jaber Foundation on Zoom, which drew in a large international audience. The video is available at <https://youtu.be/9Xyz079Z3Ss?feature=shared>



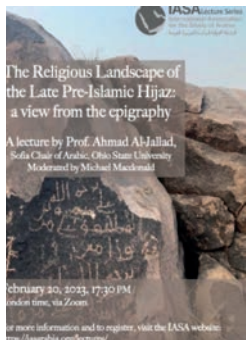
On 31st January 2023 we held the lecture Yemen and Ethiopia: archaeology and movement across the Red Sea by Richard Lee, winner of the British Yemeni Society Academic Award and at the time a PhD candidate at the University of York. It was organised jointly by IASA and the British Yemeni Society.



Grants

This year a budget of £4,950 was allocated to research grants. Ten applications were received (six Small and four Main) with a total value of £13, 812. The grants sub-committee awarded four grants as follows:

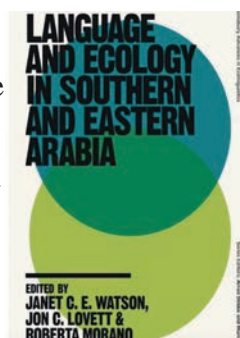
- Rawan Alfuraih, The Space of Tales: Ecologies of Embodied Movement in Najdi Sibaheen Folktales' Performance (£1,000).
- Tracey Cian, The social and cultural significance of the Iron Age snake figurines in south-eastern Arabia (£1,000).
- Lesley A. Gregoricka, Climate Change and Adaptive Responses among Umm an-Nar and Wadi Suq Communities in Ras al-Khaimah, UAE (£2,000).
- Zoë van Litsenburg, Of Shells and (wo)men: an analysis of aquatic resources from Umm an-Nar and Wadi Suq domestic structures in the Wadi al Jizzi, Oman (£943.05).



On 21 February 2023 Professor Ahmad Al-Jallad, presented new epigraphic discoveries from the late 5th to early 7th century Hijaz and discussed the religious continuities and transformations that occurred in this period and their implications on our understanding of the

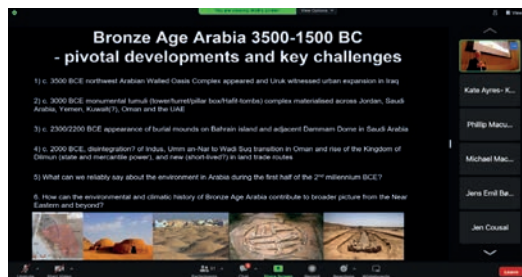
background of Islam. This lecture was moderated by Michael Macdonald and attracted over 400 registrations. A report on the lecture will be published in this Bulletin.

On 26th April 2023 Professor Janet Watson, Professor Dawn Chatty and Dr Jack Wilson gave a lecture on 'Language and Ecology in Southern and Eastern Arabia', an event jointly organised by British Yemeni Society, IASA and the MBI al Jaber Foundation. The video is available at: <https://youtu.be/JTWKiEf5eSA?feature=shared>



Finally, I would like to thank our trustees and the many others who give their free time to supporting the IASA, not least, Will Deadman, our Membership Secretary. I have found it a great a pleasure and a privilege to work with all.

Noel Brehony



On 4 August IASA members were able to watch on Video the keynote

lecture given at the 2023 Seminar by Professor Adrian G. Parker Professor of Geography at Oxford Brookes University. The title was "Arabian Paleoenvironments and climate change during the Arabian Bronze Age (3500-1000 BC)".



Overlooking Wadi Munay in Ras al-Khaimah, these Wussum (tribal marks) tell a story of shifting power and ownership. Recorded as part of the Traditional Architecture survey (Photo: D.Connolly/H. Kdolska)



Wadi shams in northern Ras al-Khaimah has a wealth of architectural and archaeological features, that were recorded as part of the Ras al-Khaimah Traditional Architecture survey (Photo: D.Connolly/H. Kdolska)

Welcome from the new Chair

Dear IASA Members,

I am honoured to serve as the IASA Chair beginning this month. I am well aware that I have big shoes to fill and would like to extend my thanks to Noel Brehony and the outgoing trustees for all their hard work in bringing the IASA to its current very healthy state in terms of membership and finances.

The IASA represents a collective organized curiosity about the languages, history, culture and archaeology of the Arabian peninsula. With rigorous academic research and engaging public outreach we bring that sense of organized curiosity to the world.



This is an important time for that mission. Throughout the countries of the Arabian peninsula, there is an ever-increasing popular and governmental interest in archaeology, heritage and museums. That interest is founded on a deep sense of identity and history. As Chair I will further our on-going efforts to bring the IASA's activities and outreach, in a very tangible way, to the part of the world that has been its scholarly focus for more than 50 years. Achieving this will not only expand its membership and find new audiences for its conferences and events, but more importantly will enhance the IASA's more inclusive and self-reflexive understanding of the Arabian peninsula.

I look forward to working with all of you over the next few years in realizing this important goal.

Best wishes,
Peter

Welcome from the new Vice Chair

Dear IASA Members,



I am very honoured to have been appointed IASA Vice-Chair from the past AGM. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Noel Brehony and the trustees that are ending their service now. As our new Chair states, they leave big shoes to fill, but we will do our very best!

The IASA has gained fair acknowledgement as a learned society in Europe and America due to its excellence. Peter is right to point out that this is a good time to gain more recognition in our own area of studies, the Arabian Peninsula. This must be done while maintaining our sense of identity and high standards of professionalism. These have been shaped by the transformation of the institution from BFSA to IASA and by the transformation of the Seminar from a UK-based to an international conference. To my knowledge, the IASA has been the only institution of its kind to undertake such a move, particularly bold in these times of rising nationalism in many countries.

With its unparalleled spirit of scholarly community and collaboration, the IASA has been an important support about me during my transition from early career to established scholar. I want this to continue being so for many other scholars and people driven by curiosity for the Arabian peninsula. I am looking forward to see what the next few years bring! I will be glad to see this alongside all of you!

All the best,
José

Meet our new



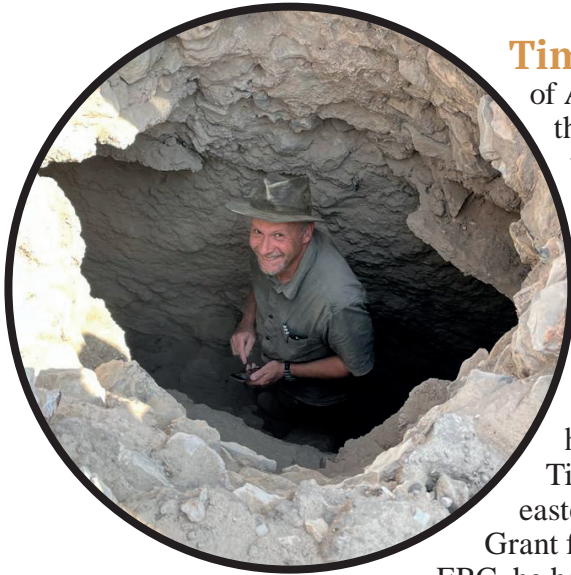
Salman Al-Mahari, a Bahraini national, is currently serving as the Director of Antiquities and Museums at the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities. He has a PhD in Archaeology and has dedicated his career to this field since 2001. Throughout his career, Salman has presented scientific papers and lectures both locally and internationally, focusing on the history and archaeology of Bahrain. He has provided valuable insights into the results of archaeological excavations and the conservation of archaeological sites in Bahrain. In 2009, Dr. Salman Al-Mahari published a book titled "Archaeological Sites in the Kingdom of Bahrain: Threats and Challenges". He has also contributed to the field with publications such as "Conservation of Historic Buildings" by ICCROM-Sharjah Publications in 2018 and "Islamic Funerary Inscriptions in Bahrain" by Brill Publishing in English, also published in 2018. Dr. Salman Al-Mahari is a respected member of

both the Bahrain History and Antiquities Society and the Arabian Gulf History and Antiquities Society. He actively engages in activities aimed at raising community awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage. In summary, Salman Al-Mahari is a highly accomplished archaeologist and museum director, known for his extensive knowledge and contributions to the field. His publications, lectures, and involvement in various societies demonstrate his commitment to preserving Bahrain's rich cultural heritage.

Will Deadman grew up in Oman and studied the Early Bronze Age of eastern Arabia during his undergraduate and postgraduate studies at Durham University. In 2017 he completed his PhD examining Hafit tombs using remote sensing; he has also participated in a number of research projects in the region, and is Assistant Director of the Rustaq-Batinah Archaeological Survey. Dr Deadman now works as a postdoctoral researcher for the 'Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa' project at Durham. He has been IASA membership secretary since 2010.



ew Trustees



Timothy Insoll, FBA FSA FRAS is Al-Qasimi Professor of African and Islamic Archaeology and Director of Research at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, where he is also founding Director of the Centre for Islamic Archaeology. He is Honorary Archaeological Advisor to the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Bahrain, HRH Sh. Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, is an Honorary Curator in the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board and Honorary Lecturer, Department of Archaeology and Heritage Management, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia. He is a Fellow of the British Academy, Society of Antiquaries and Royal Asiatic Society. He has completed extensive archaeological fieldwork in Gao and Timbuktu in Mali, northern Ghana, Bahrain, western India, and eastern Ethiopia, the latter as PI of a recently ended ERC Advanced Grant funded project, *Becoming Muslim* (2016-2022). In addition to the ERC, he has received research funding from the Wellcome Trust, AHRC,

British Academy, and Max van Berchem Foundation. He completed his studies at the Universities of Sheffield (1989-1992) and Cambridge, and after finishing his PhD (1992-1995) was a Research Fellow at St John's College, Cambridge (1995-1998), and was subsequently at the University of Manchester (1999-2016). He is curator of two site museums in Bilad al-Qadim, Bahrain, and Harlaa, Ethiopia and has recently co-curated the new Islamic archaeology section, Ancient Islamic Societies, in the National Museum of Ethiopia. He has published extensively, including 11 monographs (one translated into Turkish and one into Persian), 13 edited volumes and special issues of journals and approximately 55 peer-reviewed journal articles, and 50 contributions to edited volumes. Most recently he edited a special section on the Islamic archaeology in sub-Saharan Africa for the *Journal of Islamic Archaeology* (2022, 9[2]), and is currently working on a monograph, *Islamic Archaeology in Global Perspective* (Abingdon: Routledge).



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Don't forget, biographies of all our
Trustees can be found on the IASA
website:

<https://iasarabia.org/biographies/>

Trustee News

Prof. Derek Kennet will be joining The University of Chicago, Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures as the newly established Professor of Arabian Peninsula and Gulf States Archaeology on the 1st January 2024. He will be based partly in the department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations. Derek Kennet will be leaving Durham University, UK, where he has been for the past 25 years and where he currently holds a Professorship in the Department of Archaeology.

IASA Lectures

The IASA holds at least three online events per academic year, in addition to the Annual Beatrice de Cardi Lecture, named in honour of our late President, usually held in the Summer following the AGM.

If you are a likeminded organisation and would like to hold a joint event please contact us via bulletin@theiasa.com. Members with suggestions for events are also very welcome to forward them.

The Religious Landscape of the pre-Islamic Hijaz: a view from the Epigraphy

21st February 2023

The religious background of the Quranic audience has been the subject of much scholarly attention in the past decades. Scholars, such as Crone and Hawting, have cast doubt on traditional narratives that depict Arabia, and especially the Ḥijāz, as a heathen land untouched by Biblical monotheisms. Through a close reading of the Quranic text, they highlighted the commonalities between the opponents of Muḥammad, the Mushrikīn, and nascent Islam.

The Mushrikūn seem to have been well-acquainted with Biblical ideas. Both groups believed in one high god who created and had dominion over the heavens and the earth (Q 39:38); they believed in a cosmos consisting of seven heavens above which is the throne of God (Q 23:86-87); they believed in the angels and jinn; they considered the Meccan sanctuary sacred. Crone suggested that the primary theological disagreement between Muḥammad and the Mushrikīn concerned the intercessory role of lesser supernatural beings, called angels and gods indiscriminately in the Quran, and their status



as God's offspring. Historians of early Islam continue to debate this issue, which ultimately comes down to reconciling the close reading of the Quran with later traditions found in Islamic literary sources. But a third dimension of investigation is possible.

The last ten years have seen great advances in the epigraphic exploration of Saudi Arabia, which has resulted in the growth of the corpus of Paleo-Arabic inscriptions* from just four texts at the turn of the millennium to over forty-five today. Unlike literary sources, these texts are direct witnesses to the religious landscape of late pre-Islamic Arabia. The inscriptions span from Nagrān in the south of Saudi Arabia to Zebed in northern Syria. All of the texts from the Levant, Dūmat al-Jandal, and Nagrān are Christian, which is not entirely surprising. Until recently,

however, the Ḥigāz remained a sort of black hole. Was it indeed the last bastion of paganism in Arabia? In the last few years, a number of texts from the Tabūk region as well as the region of Mecca and al-Ṭā'if have been discovered.

Much to our surprise, all of these inscriptions are monotheistic, in the sense that their religious formulae invoke only one God, Allāh or al-'Ilāh - there are so far no invocations to the numerous gods mentioned in works like ibn al-Kalbī's Book of Idols, or even to the "goddesses" Allāt, Al-'Uzzē, and Manōh mentioned in Sūrat al-Najm. But unlike the clearly Christian texts from elsewhere, these inscriptions present a more neutral monotheism, with no clear symbols of Judaism or Christianity. They open with an invocation in God's name: "in your name, O Allāh." They call the passerby to be pious towards God, who is sometimes called rabb "lord," and to bless the reader. They ask for his forgiveness. What is further curious is that two of these monotheistic texts were authored by men bearing pagan names, "Servant of al-'Uzzē" and "Servant of the (divine) Sun."

