

The IASA Bulletin

The latest news and research in the Arabian Peninsula

Issue 32 Spring 2024



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.

Membership

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

Website: <https://iasarabia.org>



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Cover photo: Members of the Sohar Project



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Welcome

Hello and welcome to the Spring Bulletin. This will be my final Bulletin in my capacity as Outreach Consultant and once again it has been an absolute pleasure to compile. It is typical that now I have finally mastered (or should I say have a better understanding of) the publishing software, *Indesign*, we are in the process of recruiting a bilingual Outreach Consultant who can expand the readership to a wider audience. At least now I can confidently provide a handover to the next incumbent, should they not be familiar with this software, and I have learned a new skill...

As always, the content for the Bulletin 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. This Spring Bulletin presents our regular features including regional news, this time from Bahrain, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates and our Final Word is by Professor Dr. Elynn Gorris (FNRS, UCLouvain), Manhal Makhoul (FNRS, UCLouvain), Perrine Pilette (CNRS, UMR8167), Amr Ryad (KULeuven), Jan Tavernier (UCLouvain). Here they will be talking about The “In the Footsteps of Ryckmans” survey from Jeddah to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

I look forward to seeing many of you in Paris this June for the IASA Seminar for Arabian Studies and you can register [here](#).

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!



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

Welcome from our Chair

Research by local scientists and international collaborators continues to shed light on the languages, history, archaeology and culture of the Arabian peninsula. Almost every week now, there is an announcement of a new discovery that pushes back the date of early hominin occupation of the region, or reveals a previously unknown archaeological or historical site. The IASA plays a critical role in bringing this information to a global public, through the Bulletin, public lectures, and our flagship activity, the Seminar for Arabian Studies which this year, for the first time, will be held in Paris.



It's my privilege to serve as Chair of the IASA at this exciting time and I look forward to seeing our activities expand and our membership grow. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy this Bulletin and the many upcoming activities that we have planned in 2024.

See you in Paris!

Peter Magee



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

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

IASA is seeking to contract a freelance Outreach Consultant

Dear IASA Member,

We are going places! The IASA Trustees wish to expand the reach of the association so that more people can learn about and enjoy the fabulous activities that we develop and promote. It is our intention to be more active in social media and communications than ever, and we want to make sure that the Arab-speaking public can share our excitement. For this reason, we are looking to contract a new outreach consultant who will be the main person responsible for implementing this strategy. With this in mind, I am very happy to share with you the job description that the Outreach Committee has written. Please share far and wide, and do not hesitate to apply if you think that you are a good match for this.

*With all best wishes,
José C. Carvajal López, Outreach Committee Chair*

IASA wishes to contract a freelance Outreach Consultant to work with its trustees to develop and then implement an Outreach strategy designed to inform an international audience about its annual Seminar and other activities as well as providing information on new developments, discoveries, research and events across its range of activities. IASA wants to enhance its presence and profile in the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and ensure that its social media, E-Bulletin and website are devoted to this purpose. IASA will pay a fee (to be agreed). The contract is for one year but is renewable. Ideally the consultant would start on 1 June.

The IASA exists to promote research relating to the Arabian Peninsula and, in particular, its archaeology, history, epigraphy, languages, literature, art, culture, ethnography, geography, geology and natural history from the earliest times to the present day (or, in the case of political and social history, to the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1922). IASA aspires to maintain its Seminar for Arabian Studies as the only annual international forum for the presentation of the latest academic research on the Arabian Peninsula across the range of IASA's research interests. In addition, IASA also fulfils its aims by awarding research grants, producing its own publications and supporting others, disseminating news of new research and events connected with Arabia and organizing lectures and events. (Further details can be found at <https://iasarabia.org/>)

The Outreach Consultant's main priority is to enhance our social media in both English and Arabic. He or she would oversee the IASA's Outreach by managing the postings on Social Media sites including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram and other channels in both English and Arabic. Postings should cover the full range of IASA's field of interest. Some familiarity and experience in using social media would be

essential. Knowledge of one of subjects covered by IASA would be highly desirable.

The Consultant would also edit the IASA biannual E-Bulletin – for an example please go to <https://iasarabia.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/IASA-Bulletin-spring-low-res.pdf>. In addition to contributions received in response to the call for submissions, content is collected by the Editor throughout the year and solicited from regular contributors. The editor is responsible for coordinating the contributions to the Bulletin of the Book Review Editor and a Research Editor. The editor will also work with the Outreach Committee whose function is to support and advise the editor. It would be an advantage if the consultant had some previous experience of editing similar publications and some knowledge of the In-Design system used though we would open to ideas for changing the designs and look of the E-Bulletin in line with a broad outreach strategy.