While it is very dangerous to draw theological conclusions on the basis of personal names alone (just consider the name Dennis borne by Christians today), it is possible that such names

indicate some belief in supernatural beings beside Allāh. Thus, the epigraphic evidence seems to favor the interpretation of Crone regarding the religion of the Mushrikīn. The inscriptions point towards a pan-tribal belief in only one god called Allāh, who is the sole object of devotion and from whom forgiveness is sought. The persistence of pagan personal names is, however, compatible with the belief in lesser supernatural beings functioning as intercessors, similar, as Crone suggested, to dead saints in later Islamic traditions. While it is impossible to know on the basis of the surviving evidence whether these beings were regarded as angels or something else, it is clear that they were not worshipped in the same way as Allāh. We do not know what the authors of these Paleo-Arabic texts would have called themselves or if they would have indeed regarded themselves as monotheists, as argued by Hawting. Future fieldwork will surely increase our understanding of the religious landscape of Arabia on the eve of Islam, and perhaps provide answers to these outstanding questions.

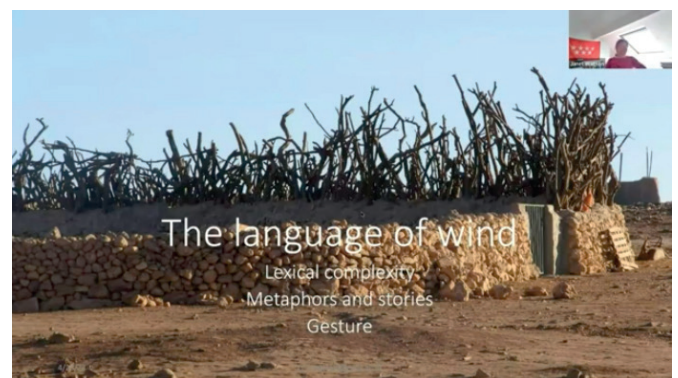
* Paleo-Arabic refers to the non-standardized, primarily pre-Islamic phase of the Arabic script.

Report by Ahmad Al-Jallad

Language and Ecology in Southern and Eastern Arabia

On 26th April 2023 Professor Janet Watson, Professor Dawn Chatty and Dr Jack Wilson gave a lecture by Zoom on 'Language and Ecology in Southern and Eastern Arabia', an event jointly organised by British Yemeni Society, IASA and the MBI al Jaber Foundation. This lecture was based on the book of the same title edited by Janet Watson, Jon C. Lovett and Roberto Morana which will be reviewed in our next bulletin. Miranda Morris was one of the chapter authors who contributed to the discussion during the Q and A. The book itself seeks to examine the relationship between language and ecology from the perspectives of the communities in southern and eastern Arabia.

Professor Janet Watson from the University of Leeds spoke first explaining that one common



feature of the southern part of the region was the monsoon rains and winds. The region covered by the book included people who spoke Omani, Qatari and Musandam Arabic as well as Kumzari and the Modern South Arabian languages Mehri, Hobyot, Harsusi, Bathari, Shehret and Soqotri. She noted common features in the Modern South Arabian languages: the importance of names

before numbers, how times of day were defined not by hours but often by the position of the sun and the type of light experienced; how time could be measured not in hours and minutes but by the time taken to walk from one wadi to another or the time taken to milk a set number of camels. Dates could be defined not in calendar terms but in relation to a memorable climatic event. Another feature that came up in several chapters of the book was the complexity of language referring to wind. Within Mehri, she and colleagues had found 47 names for different types of wind according to duration, time of day, hot or cold, etc. Janet showed videos to illustrate how gestures added to words in communication.

This was further defined by the next speaker Dr. Jack Wilson, a lecturer in English language at Salford University, who spoke about different types of gesture and the relationship between the structure of language and gesture illustrated through short videos from Mehri speakers in which they complemented, for example, the giving of directions with gesture by hand, facial expression, the rising and falling tone of voice and the elongation of vowels and words. Language, gesture and acoustic profile are all meaningful. The same practices are found in other Modern South Arabian languages. The way that events are conceptualised is influenced by language and language influences the way that events are conceptualised. The videos shown by Dr Wilson can be seen in the recording of the lecture at <https://youtu.be/JTWKiEf5eSA?feature=shared>

Meaning is multimodal



wa-sbēbi āga::wfa-tā-tsbēbi hāl hāl agidār aṭ-ṭībar
and-go.up.2fs up until-2fs-go.up where where DEF-wall that-broken.3ms
'and go up and up until you go up to the broken fence'

Professor Dawn Chatty from Oxford University focused on the remote Jiddat il Harasiis in Oman's central desert on the edge of the Empty Quarter, an area she first got to know in 1978. This was when the population was 5,000 people covering an area about the size of Scotland, and made up of people and tribes pushed into this remote area from Dhofar. The community has changed a great deal with the engagement of the modern

state of Oman and the introduction of Arabic as the main language, exploration by oil companies who tended to see the area as terra nullius and the effect of conservation activities, notably the project to reintroduce the Arabian oryx which had been hunted into virtual extinction. Though the conservation agencies hired Harasiis trackers, they – like the oil companies in the early years - did not engage sufficiently with the Harasiis to understand their problems, learn from their knowledge of the environment, or get them fully involved in the project. As Professor Chatty noted, the authentic inhabitants came to be regarded as outsiders and this impaired efforts to preserve the oryx.

Oryx in Yalouni Enclosure



Today the Harasiis have lost interest in the oryx; their language is taught only at home; however, their connection with the ecology remains strong. Dawn ended with a positive note: some of the Harasiis who have managed to maintain their camel herds in Oman have established weekend retreats in the Jiddat and seek to maintain links with their culture, social organisation, and language.

Report by Noel Brehony



Excavations in Samahij, Bahrain, October 2023, photo. T. Insoll

22 Years of the Anglo-Bahraini Early Islamic Bahrain Project

The lecture was presented Professor Timothy Insoll FBA, FSA, Al-Qasimi Chair in African and Islamic Archaeology, Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, University of Exeter, UK, at the Society of Antiquaries, London on 21st September 2023, following the IASA AGM. The speaker began by thanking IASA and the Society of Antiquaries for the invitation to deliver the lecture and said it was a particular honour that the lecture series was named in memory of Dr Beatrice de Cardi, a pioneer in the study of Arabian Gulf archaeology. He was also honoured that it was attended by Shaikh Khalifa Al-Khalifa, the President of the Bahrain Authority for Culture and Antiquities and His Excellency Mr Hussain Mohammed Alam, the Charge d'Affaires of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Bahrain in London.

The many people who had contributed to the research in Bahrain over 22 years were thanked and it was indicated that the lecture was a summary of their efforts with the speaker merely a mouthpiece for a collective voice. He also stressed that it would not have been possible to complete the research without the enlightened vision and moral and financial support of HRH Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al-Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Bahrain, as this and the freedom offered by BACA have allowed the Anglo-Bahraini Early Islamic Bahrain (EIB) Project to explore the complexities and cosmopolitan nature of Bahraini Islamic archaeology.

Six themes were then discussed starting with the origins of the EIB project which began in 2001 as previous explorations of Islamic archaeology in Bahrain had been almost entirely expatriate and lacking a

comprehensive view of settlement over time, or consideration of subjects such as the impact of trade, international connections and Islamisation, environment and economy, and social identities. To begin to redress this excavations were first completed in Bilad al-Qadim, the probable Abbasid capital in Bahrain. The results of these were described with an occupation sequence between the 9th to 13th/14th centuries reconstructed. Particular emphasis was given to describing Prof. Robert Carter's work on the ceramics, the analysis of the micro-molluscs and the paleoepidemiological conclusions drawn from these, the beads, glass vessel and bracelet fragments, gold dinars, and pearling debris as evidence for international trade and the inferences that could be drawn on economy and Islamisation from the faunal and botanical remains.

The research completed on the Islamic funerary inscriptions pre-dating 1900 CE was next considered. It was noted that 150 gravestones were recorded in 26 locations including 23 cemeteries with the largest number from Abu Anbra, the cemetery for Bilad al-Qadim. The common decorative features on the gravestones, their chronology, carvers and writers, and the conservation challenges they pose were all discussed. The inclusion of some of the gravestones within the Al-Khamis Mosque Museum was then mentioned and the rationale for the museum and its displays described as threefold. First, presenting the results of the Bilad al-Qadim research. Second, indicating the value of archaeology of the more recent past and third, indicating the dynamism of past Muslim and other lives based on archaeological material. The focus was then shifted to Muharraq Island and the research finished in Muharraq Town first considered. It was described how this was undertaken to explore the occupation sequence pre-dating the 9th century, initially identified by Carter, and confirmed through eight test excavations that provided mixed material of 7th to 8th and 19th to 20th century date.

The lecture then outlined the results of ongoing excavations in Samahij which redressed this absence of in-situ 7th-8th century material. These uncovered the remains of a large building with seven rooms identified to date, and C14 dated to between the mid-6th to mid-8th centuries, underneath a much later mosque/

shrine. The function of the earlier building was suggested as possibly the residence for the Bishop of Mašmahig, a diocese of the Church of the East mentioned in the Synods of the Church in 410 and 576. The architecture, stucco, graffiti, ceramics, glassware, small finds and faunal remains were described and interpreted as probably indicative of a Christian identity for the occupants. Thus far, there is a lack of any evidence for the presence of Muslims, and the implications for Islamisation that could be drawn from this is considered.

The lecture ended by stressing that the future of Bahraini archaeology lay with the next generation of archaeologists, both expatriate and indigenous. It was concluded by reiterating that the research was only possible because of the ongoing partnership with Bahraini friends and colleagues.

Report by Timothy Insoll

Arabian Palaeoenvironments and Climate Change During the Arabian Bronze Age (3500-1000 BC) 4th August 2023

The climate of Arabia is complex and results from the dynamic interplay between a number of major atmospheric as well as oceanic systems across a range of spatial and temporal scales. Throughout the Holocene, Arabia has been highly sensitive to climate variability, with pronounced and often geographically variable environmental responses to global, regional and local shifts in climate which have at times had profound as well as more subtle impacts on the landscape. Understanding how and why landscapes evolve and change through time and space are important factors when considering the archaeological record with respect to local and regional contexts, especially across a region as diverse as Arabia.

A wide range of palaeoenvironmental approaches are currently used to address these questions. Understanding how different palaeoarchives can be analysed (including lakes, dunes, palaeosols,

fluvial, alluvial, colluvial systems, speleothems and marine records), what these records show, their chronological resolution/constraints/limitations, and how climatic interpretations can be inferred are key to interpreting records.

Unsurprisingly for the arid Arabian region, climate change usually constitutes the principal component in archaeological models for cultural and socioeconomic change. As such some long held assumptions about Bronze Age (3500-1500 BC) Arabia may, however, be ripe for revision or adjustment because knowledge on the environmental and climatic developments has increased considerably in recent decades. If we are to obtain an informed picture of the causes driving change in the Bronze Age, it is imperative that new palaeoenvironmental insights are integrated with archaeological models. A growing body of evidence suggests widespread, abrupt, and rapid centennial-scale shifts in Arabian climates during the Bronze Age. Are these changes ubiquitous across the region or are there regional and local differences? To what extent does climate and environment shape the landscape across Arabia during the Bronze Age? Can linking climate events to the push and pull factors of human behaviour at regional and local scales be used when testing notions of cultural and socioeconomic change?

It is likely that societal resilience to climate change, the severity and rate of any change, how this translates to local water availability and how widely climate may or may not have influenced trade/social networks, creates complexity in understanding archaeological records in relation to societal change. To address this, well-informed and updated surveys of the proxy data and regional models are needed to assess pivotal developments in the Arabian Bronze Age to better understand the role, if any, of climate change in the dynamics of Arabian Bronze Age societies.

Report by Adrian G. Parker

The screenshot shows a Zoom meeting interface with the title "Reconstructing palaeoenvironments". The main content area is a grid of images illustrating various environmental and archaeological topics:

- Ocean cores:** A large research vessel at sea.
- Dunes:** A desert landscape with sand dunes.
- Coastal sabkha/lagoon:** A wetland area with water and vegetation.
- Lakes/wetlands:** A dry lake bed in a desert.
- Ice cores:** A close-up of an ice core sample.
- Corals:** Underwater coral reefs.
- Fluvial records:** A river channel in a desert landscape.
- Speleothems:** Stalactites and stalagmites in a cave.
- Palaeosols:** Ancient soil profiles in a desert.

The Zoom interface includes a top bar with "You are viewing IASA's screen" and "View Options". The bottom bar shows "Unmute", "Start Video", "Participants" (31), "Chat", "Share Screen", "Record", "Reactions", "Whiteboards", and a "Leave" button. A list of participants is visible on the right side of the screen.

Forthcoming Lectures

The IASA 2024 lecture series is currently being finalised and members will be sent details in due course. Non-members may check our social media accounts for details, or contact outreach@theiasa.com.

On Wednesday 6th Dec 2023, 6:45 PM - 8:30 PM, the British Omani Society are hosting a lecture entitled *The Mangroves and Coastal Wetlands of the Sultanate of Oman*. This will be held at the Royal Geographical Society, Kensington Gore, London, SW7 2AR

The two speakers this year are distinguished Omani field scientists: Ms. Aziza Saud Al Adhoobi, Wetland Management Head Section, Environment Authority, Oman, who will speak on: "Current Mangrove and Coastal Wetlands Research & Future Projections." Mr. Badar Yousuf Al Bulushi, Mangrove Forest Conservation Specialist, Oman, will speak on: "The Value of the Mangroves of Oman, Present and Future." The evening is being co-chaired by Mrs. Suaad Al Harthy, Executive Director, Environment Society of Oman (ESO), and Mr. Nigel Winsler, organiser of the annual Oman Natural Heritage Annual Lectures.

Tickets are available via eventbrite: general admission £15, BOS and RGS-IBG members £9, students £5 + ticketing fees.



Image: Ms. Aziza Saud Al Adhoobi

Seminar for Arabian Studies

The Seminar for Arabian Studies, founded in 1968, is the only international forum that meets annually for the presentation of the latest academic research in the humanities on the Arabian Peninsula from the earliest times to the present day or, in the case of political and social history, to the end of the Ottoman Empire (1922). Papers read at the Seminar are published in the Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies in time for the Seminar of the following year. The Proceedings therefore contain new research on Arabia and reports of new discoveries in the Peninsula in a wide range of disciplines.



Images: Kate Ayres-Kennet

If did Seminars...

The 56th IASA Seminar for Arabian Studies took place at Moesgaard Museum and Aarhus University, Denmark, who were celebrating the 70th jubilee of the pioneering Arabian Gulf expeditions (est. 1953). The Seminar was jointly organized by the Department of Archaeology, Aarhus University, and the Orient Department, Moesgaard Museum and it would not have been possible without the generous support of the C. L. David Foundation, the Carlsberg Foundation, the Frimodt-Heineke Foundation, the Dr M. C. Holsts Foundation, and the Beatrice de Cardi Fund of the Society of Antiquaries of London.

The first day of the Seminar was held at the fabulous Moesgaard Museum and the Seminar began with a nod to the 70th Anniversary with a single session of 12 papers on the Early Bronze Age in the Oman Peninsula. There is not the space to mention every paper, but they were

diverse and ranged from surveys to experimental archaeology and set the standard for the days to come. This was followed by an excellent keynote lecture given by Prof. Adrian G. Parker entitled *Arabian Paleoenvironments and climate change during the Arabian Bronze Age (3500-1000 BC)*. His lecture was also available to members to watch via Zoom and a report of this lecture is featured above (p. X).

Following the keynote, we were invited to the Wine “Carlsberg Beer” Party to meet the Pioneers. It was wonderful that so many of the Pioneers were able to attend and Dr Steffen Terp Laursen curated a wonderful exhibition of memorabilia which provided a fitting backdrop to the evening accompanied by crates of the famous Danish beer.

Day 2 moved to Aarhus University, and we dived straight in with three parallel sessions. To mark the 70th anniversary of Denmark's Arabian Gulf expeditions and the legacy of P.V. Glob and T.G. Bibby, this year's Special Session focused on the archaeology of Bronze Age Arabia entitled: *Bronze Age Arabia - 70 years on...What we have*

learned, and what we still don't know? This Special Session set out to address the major open questions, qualify the limits of our understanding, and suggest directions for new and more targeted research to fill these gaps. A total of 10 papers were presented by distinguished experts who were charged with a specific area or topic and some predefined questions. The aim of their contribution was to raise debate that would propel our understanding of Bronze Age Arabia forward. Geographically, the session's aim was to cover all of Arabia with a thematically broad focus on the Bronze Age. The session ended with a panel discussion including Dr Felix Riede, a European Prehistorian based at Aarhus University, who brought in an external perspective to the Arabian archaeological debate. The conclusion of the discussion was that we have a good data set, but we need to improve its analysis and interpretation drawing upon external theoretical frameworks.

Simultaneously the two parallel sessions offered 16 papers on the Islamic Period and 9 on Representations. These ranged from fieldwork reportage and ethnography to archival research. The final day, again in Aarhus University, saw a further 2 parallel sessions. 13 papers were delivered in the Iron Age and Beyond session with 15 papers split across Epigraphy and Text (5), Stone Age and Prehistory (6) and finally Dilmun (4). Across the three days, 65 papers were presented outside of the Special Session and with so many excellent papers on offer, it was difficult to choose between them. I was fortunate that whilst sitting on the Registration desk, I could flit between the rooms with ease online. I felt for those who had to choose between two papers which ran simultaneously, and more than one person was observed running from room to room.

In the lead up to the Seminar, the Committee were concerned that we would be unable to match Berlin. However, our worries were unfounded; Aarhus proved to be another success thanks to Dr Steffen Terp Laursen and his team, with a record turnout surpassing that of the previous year. However, it was not without incident: Fed-Ex lost the consignment of books for Archaeopress, including last year's PSAS, and "coffegate" saw the morning's refreshments being delivered to Moesgaard Museum on day 2, instead of Aarhus University, which left more than just the Italians disgruntled at the lack of caffeine. Thankfully the mix-up was resolved in time for lunch, and it didn't mar the enjoyment of the rest of the Seminar.



Image: Steffen Terp Laursen

The Committee would like to extend our thanks to Dr Laursen and his team who made this year's Seminar possible, and we look forward to seeing you in Paris in 2024.

Report by Kate Ayres-Kennet on behalf of the Seminar Committee.



Paris 2024

The 57th Seminar for Arabian Studies will be held in Paris. The preparations are well underway and are being led by Dr Jérémie Schiettecatte (CNRS). The Seminar has been brought forward to avoid the Olympics and will be held on the 27th-29th June. Further announcements will be made in due course but do keep an eye on the IASA website (<https://iasarabia.org/the-seminar/>) as well as our social media accounts.

Changes to the format of papers at the Seminar for Arabian Studies, Paris 2024

The Seminar Committee has decided to change the way papers are given at the Seminar. The changes will be introduced for the Paris Seminar in June 2024. They follow from the strong feeling amongst Committee members that too much time is dedicated to descriptive reporting of fieldwork (rapportage) at the Seminar, and not enough to synthetic review, broader research questions and discussion. This feeling was backed by Felix Riede's comments at the end of the Århus Bronze-Age session in 2023. This year we will therefore accept the following two types of paper:

Short rapportage: Such papers will be focussed on reporting the results of current fieldwork (or labwork) of any sort. Presentation of the wider academic and geographical context should be brief and acknowledgments should be listed in a single, brief final slide. The paper should focus on describing the work that has been done and its results. Short rapportage papers will be allocated 15 minutes speaking time (including questions).

Synthetic overview: Such papers will be expected to provide a review and/or analysis of a wider research question of any sort. Detailed context is required and the abstract will need to set out clearly the scope and aims of the paper and outline the data set or evidence on which it will be based. Such papers will be allocated 25 minutes with 5 minutes for questions.

All abstracts will be allocated to one of these types. Those submitting abstracts will therefore be required to state clearly which type of paper they are proposing. If it is a synthetic overview, then the requirements set out above will need to be set out in the abstract, this will be scrutinised by the Committee.

It is hoped that this format will allow more time for discussion sessions.

Both types of papers will be acceptable for publication in PSAS in the normal way. It may be possible to allow a longer word limit for synthetic overview papers, this is a matter that is still under discussion.

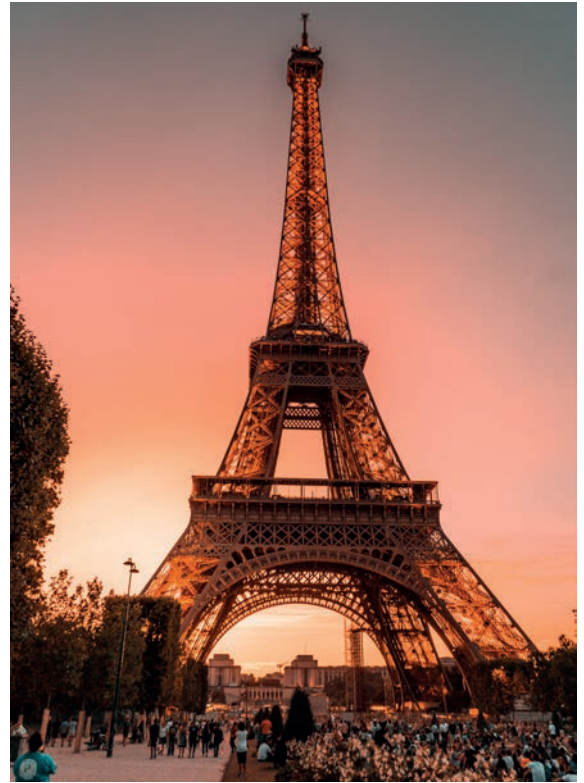
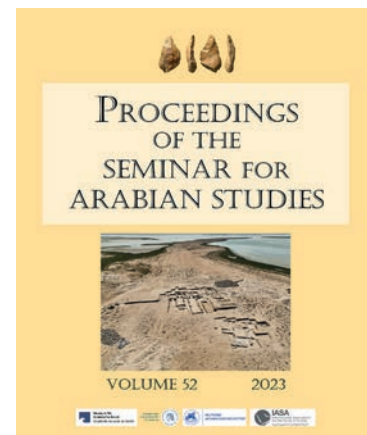


Image: Adrien on Unsplash

IASA Publications



Vol. 52 (2023): Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies Volume 52 2023: Papers from the fifty-fifth meeting of the Seminar for Arabian Studies held at Humboldt Universität, Berlin, 5–7 August 2022 is available now from Archaeopress <http://archaeopresspublishing.com/ojs/index.php/PSAS>

The editors of IASA Publications are always keen to hear from potential contributors, who in the first instance should contact Dr St John Simpson: ssimpson@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk or Prof Derek Kennet: derek.kennet@durham.ac.uk.

IASA Research Grants

Each year the IASA makes a number of grants intended to support research in any academic area covered by the IASA's aims, which are to promote research relating to the Arabian Peninsula, in particular, its archaeology, art, culture, epigraphy, ethnography, geography, geology, history, languages, literature and natural history. Grants may be used to fund fieldwork, library or laboratory-based research or research support.

The number of grants awarded each year depends on the amount of money available. We expect to be able to offer small research grants (up to £1,000, for all categories of researchers) and Main Research Grants (up to £2,000, or possibly more, for post-doctoral research).

The next deadline for the IASA will be **31 May 2024**. See the website: <https://iasarabia.org/grants/>

Country News

Oman

The Easternmost Outpost of the Ancient South Arabian: Andhūr in the Heart of Dhofar: Preliminary Results of the HELFA Research Programme.

Silvia Lischi (Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford)

During the 2022-2023 season, the first field campaign was conducted in the Wādī Andhūr area to unravel the human-environment palimpsest in the area and to study one of its prominent sites, known as Andhūr, characterised by the persistence of megalithic ruins. Located on a promontory at the centre of the wadi and oasis, Andhūr has attracted the attention of adventurers and archaeological pioneers since the early 1900s, including Bertram Thomas in 1928, Wilfred Thesiger in 1945 and Wendell Phillips in 1966. More recently, Juris Zarins also explored the area during his Dhofar survey.

Observations of the ruins and remains led these pioneers to postulate that the site might be of South Arabian origin. The resemblance of the



Discovery of the Inscriptions. Image: Adam al Ghafry

visible remains to those at Ḥanūn and Sumhūram was striking. However, its remote location deep within the Nejd plateau and far from any inhabited centre (some 170 kilometres from Salalah) has contributed to its preservation and integrity. Remarkably, none of these pioneers undertook excavations. Their efforts were limited to observing the ruins and documenting what was visible.

Under these premises, the DHOMIAP project decided last winter to launch a new research programme entitled HELFA - In the Heart of the Land of Frankincense: Discovering Wādī Andhūr. The primary objectives were to resolve any uncertainties regarding the South Arabian nature of the site and to gain insights into the settlement dynamics of the region for comparative analysis with the Khor Rori area. The initial field campaign, while not without



Andhur remains from South. Image Adam al Ghafry

its challenges, served as a foundation for future research and already provided crucial information for understanding the site. The fieldwork revealed the layout of what appears to have been a walled centre of approximately 503 square metres. Within the central building, masonry has been preserved for about 3 metres, giving hope that sufficient material will be collected to fully decipher its chronology and purpose. This prominent building is flanked by two large open spaces enclosed by massive walls. The one closest to the entrance contains several limestone tanks, probably used to store water. Remarkably, the discovery of two South Arabian inscriptions engraved on stone blocks definitively confirmed the South Arabian nature of the site.



Main building Image: @DHOMIAP Project

The archaeological investigation of the site was complemented by a survey of the surrounding area, which revealed numerous archaeological elements from various periods, from the Neolithic to the Islamic phase. These include the presence of an Islamic site immediately to the south of the South Arabian settlement, as well as trapping stones, triliths and other significant structures currently under investigation. The comprehensive mapping of the area, coupled with the excavation and understanding of the South Arabian site, are the core objectives of the HELFA research programme, made possible by the invaluable support of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman, the Land of Frankincense Museum of Salalah, the Italian Embassy in Oman, and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

For more details on this research programme and other research initiatives undertaken by the DHOMIAP project in Oman, please visit the website <http://dhomiap.cfs.unipi.it>, where you will also find links to our social media profiles and publications.

Bisya & Salut Visitor Centre

Ibtisam Al-Mamari & Dennys Frenez

On February 23rd 2023, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman inaugurated a modern Visitor Centre at the site of Bisya & Salut, nestled in the foothills of the Al-Hajar Mountains some 30 km south of the UNESCO historical city of Bahla.



Bisya and Salut Visitor Centre inaugurated by the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in February 2023.

Organised in four main galleries (Bronze Age, Iron Age, Islamic, and UNESCO sites), the Visitor Centre displays more than 350 exciting findings from decades of excavations in the area, making use of a series of thirty large informative panels in Arabic and English to describe the different sites, their discovery and excavation, and the historical processes involved.



Bronze Age gallery displaying original finds, replica models and descriptive panels in Arabic and English.

A booklet has also been produced in English and Arabic versions and will be made available to visitors.



English version of the booklet describing the sites and historical processes involved.

Palaeolithic and Neolithic

Between 8000 and 6000 BC, the monsoon delivered consistent rainfall to interior Oman. Wadi Sayfam and Wadi Bahla were perennial rivers and the area was extremely verdant. This climatic optimum is witnessed in the area by lithic tools from the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods. During the 6th millennium BC, however, the monsoon began to retreat southwards and by the end of the 4th millennium BC Wadi Sayfam and Wadi Bahla had become seasonal streams, insufficient to support an extensive human settlement.

Bronze Age

The beginning of the Bronze Age saw a transformation of the local society with

the introduction of agriculture, permanent settlement, copper industry, and seafaring trade, which formed the basis of the so-called Magan Civilisation. Bisya & Salut were transformed into an oasis thanks to the introduction of date palms, wheat, and barley, cultivated using simple irrigation systems like wells, dams and ditches. Copper from the nearby hills allowed the establishment of trade networks with the surrounding regions as well as with overseas civilisations. This period also saw the construction of megalithic stone towers, 20-25 metres in diameter and several metres high, with a well in their centre and surrounded by deep ditches to collect water. Three towers have been found in Salut and five in Bisya.



Aerial view of the Early Bronze Age tower ST1 with Jabal Salut in the background (photograph by S. Bizzarri).