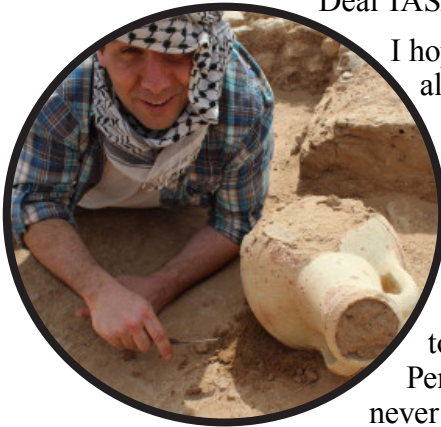
The consultant would also be responsible for updating the website (and recommending any changes to it) using Word Press and for assisting the Events committee in the organisation of lectures and events.

We anticipate that the consultant would need to devote 25% of his or her time on these tasks in the contract period. He or she would report to the IASA Outreach Committee. He or she should be able to operate in both English and Arabic.

We would welcome expressions of interest and we would be happy to discuss the requirements in greater detail. Please get in touch with us via contact@theiasa.com

Welcome from the Vice Chair

Dear IASA members:



I hope your spring is going as well as mine, though definitely, I hope it is also less rainy than mine!

It is my first spring as Vice Chair of the IASA and in my new(ish) position as Investigador Científico (a title that is equivalent to Associate Professor) in Islamic Archaeology and the Institute of Heritage Sciences, CSIC, in Santiago de Compostela (Spain). You could say that I have gone a long way, from my first academic post in UCL Qatar. Doha, to Leicester, UK, where I spent five years, and to where I am now. Sad as it was to me to leave the warm Arabian Peninsula, I cannot say that I am an unhappy person. First, I really never “left” Arabia: my research, my interest, keep me tied to the place (why would I have volunteered to take office in the IASA otherwise?). During

my very merry years at the University of Leicester, Qatar was in fact my main focus of study, and I have been interested in what is happening there up to today. In fact, I was very fortunate to return to Qatar to work in Qatar Museum’s excavations under the leadership of Rob Carter in November and December 2023 (what we did there I will leave to Rob and the rest of the team to develop in a future Bulletin or in a Seminar). But I am also a happy person because Santiago de Compostela is a beautiful and interesting place.

Santiago, as you know, is home to one of the most impressive medieval cathedrals of Europe, and it is one of the foremost pilgrimage centres for Christians (the famous Camino de Santiago). When walking, often under the rain, through the stone streets of the old city, I can see pilgrims around me the whole year around (though the Camino is most popular during summer by far), and I am reminded of the importance of pilgrimage as a way to link peoples and places and to allow for a wider vision of the world when communications had a very different pace and speed than in our days. For me this is, of course, a call back to Arabia, where Mecca and Medina became the centre of the world of believers from the Age of Islam, but also before, when pilgrimage centres attracted people and merchants from the whole peninsula and beyond. As you can see, I can find a bit of Arabia even in one of the most rainy cities of Europe!

And another advantage of Santiago is that it is not that far from Paris! And with that, let me don my hat of Co-Chair of the Seminar Committee (see what I did there?). We are getting ready for what will be an exciting Seminar for Arabian Studies in the City of Light, and I for one cannot wait. The seminar will take place in the days 27th, 28th and 29th June at the Institut National d’Histoire de l’Art (an early one, after a few years celebrating the seminar in August). The venue is wonderfully placed in the historic centre of Paris, very close to the Palais Royal and the Louvre. The programme is being finished as I write these lines, and it promises to be fascinating. This year we will have two special sessions, one on Late Antique Arabia, organised by Jérémie Schiettecatte (the force behind the Seminar in Paris), and another one on Zaydi governance, run by Ekaterina Pukhovaia, who delivered an excellent IASA lecture on the subject in 2022 (see it in the IASA Youtube channel, if you missed it!). It will be also the first time that we run the seminar with papers with different length: people submitting Synthetic Overviews will have 20 mins + 5 mins for questions, and presenters coming with short reports will have 10-12 mins + 3 mins for questions. The idea behind this new organisation is to give more room for discussion in topics where the authors can provide a more developed argument, while at the same time giving the chance to people with new projects or recent information to present quick summaries of them.