Tombs consisting of a stone ring wall surrounding a burial chamber for several individuals are found throughout the area. A global event of intense aridification had affected Asia from 2200 BC, causing entire civilisations to collapse. In the Al-Hajar region, it aggravated the effects of the southward retreat of the monsoon, rendering the simple water management systems in use ineffective and leading semi-nomadic pastoralism to substitute agriculture. This period is witnessed in Bisya & Salut only in the reuse of earlier tombs.



View of an Early Bronze Age tomb on Jabal Salut (photograph by S. Bizzarri)

Iron Age

This climatic crisis was overcome at the beginning of the Iron Age thanks to the introduction in the Al-Hajar region of an innovative system of water management, currently known as the falaj (pl. aflaj). Aflaj consist of a subsurface aqueduct that collects groundwater from an aquifer in the mountains and transports it through a tunnel to the plain. Aflaj enabled the cultivated land and intensify human settlement. At Salut, a large new settlement was built comprising the so-called Castle and Village. The massive Castle (Husn) was built on the Salut Hill around 1300 BC. It consisted of a large mud-brick platform surrounded by several buildings, a pillared building used for ceremonial gatherings, and rooms where large-scale copperwork was carried out. The megalithic enclosure wall that still surrounds the hill, giving the Castle its impressive, fortified appearance, was erected around 600 BC. The Village (Qaryat) occupies the northern slope of Salut Hill and the plain north of the Castle. It was surrounded by a massive wall with a monumental gate, which encompassed residential areas and workshops for metallurgical activities. A coeval necropolis is found at the foot of Jabal Salut.



Aerial view of the Early Iron Age castle and village in the Salut plain (photograph by S. Bizzarri).

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Saudi Arabia

Return to the Umluj shipwreck. The 2022 field season.

Chiara Zazzaro and Romolo Loreto

Facing an isolated, L-shaped coral reef extending approximately 1km, the Umluj shipwreck lies some 16 miles from Umluj, a city situated on Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coast. The shipwreck has been identified as an 18th century merchantman, which sailed up and down the Red Sea, carrying food and provisions from Ottoman Egypt to Mecca. On its fateful return journey, the ship was carrying a cargo of items including earthenware water jars, coffee from southern Arabia, and also exotic products from the Indian Ocean, which would have been loaded in the ports of Jeddah and Mocha and likely brought there by Indian merchants (Zazzaro, Loreto, and Visconti 2017). Two similar shipwrecks of the same period have been previously excavated in Egypt: the Sadana and the Sharm al-Shaikh shipwrecks (Ward 2001, Raban 1973). The Umluj shipwreck is the first to be excavated in the Saudi waters of the Red Sea, and it is probably the best-preserved shipwreck identified in this sea to date.

The first two field seasons, conducted in 2015 and 2016 respectively, focused on surveying the area of

the shipwreck in order to investigate its historical and archaeological significance, understand the wreck formation and the circumstances contributing to its wreckage, and also evaluate the most suitable areas from which to start an excavation. This latter focus was the aim of the 2022 field season. Thanks to the agreement between the Ministry of Culture, King Abdelaziz University and KAUST, in August 2022 it was possible to carry out two weeks of fieldwork at the Umluj site after a six-year hiatus.



Figure 1: The team of the 2022 field season. (Photo: Massimo Biciato)

The team was composed of five archaeologists from the Ministry of Culture (Mozayen Waleed Badr, Alsiwan Amar Abdulkarim, Alhayiti Abdullah Salamah, Algharni Mahdi Kasif, Altarib Abdulelah Khalaf), two archaeologists from Univeristà di Napoli L'Orientale (Chiara Zazzaro, Romolo Loreto), a photographer (Massimo Biciato), a diver from King Abdelaziz University (Abdulati Marwan Mohammed), and three archaeologists from Alexandria University (Emad Khalil Helmy Elsaied Khalil, Mohamed Said Younis Ibrahim Salam, Mohamed Ahmed Khedr). The team was aboard the KAUST research vessel, "al-Azizi", from the 19th to the 28th of August, 2022 (Figure 1).

Despite the passage of time, the site was still in good condition and the team opened a trench of 10 by 4 meters in the aft half of the shipwreck where a small test trench had already been excavated on the port side in 2016. The excavation was conducted both by hand fan and with the use of an air dredge. Several scattered wood fragments disconnected from the whole ship structure were found in the

first excavated sand layer. The layer below was characterized by a more compact and finer, sandy sediment, which extended between the frames and covered the hull planks, embedding both organic and inorganic finds.

Archaeological finds included: cargo trading items, such as porcelain coffee cups, jars, barrels, glass bottles, pipes, coconuts, nutmeg, coffee beans, jujube, and resin; personal items such as a spoon, a comb, a button, beads, a gun bullet, and possible coins; food-related items for the crew such as sheep or goat bones, fish bones, hazelnuts, raisin seeds, and cooking pots; and also ship-related equipment such as nails and metal sheets.



Figure 2: Team member Algharni Mahdi Kasif conducting hand-fanning excavation between ship's frames. (Photo: Chiara Zazzaro)

A new photogrammetric survey was conducted around the shipwreck to document the progress of the excavation (Figure 2). At the end of the excavation the area was covered and protected by a layer of geotextile held in place by bags filled with sand. This massive merchantman, around 35-40 meters in length, may have sunk while sailing northbound during an overnight stopover at the reef or by accidentally hitting the reef in adverse weather conditions. The results of the 2022 field season suggest that the cargo is in a good condition of preservation, as well as the wooden parts of the ship. The finds in the aft part of the ship suggest that, maybe, part of this area was used for food preparation and for storing porcelain coffee cups. Further investigations will certainly contribute to a better understanding of the organization of the vessel, its trading functions and ship architecture.

Raban, A. (1973) 'The Mercury carrier from the Red Sea', *International Journal of Nautical Archaeology*, 1(2), 179-183.

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Figure 3: Porcelain coffee cups found in the stern area of the shipwreck. (Photo: Ministry of Culture)



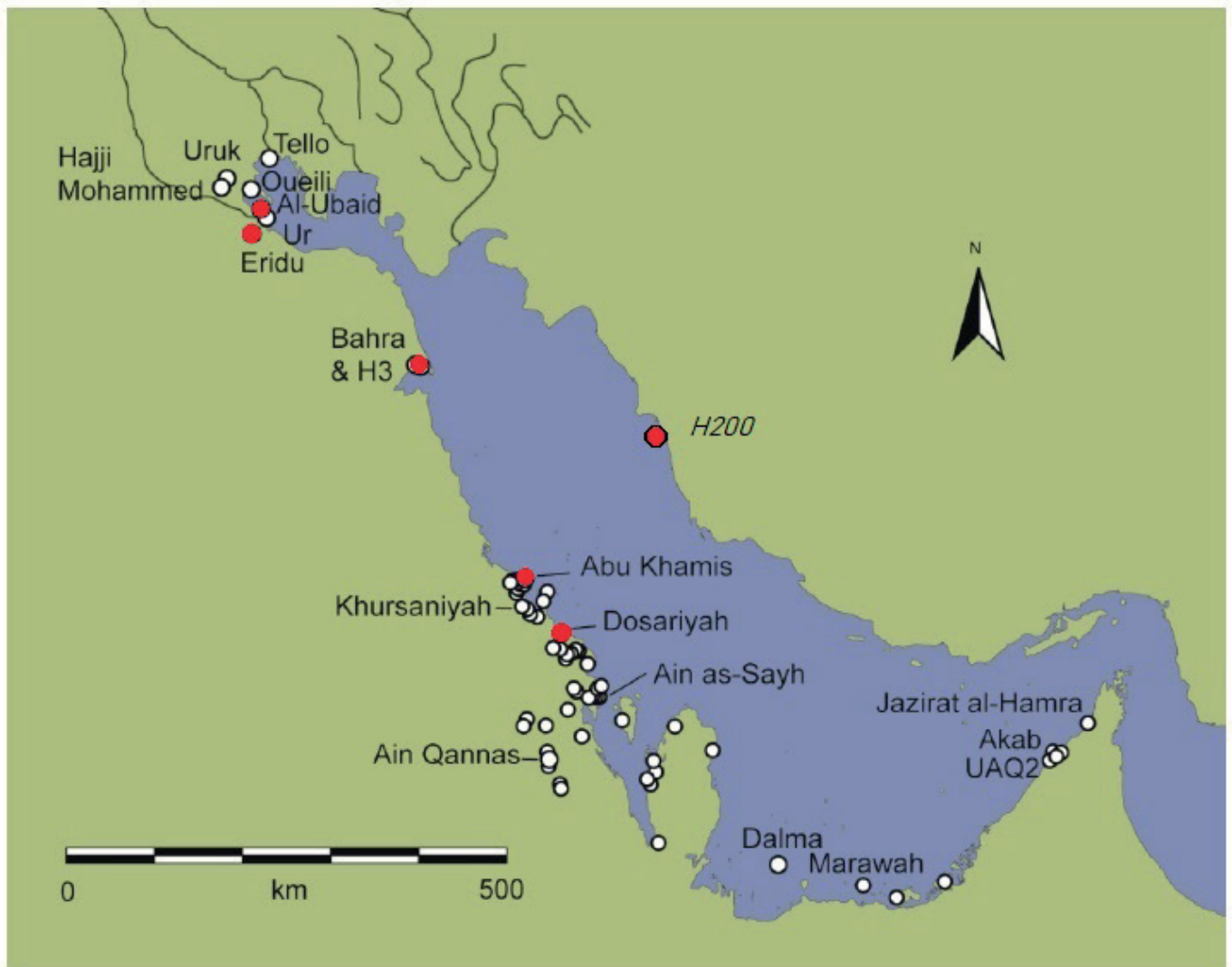
Figure 4: The mound of qulal jars. (Photo: Massimo Biciato)

Research Notices

The Ubaid in the Gulf: Continuing geochemical and petrographic research

Eleanor Preston, PhD candidate, UCL, London

Ubaid ceramics are found from the 6th to 5th millennium BCE on sites in Syria and the Caucasus, throughout Iraq, along the Zagros mountains and southwest of Iran and along the Arabian coast of the Gulf. Ubaid ceramics themselves are part of a far reaching black-on-buff ceramic tradition that covers much of western Asia. As may be expected from such a wide coverage area and long timeframe of use, the spread of the Ubaid ceramic tradition was not uniform; indeed spread of the Ubaid into the Gulf



Map 1: Map of the Gulf region's Ubaid-related sites with this study's sampled sites highlighted (After Carter 2020:70).

can be said to be unique within the greater Ubaid-phenomenon. Ubaid potsherds are found all along the Gulf coast on sites that otherwise would be characterised as Arabian Neolithic. Except for two unusual sites in Kuwait (H3 and Bahra 1) very little other material culture from the Ubaid-horizon is known within the Gulf which contrasts to the Ubaid-horizon elsewhere, where a collection of different types of material culture is found in various combinations, alongside Ubaid-ware.

The mechanism by which the Ubaid - I specifically mean Ubaid pots - arrived in the Gulf is different than elsewhere. It was this unusual characteristic that led Oates et al (1977) to sample the Ubaid-ware from six sites along the Gulf coast (three in Saudi Arabia, one in Bahrain and two in Qatar) and four sites from southern Iraq and analyse them through geochemistry (NAA) and petrography. The results demonstrated that the Ubaid pots in the Gulf come from southern Iraq, contrasting with the wider

Ubaid-horizon where pots were normally made and used locally with only a small number being exchanged between communities with a shared or similar material culture.

In 2006 Robert Carter, at the time a Honorary Research Fellow at Durham University, collected together ceramic material from around the Gulf Coast, with the aim of furthering archaeological understanding of regional connectivity including how and why Ubaid potsherds came to be on Arabian Middle Neolithic sites. Professor Carter selected six sites from around the upper and central Gulf region, including a site from the Iranian coast (Map 1), with the aim of creating a more rounded and detailed view of the connectivity of the region, observable only due to the presence of imported Ubaid pots in Arabia.

In total, 180 ceramic samples were collected from

two Iraqi sites, one Iranian site, one Kuwaiti site and two Saudi Arabian sites. All 180 of the ceramic samples underwent geochemical analysis using ICP-AES and 127 were selected for petrographic analysis. In 2016 the geochemical dataset and the thin-sections were given to me for my PhD research, which is now coming to end and while there is not room here to discuss in full the results of this research, a number of observations can be made that have implications beyond this study, as well as for the understanding of the Ubaid, not just in the Gulf but for southern Iraq as well.

Oates et al (1977) initially identified the settlement of Ur in southern Iraq as a primary origin point for the Ubaid material sampled from the Arabian coast. However, the data was reassessed by Roaf and Galbraith (1994) and the conclusions regarding Ur were rejected, partly due to errors in the data but also because it was believed that the alluvium clay from southern Iraq was too homogenous to allow for a settlement level of specificity concerning the origin of Ubaid pots and it was only possible to say that they originated from southern Iraq. However, with developments in geochemical analysis it appears to no longer be the case that geochemical data cannot be used to be more specific than the region of southern Iraq in regards to where Ubaid-ware pots come from; within this study the geochemical data displays clear patterns. While it is not possible here to be site specific for Ubaid pots' place of manufacture, future research, with a greater number of comparable samples from more southern Iraq sites, may be able to establish a more limited area for the pots' origins. These results also have implications for the Ubaid within southern Iraq, as a picture of settlement connectivity within the alluvial plain may be possible to outline using geochemical data from pots and clay sources from across the region



Example of Ubaid-ware from Iraq sampled for this study

The greater recognition of patterns within the Ubaid data also begins to add details to the model of connectivity within the Gulf, highlighting a complexity that has been speculated on but not shown through multi-site geochemical analysis. This complexity is observed in the likelihood that

the Ubaid-ware found in Arabia come from more than one source in southern Iraq and that the pots were arriving on the Arabian coast at more than one location.

This study also included a small number of Arabian red coarse-ware samples for comparative purposes. Despite the small number of samples, the data also displays a complexity that needs further investigation. The data suggests at least two points of origin for the Arabian red coarse-ware.

Finally, a note on the Ubaid-related material from Bushehr on the Iranian coast. It is possible that the network that connected the Ubaid cultural horizon to the Arabian Neolithic horizon also incorporated the Iranian coast of the Gulf. The number of sites dated to the chalcolithic along the Iranian coast are few in number and this study only has ceramics from one such site (H200), and the data from this site indicates no evidence of connectivity with the Arabian coast and only limited connections to southern Iraq.

The Geochemical and petrographic analysis of ceramic material from six sites from around the upper and central Gulf provides evidence for the network that connected the region and highlights areas of interest and potential for further work. Identifying southern Iraq as the point of origin for Ubaid-ware found on the Arabian coast is not the limit to what can be learnt from the ceramic material of the Gulf in the 6th and 5th millennium BCE.

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The Socio-Cultural Traditions Of The Iron Age Snake Figurines In South-Eastern Arabia

Tracey Cian, Ph.D. Candidate, Department of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology, Bryn Mawr College

Found at several sites across south-eastern Arabia (fig.1), including Salūt, Jebel Muḍmār (Oman), Sārūq al-Hadīd, Masāfī, and Bithnah (United Arab Emirates, UAE), snake figurines remain a poorly understood and understudied artefact type. Current research and scholarship suggest a ritual interpretation, and snake artefacts appear to be key elements of Iron Age II (c. 1000–800 BC) religious beliefs and activities in the area. Despite this, much is still unknown, and this topic has never been fully analysed from a macro-perspective, with studies focusing instead on individual sites and assemblages. This paper presents an overview and preliminary analyses from my PhD dissertation research, taking into consideration six main sites, located in Oman and the UAE. Preliminary results from Oman point towards variations in the way these artefacts were used and distributed across sites and suggest that the snake figurines represent at least two distinct local species. Although further research is needed, this work also sheds light on possible metal production methods, and different practices and processes of usage and handling of objects.



Figure 1: Map of the UAE and northern Oman highlighting the Iron Age sites included in the research. In blue are the ritual centres, in orange the pilgrimage/workshop centres, and in white the as yet undefined centres (Map ©Tracey Cian)

Snake artefacts in south-eastern Arabia have been found in specialised buildings, in cultic sites and/or pilgrimage/workshops centres, which are located both in the mountainous areas and on the desert fringes. Iconographical analyses previously conducted on ceramic vessels from the Arabian Peninsula (fig.2) and its neighbouring regions (Mesopotamia, the Levant, Iran) have determined that the image of the snake is regarded in high esteem in all of these areas, as the animal is represented frequently on a variety of media, with some snake artefacts retrieved in the Arabian Peninsula appearing to resemble snake imagery from contemporary Levant, north-western, and south-western Arabia. Unlike the surrounding regions, the limited distribution of snake artefacts in south-eastern Arabia, however, underscores potential cultic or administrative functions of the associated buildings, and also suggests a connection between snakes, water and metalwork, which would all be associated with a worship of fertility of land, humans, and animals (Mouton et al., 2012; Benoist et al., 2015; Gernez et al., 2017; Karacic et al., 2017; Avanzini and Degli Esposti eds., 2018; de Vreeze et al. 2022; Weeks, 2022; Valente, 2023).



Figure 2: Examples of snake representations as ceramic appliqués (collection of The National Museum, Sultanate of Oman, and of the Bisayah and Salūt Visitor Centre, Sultanate of Oman. Images ©Tracey Cian)

The fieldwork part of the project involved primary data collection at the National Museum of Oman, at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman, and

at the newly opened Bisayah and Salūt Visitor Centre. Measurements, notes, and photographs were taken over the months of February–March 2023, and the samples observed from the sites of Salūt and Jebel Muḍmār (Oman) included 51 metal and 47 ceramic artefacts.

In order to collect data, the following was carried out:

- Step one: observation and measurement of the artefacts to determine any physical similarities or differences between them (fig.3).
- Step two: data compilation in a database, whose categories include the position of the snakes on the ceramic vessels/the type of decorations on metal, their dimensions, whether or not decorations (e.g.: incisions, painting, droplets) are present, presence of wear and tear, the contexts, and sites in which they were found.
- Step three: development of ceramic and metal artefact typologies to apply to all sites under study.



Figure 3: In-person analysis of the artefacts from Jebel Muḍmār East 3, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism (Muscat, Oman). Photo courtesy of Dr Sheikha Khalifa Al Rasbi, Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman.

While data collection is still ongoing, analysis of the initial data indicate several preliminary results. The main materials used to create the artefacts include bronze, copper, and iron, and locally-sourced clays – as already demonstrated from analyses of some of the Masāfī samples by Benoist et al. (2019). The frequency of artefacts demonstrates a difference across the sites, with ceramic vessels predominantly found in the site of Salūt (47 samples; fig.2, and only 5 metal figurines), while there is significantly more evidence of metalwork from Jebel Muḍmār (45 samples, and only a few ceramic bowls). Furthermore, production methods can be hypothesised by two snakes attached to one another, as these would have been cast together and later separated to create individual figurines, instead of representing a single “twin” animal (fig.4).



Figure 4: Example of cast bronze snakes from Jebel Muḍmār East 3 (collection of The National Museum, Sultanate of Oman. Image ©Tracey Cian)

The distribution of the artefacts on the sites show variations in site purposes and function. Multiple stages of production and use are visible in at least one site (Salūt, but possibly also Masāfī), while Jebel Muḍmār seems to have been solely dedicated to the deposition of the artefacts. This could indicate divergencies in possible supply networks, and perhaps even the significance attributed to these artefacts. Moreover, observations of the tactile properties of the artefacts emerge as significant in that some ceramic artefacts show clear signs of wear and tear (e.g., signs of burning on one side of a long-handled bowl indicating its use while lit).

The iconography of the snakes appears to relate to the local fauna, with the depictions of at least two species of snakes. This appears more evident on the metalwork through the production of cast snakes (13 samples; fig.5), with the inclusion of little

droplets on the heads of the artefacts identifying the horned viper (*Cerastes gasperettii*), which primarily lives in desert conditions. The rest present flattened bodies and heads, with occasional incised decorations, in the form of hammered snakes (35 samples; fig.6), possibly representing a snake that prefers water habitats (e.g., *Enhydrina schistosa*, or *Hydrophis lapemoides*).



Figure 5: Example of a horned viper as a cast bronze artefact from Jebel Muḍmār East 3 (collection of The National Museum, Sultanate of Oman. Image ©Tracey Cian)



Figure 6: Example of a water snake as a hammered bronze artefact from Jebel Muḍmār East 3 (collection of The National Museum, Sultanate of Oman. Image ©Tracey Cian)

Finally, unique finds include an arrowhead with a snake incision, which might have been incised for apotropaic reasons (fig.7). The presence of a small snake figure seems to point towards a connection between the metal figurines, the ceramic appliqués and this incision. The nature of this connection still needs to be analysed; however, its appearance on a different typology of object is significant. Further research on the artefacts will be conducted in Fujairah (UAE), at the sites of Masāfī and Bithnah in 2023/2024.



Figure 7: Arrowhead with snake incision from Jebel Muḍmār East 3 (collection of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, Sultanate of Oman. Image ©Tracey Cian)

Based on initial analyses and data collection, future work will focus on several areas of investigation, including an exploration of the material variations, what their distribution might mean and how these patterns are linked to trade and production, along with identifying which communities are actively using different materials. The analysis of the materiality of artefacts, including their aesthetic and tactile properties, along with evidence of their consumption and weathering, will also contribute to the reconstruction of possible ritual behaviour at each site.

Ultimately, the comparison and systematic analysis of the snakes will contribute to determining whether the sites had different levels of importance and also whether the artefacts themselves assumed different meanings according to the sites and contexts in which they were placed. Consequently, the agency of the communities engaged in these ritualistic activities will emerge, and a better understanding of the socio-cultural and religious interactions and interconnections among the communities living in south-eastern Arabia and in the surrounding regions will finally be established.

Acknowledgments

This research would not have been possible without the financial support of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Classical and Near Eastern Archaeology of Bryn Mawr College. Special thanks go to colleagues working at The National Museum of Oman (Dr Mouza Al Wardi, Safiya Nasser Said al-Kalbani, Shaima Senaidi, Hajir Ambuali), at the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism of the Sultanate of Oman (Dr Khalil Masoud Al Nadabi, Dr Sheikha Khalifa Al Rasbi, Dr Samiya Al Shaqsi), and at the Bisyā and Salūt Visitor Centre (Dr Ahmed Mohammed Al Tamimi, and Asmaa Al Daraai).

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The British Library/Qatar Foundation Partnership

[The British Library/Qatar Foundation Partnership](#) which is digitising [India Office Records and Private Papers \(IOR\)](#) 1600-1950 and [Arabic Scientific Manuscripts](#) held at the British Library for the [Qatar Digital Library \(QDL\)](#) made available its 2 millionth image available on the QDL in May.

An integral part of the project’s workflow is the work of the Conservation Studio in assessing the archival items before they receive expert enhanced cataloguing and are digitised. Below is a [3D model of IOR/F4/1767](#) which was too big for its own binding causing major conservation issues.



There is a wealth of visually interesting material being digitised including maps. One of our #mapofthemoonth was this [1675 hand drawn map by Frederick de Wit](#) of the western Indian Ocean showing the coast of the Arabian Peninsula.



A fascinating item digitised in July was this [Arabic language almanac](#) from 1844 of information for navigation in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Red Sea.

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٢٩	٣٦	جزيرة فيلكه	خزرج الصراحي
٢٩	٧١	جزيرة عضي	بنه رابو الخصب
٢٥	٢٠	جزيرة كاظمه	راس الزين
٢٩	٧١	قرية دهدار	راس سيجان
٢٩	٢٥	سك شوير	بنه رالمنك
٢٩	٧١	راس الارض	بنه رخايوسه
٢٥	٣٠	بنه الكويت	نقشه ابوراشد
٢٩	٧٠	راس العجوز	راس اليبسه
٢٩	٤٠	بنه الشوخ	خزرج هلته
٢٩	٧٠	القطان في سلك	خزرج عبدالله
٢٩	٢٥	العليه	الخزرايب
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Since our last update there has been some intriguing research by BLQFP staff published on British Library blogs. This has included an exploration of the varied uses of the #Arabic word [Qafila](#) within the India Office Records, a word with the literal meaning 'the returning one', [T.E. Lawrence's sojourn from Arabia to Dorset](#), and the thoughts of an [18th century British merchant](#) in the India Ocean on the importance of bribery and tax-dodging.

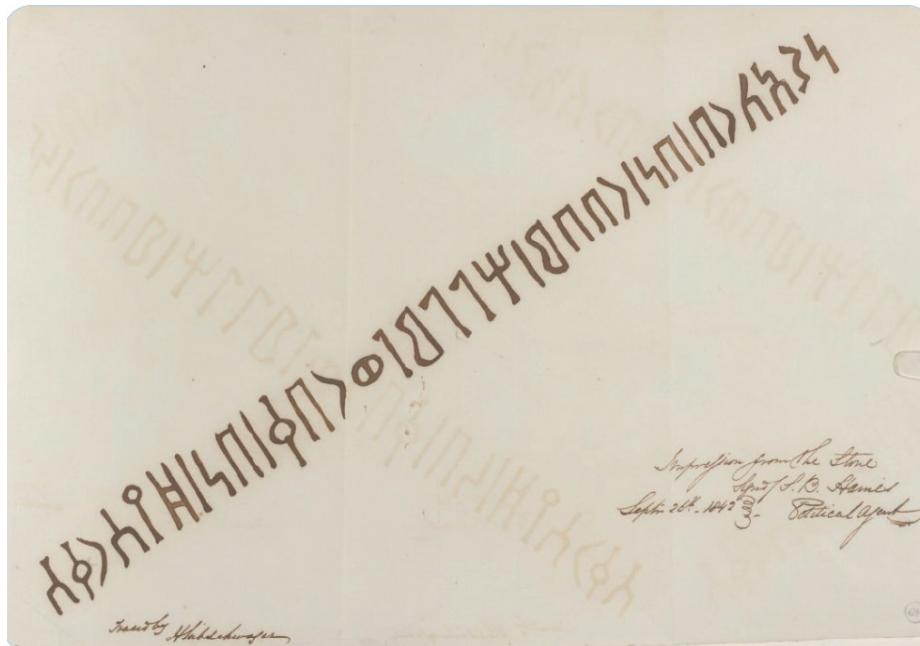
Recent QDL Expert Articles include a Finding Aid on the [IOR/L/MIL series 1708-1957](#) and the [Mss Eur F111-112 personal papers of Lord Curzon](#), the [petition of the Sponge Exploration Syndicate](#), and the lesser known early years of the [late Sultan Qaboos](#). Other QDL Expert Articles have looked at the ['Banias' of the Gulf](#), the [Euphrates Expedition 1835-1836](#), the [influence of dreams and astrology on 14th century Mamluk rulers in Egypt](#), and the [Al-Qusaybi merchant family of Arabia](#).



عائلة القصيبي: وكلاء وممولون لعبد العزیز آل سعود

سوزانا جيلارد، أخصائية محتوى، أمينة أرشيف، المكتبة البريطانية
١٦ مارس ٢٠٢٣

All the catalogue descriptions and articles on the QDL are bilingual and a link is provided at the top of every page to switch between English and Arabic. In April we tweeted that ‘an unusual item was discovered in Aden in 1842: a circle of polished white marble inscribed with a curse against thieves in Himyaritic’.



[IOR/F/4/2005/89508 ‘Aden. Regarding Hymyaritic \[Himyaritic\] Inscriptions and Ancient Coins found at Aden’](#)

We look forward to keeping in touch with IASA – follow the BLQFP on [@blqatar](#) for all the latest news including the #mapofthefmonth and #newlydigitised highlights and do keep in touch as well with the QNL on [@QNLlib](#).

Lives Remembered

Stephen Day CMG

Stephen Day CMG who died on 14 March 2023 at the age of 85 and had been a member of IASA, was well known for his many links with the Arabian peninsula, starting with six and half years in the former British Overseas Civil Service, nearly all of which was spent as a Political Officer and Adviser in South Arabia from 1961 until it became independent in 1967. Stephen then joined the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office and retained his interest in Arabia and after serving as the British ambassador to Qatar 1981-4) he became Head of the Middle East Department until 1987. He was attached on a temporary basis to the household of the Prince and Princess of Wales and accompanied them on a visit to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states in 1986. He later served as ambassador to Tunisia and after retirement he became a trustee of the MBI al Jaber Foundation and played an influential role in setting up the London Middle East Institute at SOAS. He was also an early adviser to the Qatar Foundation.