I am going to end my letter here, but not before warning you that both the seminars and the Trustees are working hard to bring some changes that will improve the functioning of the IASA and make it brighter and more ready than even before to go into the second quarter of the 21st century. Keep tuned in, as we will need your input and your ideas in what is to come!

All the best,

José Cristóbal Carvajal López

IASA Vice-Chair and Seminar Committee Co-Chair

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 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.

Intellectual Connections between Jazirat al- 'Arab and Jazirat al-Andalus

23rd May

In this presentation Maribel Fierro and José C. Carvajal López will talk about the project and the results that led to the publication of the book that carries the name of the session. This book includes the proceedings of one of the Special Sessions of the Seminar for Arabian Studies celebrated in Casa Árabe in Cordoba (Spain) in 2021. In the first part of the presentation, Carvajal López will explain the development of the special session and will summarize the papers that were included. In the second part, Fierro will offer a summary of her own paper, where she discusses the ways in which the Holy City of Madina, in the Hejaz, became present in religious practices in Maghreb and al-Andalus. Madina was of course the resting place of the Prophet and the birthplace of the founder of the Maliki school of law (Malik ibn Anas). It became the object of so strong devotion that believers unable to travel would undertake 'virtual' pilgrimages by sending letters to be read at Muhammad's Grave. Fierro also notes how the narrative of the attempt of two Iberian Christians to steal the body of Muhammad was instrumentalised as a call to protect al-Andalus from the advance of the Christian polities. In general her work explores the ways in which a vision of Umayyad Cordoba as a new Madina was built as an attempt to boost the Umayyad's political credentials.



Future lecture dates to be confirmed:

- Michael Crawford: *The Imam, The Pasha & The Englishman* based on his book which is being published this year by Medina
- William Facey: *Euting's Diary of a Journey through Inner Arabia, 1883–1884*

Forthcoming Lectures

Leiden Yemeni Studies Lecture Series

This spring Leiden University will host the first round of a series of online talks about Yemen. The series, running from January 2024 till June 2025 and sponsored by the Horizon-2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions project EMStaD YEMEN, brings together experts on various aspects of Yemen's history, art and archaeology, politics, economics, sociology, anthropology, and literature, creating an interdisciplinary dialogue about the region.

All talks take place online (zoom) at 16.00 Central European Time, registration is available through the individual pages of the events on the series [webpage](#).

22 JANUARY
Bernard Haykel
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
Keynote Lecture
Zaydis, Salafis and Houthis
and Their Engagement with
the Islamic Tradition in Yemen

19 FEBRUARY
Ewa Strzelecka
VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM
Reimagining Peacemaking:
Gender, Diaspora, and Peace
Democratization in Yemen

25 MARCH
Mahmood Kooria
LEIDEN UNIVERSITY
Indian Problems,
Yemeni Solutions?
Legal Exchanges in the
Sixteenth Century

22 APRIL
**Zacharie Mochtari
de Pierrepont**
UNIVERSITY OF LIÈGE
Blessed Aristocracies:
Charismatic Authority, Rural Elites,
and Historiography in Medieval
Yemen (6th–9th/12th–15th
Centuries)

20 MAY
Ingrid Hehmeyer
TORONTO METROPOLITAN
UNIVERSITY
History of Water
Management
in Yemen:
An Interdisciplinary
Study

24 JUNE
Marieke Brandt
AUSTRIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
Mapping the Past,
Imagining the Future:
Heritage Politics
in Houthi Yemen

**Leiden
Yemeni Studies
Lecture
Series**

Spring Lecture Series 2024
16.00-17.30 hrs | online via Zoom
For more information and to register for
individual lectures, go to lucis.leidenuniv.nl

Series supported by the Horizon-2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions project EMStaD YEMEN

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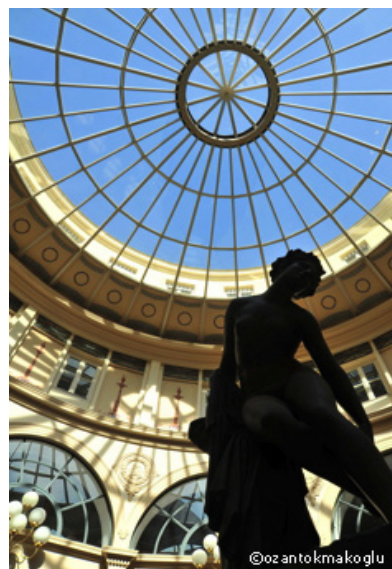
Photo: Fred Waddington on Wikimedia, Creative Commons License.