For modern historians of Yemen Stephen's accounts of his experiences of working in South Arabia as a Political Officer are invaluable. (Stephen Day, Aden and the Gulf: the reflections of a political officer (Middle Eastern Studies, volume 53, issue 1 (January 2007) pp 136-151). With little or no training apart from his degree from Cambridge at the age of just 23 he joined a tiny number of colleagues in "advising" Sultans, Amirs and shaikhs in what was then the Western Arabian Protectorate in the dying days of Britain's occupation of South Arabia, which became independent first as the People's Republic of South Yemen in 1967 and as the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY) from 1970 until its union with the Yemen Arab Republic in 1990.

Stephen made lifelong friends from his time in South Arabia including some who became leading figures in the PDRY. Whilst Head of the Middle East Department he welcomed a senior minister from the PDRY who had plotted to assassinate him in the 1960s. A former President of the PDRY seemed proud to say that he had been arrested by Stephen in the 1960s for his involvement with the National Liberation Front. Stephen also remained in touch with the former rulers and their families throughout the Arabian Peninsula, notably in



Qatar and the UAE. He never lost his love and interest in Arabia throughout his life.

Stephen and Brian Doe, who was the first director of Aden's Department of Antiquities, jointly presented to the British Museum a large collection of ancient South Arabian antiquities in 1985, and a few more personally in 1995. Most of the first group were in fact collected by Brian but Stephen was particularly proud of an offering saucer he found at Tell al-Qeru in Zingibar (BM 1995,0124.3).

Noel Brehony

Peter Hellyer 1947-2023

Peter Hellyer left an indelible mark as a journalist, historian, and archaeologist. Although not having any formal training in archaeology, his life's work was a testament to his unwavering dedication to preserving and sharing the captivating stories of Abu Dhabi, the very essence of the UAE's rich cultural heritage. Peter Hellyer's journey

to becoming an eminent figure in the world of journalism, history, and archaeology was nothing short of extraordinary. His early fascination with history and archaeology laid the foundation for a remarkable career that would span decades and leave an enduring legacy. Little did he know that his moving to Abu Dhabi in 1975 would set the stage for a lifelong connection with the region and its history.

He once remarked, "I came here as a young teacher, but Abu Dhabi and its history quickly captured my heart." This love affair with the UAE's past would define his life's work. One of Peter Hellyer's notable contributions was his extensive writing on the history and culture of Abu Dhabi and the UAE. His words served as a bridge between the past and the present, weaving narratives that illuminated the rich tapestry of the region's heritage. His publications provided invaluable insights into the natural world of the UAE, as well as helping promote its archaeology and history to the outside world. Hellyer's dedication to historical accuracy was a hallmark of his work. He once emphasized, "In the realm of history, precision matters; it's about getting the details right." His meticulous research and commitment to accuracy ensured that his writings were not just informative but also trustworthy sources for future generations of scholars and enthusiasts.

A true journalist at heart, Peter Hellyer was a fearless seeker of truth. His journalistic pursuits took him to the frontlines of important stories, where he reported with integrity and an unwavering commitment to ethical journalism. His reporting on issues ranging from environmental conservation to cultural preservation reflected his passion for the UAE and its people. Throughout his career, Hellyer championed the idea that journalism could serve as a powerful instrument for positive change. He once stated, "Journalism can shine a light on issues that need attention, creating awareness and sparking action." His belief in the transformative power of the press was evident in the impact of his work, which shed light on crucial societal and environmental challenges.

As a historian, Peter Hellyer had a remarkable ability to bring history to life. His words transported readers to a time when the sands of Abu Dhabi were traversed by traders and explorers, and when the stories of its people were yet to be written. His books and various other published



works remain definitive works that capture the evolution of the UAE from ancient times to its modern identity.

One of his most enduring legacies lies in his archaeological contributions. Hellyer recognized that the land itself held the key to unraveling the mysteries of the past. His support for archaeological excavations uncovered artifacts and ancient settlements that provided a window into the lives of the people who once called this land home. In his own words, "The soil beneath our feet is a treasure trove of history waiting to be discovered."

Peter Hellyer's dedication to preserving the UAE's heritage extended beyond his scholarly pursuits. He actively participated in initiatives to protect the environment and cultural landmarks. His work with environmental organizations aimed to safeguard the natural beauty of the UAE, ensuring that future generations would continue to enjoy the pristine landscapes he so deeply admired. His profound commitment to cultural preservation was exemplified by his involvement in projects that sought to restore and maintain historical and natural sites, such as the Al Wathba Lake. He believed that these sites were not just relics of the past but also living testimonies to the region's rich history and natural wonders. His passion for conservation was summed up in his assertion that "preserving our heritage is an investment in our future."

Peter Hellyer was not only a historian and journalist but also a mentor and inspiration to

many. He shared his knowledge generously, nurturing the next generation of historians and journalists. His willingness to guide and support emerging talents demonstrated his belief in the importance of passing on the torch of knowledge and dedication. As we remember Peter Hellyer, we are reminded of his enduring legacy. His writings continue to serve as valuable resources for researchers, historians, and all those who seek to understand the UAE's past. His commitment to truth and integrity in journalism remains a guiding light for aspiring reporters. In his own words, "History is not a static subject; it's a dynamic narrative that unfolds with every discovery."

Peter Hellyer's life and work exemplified this belief. His contributions to the fields of journalism, history, and archaeology were instrumental in uncovering the hidden treasures of Abu Dhabi and the UAE. His legacy is a testament to the enduring power of storytelling, knowledge, and the pursuit of truth. In the annals of Abu Dhabi's history, Peter Hellyer's name will forever be etched, a reminder of the man who dedicated his life to preserving the past, illuminating the present, and shaping the future of a nation. As we bid farewell to this remarkable chronicler, we celebrate his profound impact on the UAE and the world, and we carry forward his legacy with gratitude and reverence.

On a personal note, I can say that Abu Dhabi and its history also captured my heart. When I first came to work in Abu Dhabi on a 2-month contract in February 1994, little did I know that 30 years later I would still be here, and that it would become my permanent home. Peter taught me to appreciate the wonders of the UAE be it geology, palaeontology, archaeology, fauna, flora, history, and local cultural traditional practices. I miss him, his generous sharing of local knowledge, and our interesting conversations. Now I am currently working for the development and opening of the new Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi (NHMAD), due to open in December 2025. I had many conversations with Peter about the need for such a museum in the UAE. Peter would have loved to have seen this and I am sad that he will not be there for its opening. Still, he contributed some of the building blocks and knowledge behind the research which has gone into producing this museum.

My last conversation with Peter was on 9th March 2023. We both had been invited, along with some

of my work colleagues from the Department of Culture and Tourism, for afternoon tea at the British Embassy in Abu Dhabi. This reception was with His Majesty's Ambassador Patrick Moody and Aida Salamanca, Director of the British Council in the UAE, and was an opportunity to discuss cultural heritage protection and modern heritage with Charlotte Marriot, Head of International Cultural protection at the UK's Department of Culture, Media and Sport, and Stephen Bailey, Head of the Cultural Protection Fund and Director Culture in Action at the British Council.

After a stimulating evening of conversation, sandwiches and cakes, Peter kindly gave me a lift and drove me home following the conclusion of the reception. Our parting words concerned different things we still wanted to do and papers and books that he had in his office but wanted to give me to ensure they were properly archived in our records. That sums up Peter... always wanting to document and report on important discoveries relating to the UAE, a country he loved so much.

Peter will be remembered as being enthusiastic, passionate, articulate, an environmentalist, a writer, a fierce editor who was interested in archaeology, history, palaeontology, geology, natural history, birds, political and economic history of the UAE and the region, and UAE policy and its international relations. He was a staunch and loyal defender of the UAE, skilled in press releases and in drafting words in a suitable style that were sensitive to local cultural norms.

Mark Jonathan Beech

Prof. Juris Zarins, 1945–2023

If the great ancient sites of Saudi Arabia are relatively well-known today and the archaeology of that country a well-established discipline, this is no small measure due to the key role played in the 1970s and '80s by Juris Zarins, who has died suddenly aged 78 at his home in Corrales, New Mexico.

As so often with career turns, happenstance

had played its part. In the early 1970s a fellow PhD student at the University of Chicago, Dr Abdullah Masry, was appointed Director of Antiquities and Museums in Saudi Arabia, and he invited Zarins to be his Archaeological Adviser. Together they set about filling in what was until then a virtual blank in the map of the ancient Middle East, by instituting the Comprehensive Survey of the Kingdom, initiating a programme of museum development, and starting *Atlal*, the *Journal of Saudi Arabian Archaeology*. The resurgence in these fields evident in recent decades owes much to the foundations laid down at that time.

Zarins had had a challenging start in life, having been born on 17 February 1945 to Latvian parents in a refugee camp in Bad Oldesloe, Germany. When he was five, the Zarins family emigrated to the United States and settled in Lincoln, Nebraska among other Latvian families, and he retained a lifelong connection with his Latvian roots. A gifted student, the young Juris graduated with high distinction from the University of Nebraska in 1967, and moved on to the University of Chicago as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. There, in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, studying under such luminaries as the renowned Assyriologist Ignaz Gelb and the Mesopotamian archaeologist Robert McCormick Adams, he earned his doctorate in 1974 with a PhD on the domestication of the horse. This work has stood the test of time and was recently expanded and published as *The Domestication of Equidae in Third-millennium BCE Mesopotamia* (Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology, 2014). It was at Chicago that he gained his familiarity with cuneiform that enabled him to combine archaeological research with information drawn from Akkadian texts.

Zarins's time in academia had been interrupted in 1969 when he was drafted to serve in Vietnam. The experience made him hypersensitive to life's insecurities and he disliked leaving anything to chance. He would always, for example, turn up at the airport hours early for a flight. This was balanced by a sharp sense of the absurd, and he revelled in wisecracks and humorous give-and-take. With his imposing physical presence, clarity of aim, and explosive, infectious laugh, he was a natural leader regarded with respect and affection by his co-workers in the field.



He had a voracious appetite for the latest research. "Gotta assimilate all that data!" he would cry, as he fell upon some dense table of ceramic typology with the characteristic omnivorous gleam in his eye. It was all fuel to his enthusiasm for casting his net wide to find connections and patterns. Some of this did not go down well with more cautious colleagues, who regarded it as wild speculation. But his wide-ranging erudition was obvious when I first met him in Riyadh during Ramadan in 1975, when we spent a couple weeks together working out the contents and sequence of the planned Museum of Archaeology and Ethnography.

In 1978, he left Saudi Arabia to become Professor of Anthropology at South-west Missouri State University (SMSU) in Springfield. He was succeeded as Archaeological Adviser in Riyadh by Dr Alasdair Livingstone (see obituary, *IASA Bulletin* autumn 2021) but continued to conduct annual surveys in Saudi Arabia. He would remain at SMSU, by then renamed Missouri State University, till his retirement in 2006, having built a reputation as an inspiring scholar, teacher and mentor. All this time he maintained his interest in Saudi Arabia, with a specific focus on climate change in Neolithic Arabia, the development of pastoral nomadism and the origins of the Bedouin.

His interest also turned to southern Arabia. In 1990, after a project in the eastern desert of Egypt, he was invited to direct a five-year project instigated by the film-maker Nicholas Clapp and the celebrated

explorer Ranulph Fiennes to find the legendary lost city of Ubar, or Wabar, a vague memory of which had been preserved in Bedouin folklore and by an early Muslim geographer, and which had been identified on the flimsiest of evidence with the destroyed city of 'Iram of the Pillars' mentioned in the Qur'an. This had been inflated into a search for a great lost frankincense city somewhere in the sands of Empty Quarter in the Sultanate of Oman, an 'Atlantis of the Sands' awaiting rediscovery. This ill-judged enterprise drew Zarins into the public eye. The ensuing attempt to identify Ubar with the modest, albeit interesting, remains of a pre-Islamic caravanserai excavated beneath the previously known site of Shis'r was a damp squib, and confirmed the impression of hype having triumphed over rational expectation. Zarins himself quickly conceded that Ubar, if it ever actually existed, was more likely to have been a region than a city. The project had at least afforded him the opportunity to carry out serious archaeological work in a remote area of Oman which otherwise would never have received that degree of attention.

The research had included using satellite images to locate potential caravan routes and these would prove useful in continuing his work on the frankincense trade in Dhofar and on a general archaeological survey of the region. But Zarins then used satellite imagery again as part of another quest for a mythical location, the Garden of Eden, which he argued was located at the head of the Gulf where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers join to flow into the sea.

He next conducted a pioneering survey in the Mahra Governorate of eastern Yemen. After retiring from Missouri State in 2006, he returned to Oman to live there full-time with his second wife, Lynne Newton, where they conducted an important series of excavations at the mediaeval port of al-Baleed, the UNESCO World Heritage site just outside Salalah. After several years in Qatar together, they returned to the United States in 2015 and settled in Corrales, where Zarins continued to research and write until his untimely death.

A prolific scholar, Zarins published some sixty articles during his career. The last one, entitled 'The Sargonic Period at Ur: New Light on the Gutians' (in the *Festschrift to Julian Reade*, ed. St John Simpson and Irving Finkel; Oxford:

Archaeopress) is characteristically wide-ranging and original. Interweaving archaeological and epigraphic evidence from Central Asia to Iraq, it presents an elaborate hypothesis on an important and poorly understood phase of later 3rd-millennium history. It illustrates his penchant for interdisciplinary research, at once scholarly and imaginative, broad in scope while clearly focused in detail.

Juris Zarins is survived by his first wife, Sandra, and their five children, and by his widow, Lynne.