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.

Paris 2024

The 57th Seminar for Arabian Studies will be held in Paris 27th-29th June 2024 at the Institut National d'Histoire de Art, Galerie Vivienne, 6 Rue des Petits Champs, 75002, Paris (2nd arrondissement). The preparations are well underway and are being led by Dr Jérémie Schiettecatte (CNRS). All speakers have been notified, the programme is being finalised and it will be available shortly. As normal, each day will run parallel sessions. with approximately 12 Synthetic overview papers each day. Days one and three will also hold approximately twenty short rapportage papers. The Special Session on Late Antique Arabia is being held on Friday 28th June (Day two) and will be followed by the Keynote Lecture and Reception. Day three will also feature a focus session on Zaydi Yemen.



Changes to the format of the papers

This year the Seminar Committee have changed the format of the seminar and have accepted the following two types of paper:

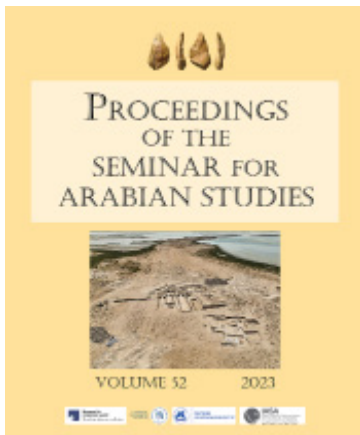
Short rapportage: Such papers will be focussed on reporting the results of current fieldwork (or labwork) of any sort. Presentation of the wider academic and geographical context should be brief and acknowledgments should be listed in a single, brief final slide. The paper should focus on describing 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 such papers will be allocated 25

minutes with 5 minutes for questions.

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.

IASA Publications



Vol. 53 (2024): Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies
Volume 53 2024: Papers from the fifty-sixth meeting of the Seminar for Arabian Studies held at Moesgaard Museum and Aarhus University, Denmark, 4–6 August 2023. This will be published later this year than usual due to technical difficulties. The editorial team expect the proceedings to be published in August.

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: dkennet@uchicago.edu

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

Bahrain

The copper hoard from Al Nasaria Garden, Bahrain

by Flemming Højlund
Moesgaard Museum

The copper hoard from Al Nasaria Garden is the largest copper hoard known from the land of Dilmun. The total metal weight is 59.750 kg. It consists of nine bun-shaped or plano-convex ingots weighing 0.400 kg, 0.500 kg, 0.800 kg, 1.150 kg, 1.150 kg, 1.350 kg, 1.500 kg, 2.250 and 2.450 kg. In addition to the ingots, the hoard consists of 48.200 kg of copper fragments and production waste which originally was corroded together in one big lump sitting in the basal part of a large pottery vessel (Fig. 1) (Højlund & Andersen 1994 p. 377, note 76. Lombard 2016 p. 37).

The metal of all the ingots as well as a few samples of the fragments/waste have been chemically analysed by the Max-Planck-Institut für Chemie (Otto-Hahn-Institut) and the Deutsches Bergbau-Museum Bochum (Prange 2001 p. 79, fig. 31, Tab. 33: BAH01-08, 10, 16-18, 20. Begemann et al. 2010 p. 156). This happened as part of a larger project to define a material signature of Oman copper in the context of the hypothesis that today's Oman was the ancient land of Magan that according to cuneiform sources supplied copper to Mesopotamia.

The importance of the Nasaria hoard for understanding the position of Bahrain/Dilmun in the metal trade through the Arab/Persian Gulf warrants the following note on the circumstances surrounding its discovery, especially since the erroneous information that the hoard was found during road construction and dates to the Umm an-Nar period has entered the literature (Prange 2001 p. 79).

In 1986-1987 Moesgaard Museum was involved in preparing the exhibitions in the new National Museum that opened in 1988 in Manama, Bahrain. In early March 1987 a large number of copper ingots were brought to the museum with the information that they had been found by a man working in Al Nasaria Garden, south of Al Malikiyah village in the Western Region of Bahrain. According to the then Director of the Bahrain National Museum, Shaikha Haya Al Khalifa, the finder's name was Said Adnan. He lived in the village of Bani Jamra and had previously worked with Shaikha Haya in Al Hajjar.

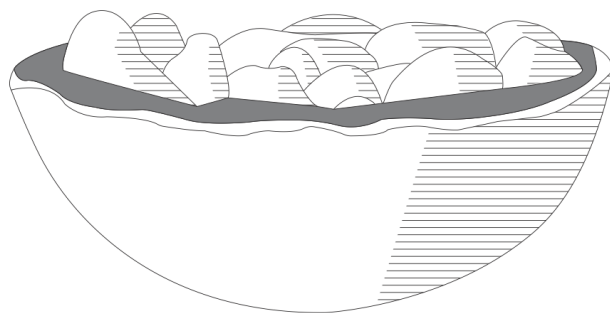


Figure. 1. Sketch of the pottery base filled with corroded copper fragments, diameter 30 cm.

On March the 8th, Karen Frifelt, Poul Kjærum and Flemming Højlund visited the site, guided by Superintendent Azis Suela. The site was made visible on the surface of the field by the dark colour of the earth and a great deal of potsherds, animal bones and shells. It measured at least 100 x 50 m but may extend into the nearby garden towards the east. In several places areas of c. 8-16 m were clearly darker than their surroundings (Fig. 2). In some holes dug to plant new trees, the thickness of the cultural deposit could be estimated to at least 1 m.

The pottery found on the surface belonged exclusively in the Barbar tradition, mostly hole-mouth vessel rims, plus a few triangular rims from necked vessels, bowl rims etc. (Højlund & Andersen 1994 p. 75-101). Only a single chain-ridge sherd was found. The material belongs to the early part of Qala'at al-Bahrain Period IIa-b, i.e. around 2000 BC.

The original finder was not present, but Mr Azis Suela pointed out the area where the metal had been found according to the finder: approximately in the middle of the site. No metal was, however, visible any more on the surface. There was no evidence for a metal workshop on the site, no fragments of crucibles or moulds and no copper balls like in the Period Ib workshop area on the beach in front of Qala'at al-Bahrain in Excavation 520 (Højlund & Andersen 1994 p. 370-378, 467-469).

The precise circumstances of discovery are unknown, and it cannot be taken for granted that the metal hoard should be dated to the early period II culture layer met on the ground. We were told that a bulldozer had been involved in the discovery of the hoard. It is possible that the site was originally a small tell and the purpose of the bulldozer may have been to remove the upper part of the tell, and thereby convert the site into a field. The hoard may have belonged to the upper part of a tell which may have dated to a later part of Period II.

Originally, the pot with the metal fragments/waste would have stood in a copper smith's workshop. Whenever the smith had filled a mould with melted copper and there was still something left in the crucible, he threw it in this pot together with other bits and pieces and left-overs.

The Al Nasaria hoard is presently exhibited in the Hall of Archaeology in the National Museum

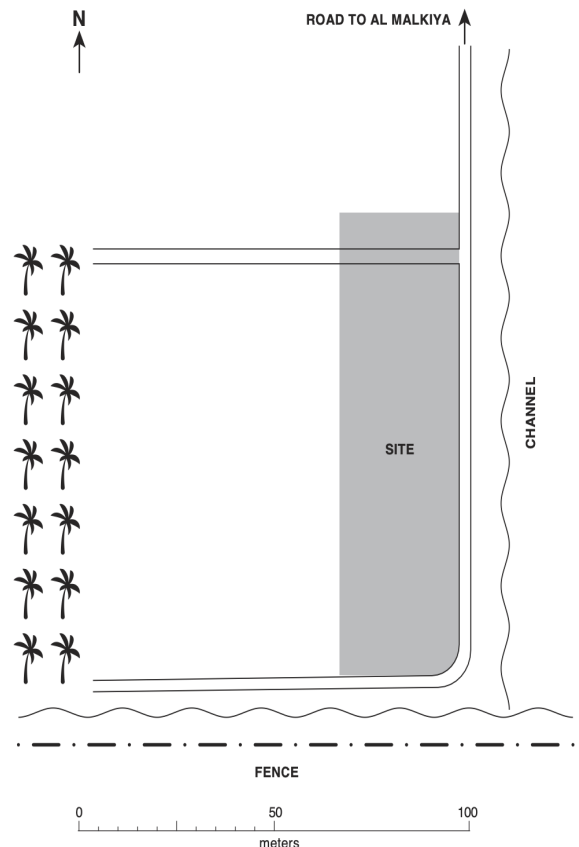


Figure. 2. Sketch map of the site.

of Bahrain and in the Qala'at al-Bahrain Site Museum.