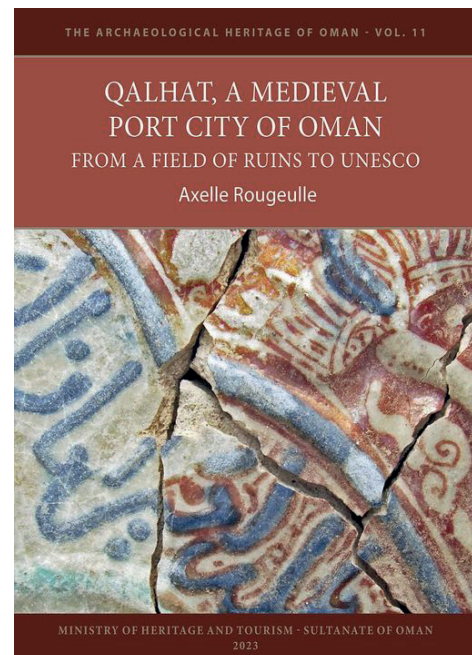
William Facey

New Publications on Arabia

Edited by Axelle Rougeulle, [Qalhat, a Medieval Port City of Oman: From a Field of Ruins to UNESCO](#). Archaeopress, 2023.

Paperbac ISBN: 9781803275932

Digital ISBN: 9781803275949



Book Reviews

The Arabian Desert in English Travel Writing since 1950: A Barren Legacy?

Jenny Walker

New York: Routledge, 2023

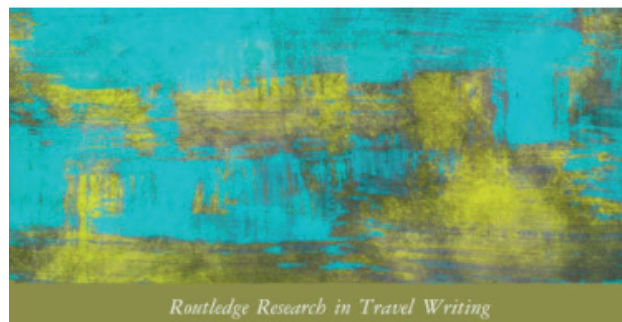
240 pp. (no illustrations),

Index, Bibliography. Hardback, £130. E-book, £29.24.

ISBN 9781032053523

The casual reader may be excused for thinking that the “Arabian Desert” is composed of rock, dust, or sand. The Arabian Desert of Jenny Walker’s new book, in contrast, is a rhetorical construction, a collection of tropes related to western imperialism, male hegemony, and above all Orientalism. “The Arabian Desert,” she thus asserts, “is not an innocent term, but a whole collection of values wrapped up in a Western appreciation of wilderness.” (p. 188). Her book is therefore primarily concerned with how English authors since 1950 have engaged, not with the desert itself, but with these various “outdated” tropes.

To put these authors and these tropes into their historical context, the book begins with a useful introduction summarizing pre-1950 British travelogues to Arabia. Walker convincingly argues for three pulses of early English voyagers: an early “misfit” wave of European outsiders, a proto-anthropological mid-wave linked to heightened Western imperialism in the region, and a final wave of travellers seeking superlative accomplishments, such as to be the first to cross the Rub’ Al-Khali desert or the last to visit the Bedu in their pure, original state. My only critique of this section is that it is somewhat selective: T. E. Lawrence and Wilfred Thesiger are overrepresented, William Palgrave and H. St. J. B. Philby are mentioned only in passing, and important authors such as Gerald de Gaury and J. R. Wellsted are not mentioned at all. The author also missed an opportunity to discuss the work of Eldon Rutter, a prolific British travel writer and Islamic convert. It may have been interesting to assess to what degree Rutter’s Muslim identity led him to qualify, modify, or reject the era’s prevailing Orientalist tropes.



THE ARABIAN DESERT IN ENGLISH TRAVEL WRITING SINCE 1950

A BARREN LEGACY?

Jenny Walker



In subsequent chapters, Walker summarizes the major texts of post-1950 British travel writers with an eye towards the degree to which they have adopted and/or transcended the traditional tropes. Chapter 1 examines the phenomenon of “second journeys” – recent travels that follow in the footsteps of previous voyagers – through the writings of Charles Blackmore, Bruce Kirkby, Adrian Hayes, and Mark Evans. Chapter 2 looks at the common trope of the desert as an empty, uncivilized and exploitable space through the works of Michael Asher, Barbara Toy, James (Jan) Morris, Jonathan Raban, Tim Mackintosh-Smith. Chapter 3, in turn, examines gender issues: the “siren” trope of the beautiful-but-dangerous desert women, the common “gendering” of the desert (as virgin, changeable, and subject to male explorer “penetration”), and the widespread depiction of Arab women as agentless victims. Chapters 4 and 5 stretch the definition of travel

writers by examining science writing and the blurry, permeable relationship between travel and tourism. These latter two chapters contain a number of interesting insights but lack the clear thematic focus of the first three sections.

One bone I would pick with the author is the consistent use of the term “explorer” to describe British voyagers in the Arabian Peninsula. As I have argued in other contexts (See Reilly, “Arabian Travelers, 1800-1950”, 2015), while it is true that most Arabian travellers adopted this heroic self-image, the fact that they ventured into already-frequented destinations with the assistance of, or in the company of, people indigenous to that terrain, makes the term inapplicable. Walker does acknowledge that “Western white men were not the first and certainly not the only expeditioners” to the Arabian Desert (p. 53), but does not take the logical next step of describing these “western white men” as travellers rather than the “explorers” they imagined themselves to be. This is a minor critique, however.

A more substantive flaw in the text is its excessive use of citations by other authors. As is typical of Ph.D. theses that are published in book form, the author’s voice is often hard to disentangle from the numerous quotations from existing scholarship, in this case from the fields of anthropology, literary criticism, postcolonialism, feminism, and ecocriticism. While dense references to existing scholarship are expected and appreciated by doctoral review committees, they make for a confusing read for the lay reader.

A final problem with the text is that when the author does clearly give her own opinion, she generally takes on the role of gatekeeper, praising progressive elements and critiquing “retrogressive” ideas in the texts under discussion. Works are labelled retrogressive if they exhibit “latent Orientalism,” for example by representing the desert as an empty space fit only for appropriation and exploitation or describing Arabian women in stereotypical ways that denies them agency. Progressive works, on the other hand, recognize the desert is home to indigenous people and animals, respect local knowledge, allow for female agency, and above all “rupture or transgress the traditional Orientalist

paradigm” (p. 196). Admittedly, her judgments are often nuanced – even mostly-retrogressive authors can make progressive points – and generally seem sensible. Nonetheless, the reader puts down the book feeling that they have learned more about Walker’s own ideological beliefs than about the book’s putative subject, the Arabian Desert in post-1950 English travel writing.

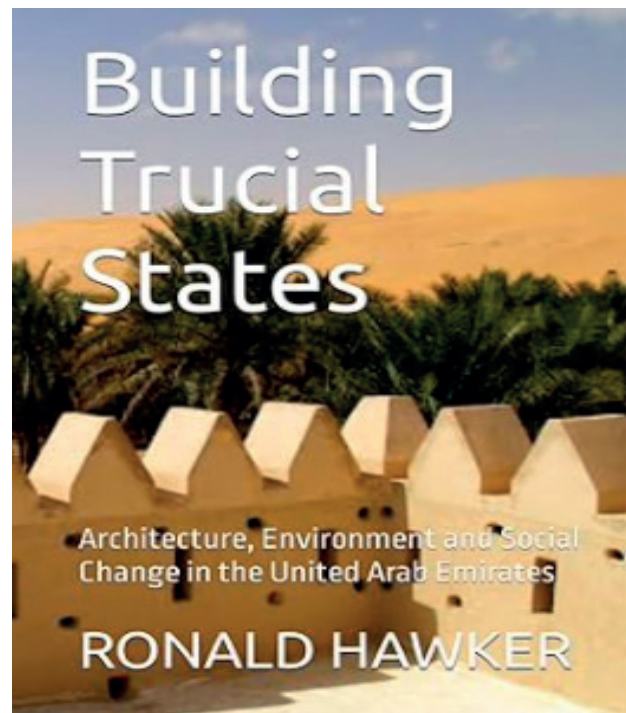
By Benjamin Reilly

Building the Trucial States. Architecture, Environment, and Social Change in the United Arab Emirates

Ronald Hawker

Belfast, Canada: CLTD Press, 2023.
Independently published. 195 pp. 232 figs.
Glossary. Endnotes. Hardback, £147.71.
Paperback, £79.24.

ISBN 979-8390964583



The United Arab Emirates has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past decades. *Building Trucial States: Architecture, Environment, and Social Change in the United Arab Emirates* explores this transformation in an illuminating journey through the architectural, environmental challenges, and societal shifts that have shaped the UAE into the

modern state it is today. At its core, the book is a detailed examination of the intersection between architecture, environment, and society in the UAE. Ronald Hawker weaves together anecdotal evidence and personal experience with historical accounts, architectural analysis, and sociological insights to provide a comprehensive overview of the factors that have influenced the built environment of the Trucial States, now the UAE. Architecture is viewed as a material expression of social life and this book seeks to chart the factors that created unique regional architectural styles, and how these were transformed by the shift to a hydrocarbon economy in the second half of the 20th century.

The author identifies three key elements that shaped traditional architecture in the region, Islamic principles, tribal structures, and environment, and the book is structured around these elements. Historical developments, from the British subjugation of the region to the development of a modern oil economy, are illustrated through architectural change. The first two chapters of the book cover the impact of Islamic traditions and triable structures on the traditional architecture of the UAE. The preceding eight chapters provide an overview of the traditional architecture of the different regions of the UAE, emphasising how varied environments and subsistence influenced the types of structures people built. The final chapter investigates how the introduction of oil wealth in the second half of the 20th century radically changed architectural styles, construction techniques, and urban planning in the UAE.

Overall, the self-published nature significantly diminishes its academic credibility, lacking peer review and professional editing. The book's potential is marred by inconsistent, low-quality illustrations, further detracting from its overall impact. While the content provides valuable insights into the UAE's architectural heritage, the lack of scholarly rigour and presentation polish limits its effectiveness as a comprehensive academic resource. Despite these drawbacks, the book does manage to offer some redeeming qualities. Its exploration of the UAE's architectural evolution is, in itself, a commendable endeavour. The author delves into the historical and cultural factors that have shaped the architectural landscape, providing valuable insights into the societal changes that have occurred over time. The book also successfully captures the symbiotic relationship between the environment

and architectural development, offering thought-provoking perspectives on sustainability and urban planning in the region. Moreover, the author's passion for the subject matter is evident in the depth of research undertaken. The book is replete with historical anecdotes, architectural analyses, and sociocultural insights that reflect the author's dedication to unravelling the complex tapestry of the UAE's architectural heritage. These insights provide readers with glimpses of the rich architectural history of the region.

By Daniel Eddisford

Seasonal Knowledge and the Almanac Tradition in the Arab Gulf

Palgrave Series in Indian Ocean World Studies

Daniel Martin Varisco

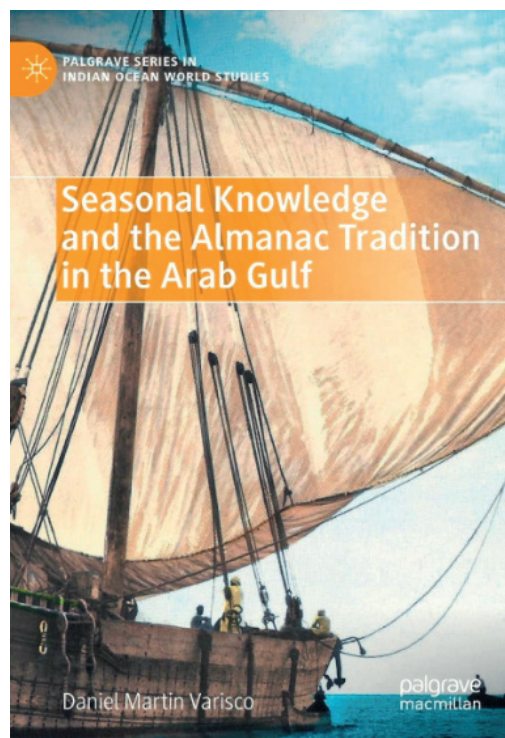
Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022

458 pp. 45 Tables. 14 Bibliographies. Index.

Hardback/Paperback, £109.99.

ISBN 978-3-030-95770-4

eBook, £87.50. ISBN 978-3-030-95771-1



Navigating the changing weather and challenging environmental conditions was a central concern for the peoples of the Arabian Gulf, especially prior to the oil and gas era. And yet this subject has been largely underexplored by western scholarship. Daniel Varisco's *Seasonal Knowledge and the*

Almanac Tradition in the Arab Gulf, however, goes some way to addressing this, presenting an extensive study of the Gulf peoples' engagement with their natural environment, and their traditional knowledge passed down through the generations and formalised in texts.

As the reader traverses this book, they are introduced to a different way of perceiving time and space, cycles of life and daily activities, through the observation of certain stars, constellations, and markers in the environment. The texts selected and presented by the author meticulously list, describe and calculate the movements of the stars and relate these to the seasonal changing of meteorological phenomena and to human activities. Through these texts, the reader really gets a sense of the extraordinary importance of wind and rain and of hot and cold seasons, for the survival of communities living in the Gulf region but a few generations ago.

Varisco's approach to the topic is that of an historical anthropologist. Viewing intangible heritage as something that is continuously changing over time, he gives particular attention to how past practices have influenced those in the present and illustrates the rich diversity of the peoples who have produced this heritage. The book's analysis centres around two main streams of knowledge: the indigenous knowledge itself, and texts produced by the scholarly elite, which are essentially adaptations of the local knowledge into more formal models.

The book is divided into two parts and fourteen chapters. Part I comprises an historical overview and analysis of data collected from texts and accounts of seasonal knowledge and almanac lore, while Part II presents a select collection of texts on the subject ranging from almanacs to poetry and proverbs. After laying out the premise and the scope of the book in Chapter 1, the author moves on to analysing the traditional knowledge of the stars, which dictated the passage of time and the navigational directions. He explains how this ancient knowledge, originally deriving from foreign and pre-Islamic cultures, was embraced in the Islamic context. Islamic scholars concerned themselves with the arts of astronomy and astrology, specifically in the almanac texts. These texts, which are the main focus of this book, contain reference to a number of astronomical phenomena which provided information on the passage of time and related specific activities to the changing seasons. Some almanacs reflect pre-

Islamic practices and also provided information on astrology, the magical connection between the planets and the constellations and other phenomena.

Traditional knowledge of the stars, discussed in Chapter 2, gives special attention to the zodiac constellations, the moon, and the planets. Their movements in the sky dictated the beginning of a new season and the corresponding activities to be conducted, as well as the maritime routes. Such constellations played a minor role in Arab folk astronomy, which was mainly based on the lunar stations and certain stars. The twenty-eight asterism of the lunar zodiac system would be plotted out over the solar year to create an annual cycle which was equal the 365 days of the year. The author explains that the Pleiades played an important role in the Arabia, as it was the most mentioned of the stations, with Canopus being a major reference point for direction, while Sirius was a star worshipped during the pre-Islamic era.

In Chapter 3, the author discusses almanac lore, explaining how such texts document the seasonal sequence of events according to a star calendar. The calendar systems of the Gulf almanacs, explained in Chapter 4, are mostly organized according to the Islamic Hijri calendar, which is lunar, while other Arabic almanacs are arranged according to the solar calendar and the stars. Here, empirical methods for telling time are also described and extrapolated from ethnographic data. In Chapter 5, traditional seasonal knowledge is presented according to the different regions of the Gulf – in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, the UAE and Oman – and how periods of wind and rain, hot and cold, are observed and recorded. Wind, rain, heat and cold have a bearing on fishing, farming, herding and survival, which form the topics discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 6 sets forth the various contents of the almanacs, which provide suggestions concerning the optimal and appropriate time for conducting a wide range of activities such as medical treatment, food, diet, sex, falconry, hunting, insects, plants, religious celebrations, family matters, and numerous other events. In Chapters 7 and 8, Varisco discusses how seasonal knowledge dictated seasonal activities on land and at sea, such as the pastoral cycle and times of cultivation, as well as maritime activities such as nautical navigation routes, pearl diving and fishing.

The final chapter of Part I (Chapter 9) addresses issues relating to the future of almanac lore and

seasonal knowledge in the Gulf. Today, the oral transmission of this intangible heritage and traditional knowledge has largely been lost, whilst the use of the almanacs lives on in new print editions and digital copies found on the web and in specific apps. With the modernisation of society and everyday activities, the almanac knowledge has faded away, as with other features of traditional Gulf heritage, such as pearling, and other practices associated with the seasonal migratory lifestyle of people in the Peninsula. By comparing this traditional knowledge with the contemporary way of life in the Gulf, the author emphasises the impact which rapid, socio-economic changes have had on the region's intangible heritage.

In Part II, Varisco presents some of the major texts concerning seasonal knowledge and provides accompanying English translations of selected excerpts from different almanacs (Chapter 10), as well as the Canopus Calendar (Chapter 11), the Pleiades Conjunction Calendar (Chapter 12), poetry (Chapter 13), and lastly, folk songs and proverbs (Chapter 14).

This book comprises some 450 pages, providing the reader with a comprehensive perspective on indigenous seasonal knowledge systems of the Arab Gulf. With its extensive exploration of the subject and analysis of wide-ranging sources – folk astronomy, ethnographic research, archival and historical records, and comparative research, Varisco's scholarly undertaking should in turn help to stimulate further and much-needed academic research and analysis.

By Chiara Zazzaro



Recorded as part of the Ras al-Khaimah Traditional Architecture survey Dhayah fort holds a special place in the history of the Emirates. (Photo: D.Connolly/H. Kdolska)

The Final Word

Nabonidus, the last King of Babylon, left his mark in a little-known ancient oasis in what is now SAUDI ARABIA.

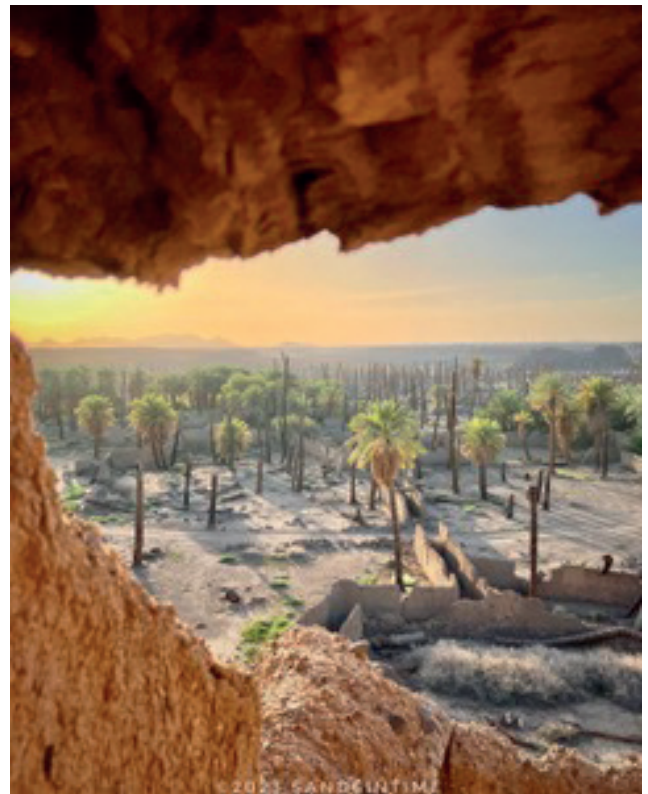
Sheila Russell FRGS

In my role as ‘Storyteller’ I always try to gather as many facts as possible about a place or person before visiting the site in question; joining the dots and bridging the gap between academia and modern social media feels like a treasure hunt sometimes. Recently I’ve been working on Nabonidus, the last King of the Neo-Babylonian Empire who came to Northwestern Arabia around 553 BCE

The Assyrian and Babylonian Empires covered huge areas which extended through Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria. Whilst parts of Arabia were vassal states, (paying tribute and allegiance to the ruling king in return for control of their own lands), they didn’t really become part of the empire until the last Babylonian King Nabonidus conquered it in 553 BCE.

The Harran Stele tells of Nabonidus’ military triumphs. It records him roaming between Tayma, Dadan (AlUla), Faddak (Al Ha’it), Hibra (Khaybar), Yadi and Yathrib (Madinah) for 10 years around 552 BCE. This is important as it’s the region of the Incense Road at which trade caravans would split, going east to Mesopotamia or north to Egypt and the Mediterranean. Confirmation of his stay is found in and around Tayma oasis in the form of late Babylonian imagery and cuneiform inscriptions, along with local Taymanitic (formerly Thamudic) inscriptions mentioning Nabonidus King of Babylon (Nbnd mlk Bbl).

The most interesting evidence of the King of Babylon’s stay in the area is not found in Tayma, but in a little-known oasis of Al Ha’it (old name



View over the ancient oasis of Faddak (modern Al Ha’it) at dawn

Faddak), in Hail Province. This is on the branch of the Incense Road leading east, past the Nafud into Mesopotamia. Located on the edge of an outcrop overlooking the oasis is a relief and inscription (1 of 2 found in the area). A series of steps lead up the hillside passing the carvings and into buildings on the edge of the modern town, maybe a temple 2,500 years ago.

The relief is an image of a man looking to his left, with four symbols level with his head. The layout is the same as other representations of Nabonidus,

such as the stelae from Harran and the rock relief in Sela, Jordan, except for the addition of the fourth symbol. The iconographic programme of Nabonidus always portrays the king standing in adoration before the celestial bodies of the moon (Sîn), the winged disk sun (Šamaš) and the morning star (Ištar). Nabonidus was known for his near-fanatical devotion to the moon god Sîn (pronounced Seen), whom he raised to the highest status in the Babylonian pantheon. This brought him into bitter conflict with the Babylonian priesthood who claimed this position for their god Marduk.

representations from an external wall of another building in Tayma has also been documented and dated to the Lihyanite dynasty. In ancient Dadan (AIUla) there is a similar depiction of a snake on a stone that forms part of a wall. I am not suggesting a direct link to the fourth Nabonidus symbol but find it fascinating and think it's certainly an area for further investigation.



Map showing the Oases Nabonidus conquered

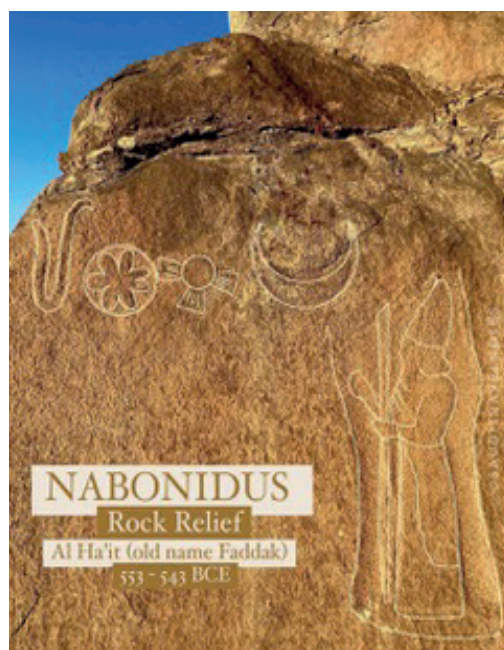
What is most interesting here is the addition of a fourth symbol, a loop, that looks like a snake. It has been suggested that it could be an indigenous deity, in whose city and temple Nabonidus set up his inscription. It could be seen as an act of religious syncretism, a form of respect for the local deities and dare I say it, a blending of beliefs. There is currently no evidence to prove this, it is pure speculation for the time being.

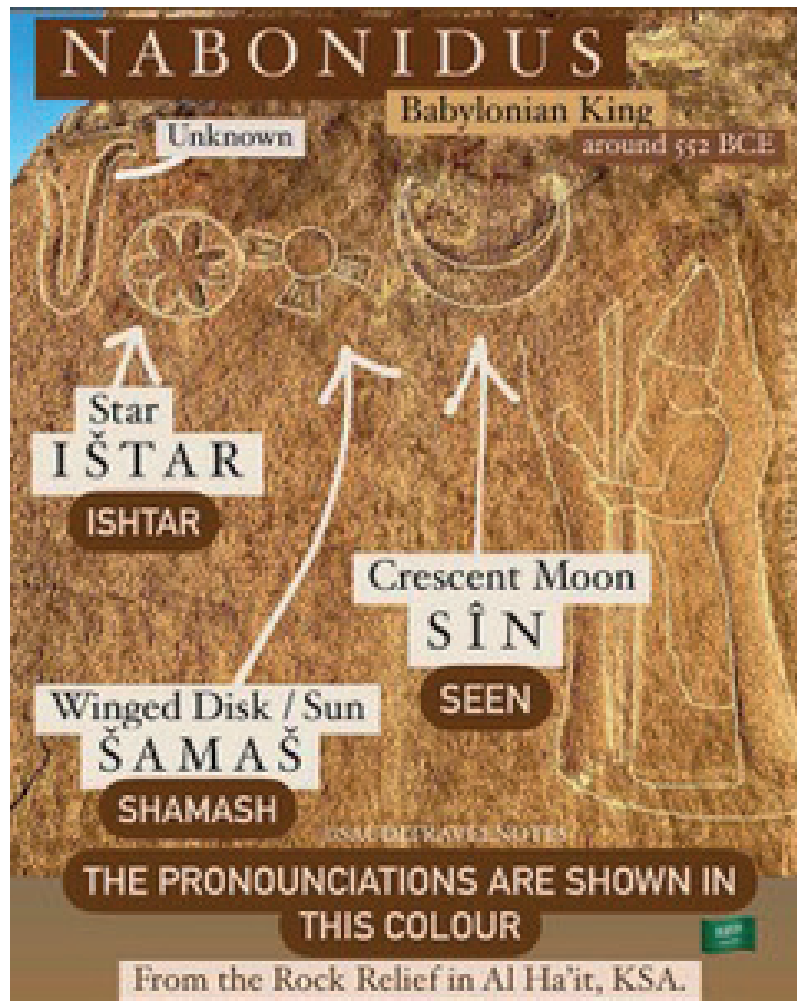
There are however actual snakes in nearby oases. An ivory (or bone) snake was found in a building in Tayma, recovered in an 11th – 9th century BCE context. It is suggested it was probably connected to cultic activities. The shape is almost identical to the fourth symbol! A relief with snake



Above: Nabonidus Rock Relief

Below: Nabonidus Rock Relief with details outlined





Nabonidus Rock Relief with descriptions

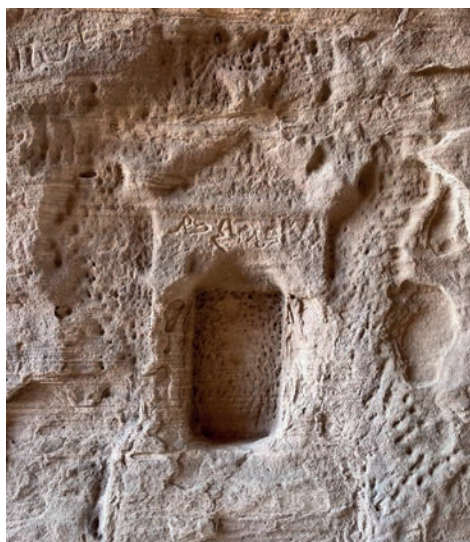
Visiting the oasis was a memorable day. Due to the high temperatures and desire to capture the best light, I started off early, being on site before 05:30. I approached from within the town so walked through some old buildings before the steps leading down to the rock relief. If you continued down the steps, you would eventually end up at the ground level and growing area. As a rough estimate the relief must be at least 10m high. The lighting was perfect, bright orange rays contrasted beautifully with the few remaining palm trees and made the rock relief glow warmly. I have studied the one photo you find online with the symbols outlined so was delighted to see all the details for myself “in the flesh” as it were. Here I was looking at the image left behind (I don’t think anyone disputes this) by the King of the Babylonian Empire. He not only conquered this oasis but stayed in the area for 10 years. So what was so special about the area, what is the fourth symbol and what is its significance?

Right: Sheila Russell with the Rock Relief





Images from the World Archaeology Summit, AlUla, September 2023



Top L: D. Eddisford; M & R: D. Kennet
 2nd Row M: D. Eddisford, R: D. Kennet
 3rd Row L: D. Eddisford, M & R: T. Power
 4th Row T. Power
 Bottom L & R T. Power; M: D. Eddisford