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Oman

2023 and 2024 excavation campaigns of the University of Bologna at HD-7 cemetery, Ra's al-Hadd

By Francesca Barchiesi & Maurizio Cattani (University of Bologna)

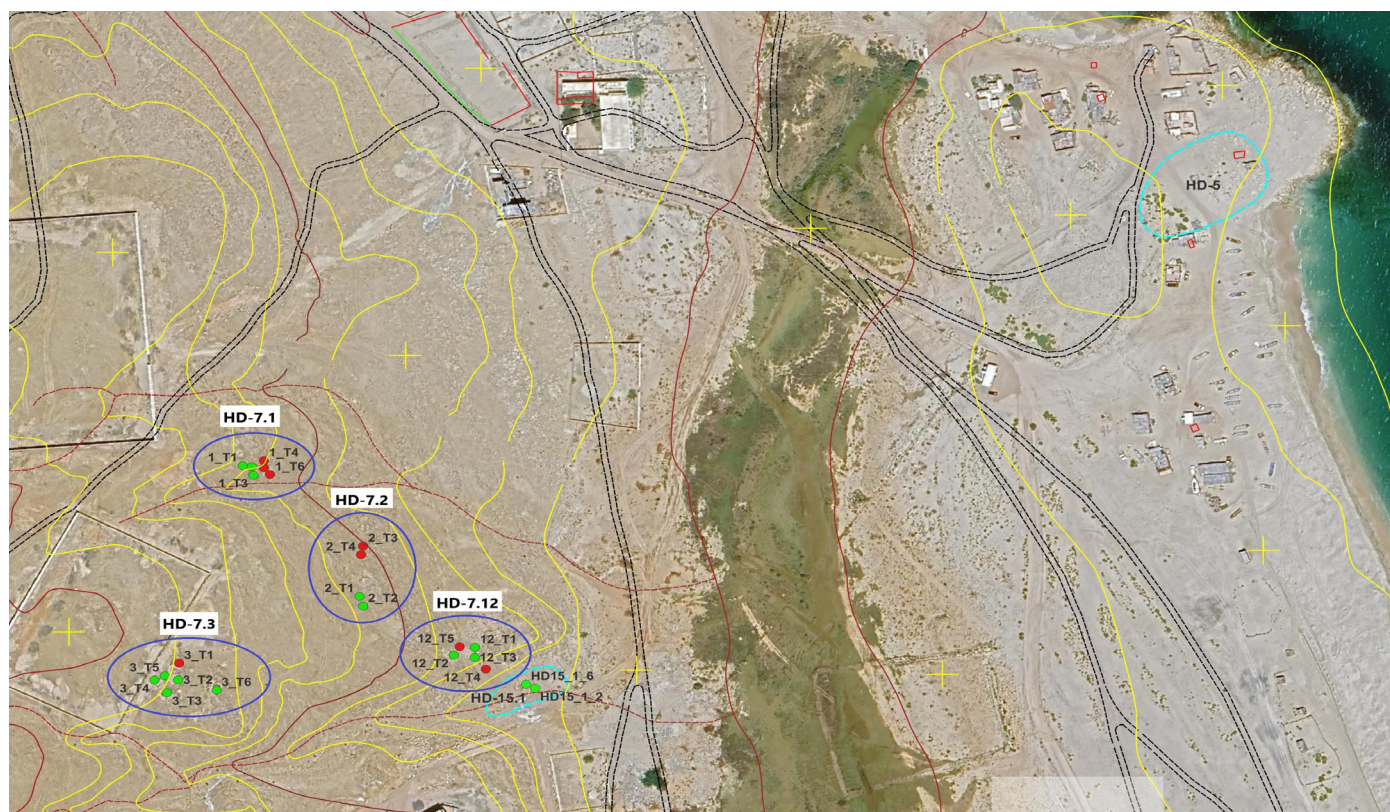


Figure 1. Location of the necropolis of HD-7 and indication of the tombs' clusters (image: Google Satellite).

HD-7 is a well-known Bronze Age cemetery at Ra's al-Hadd (eastern Sharqiyah), traditionally dated to the first half of the 3rd millennium BC and related to the nearby settlement of HD-6. Located on the edge of the rocky terrace facing the sea, it consists of small groups of tombs, forming a real funerary landscape. A longer use of the cemetery is suggested by the presence of the site of HD-5, dated to the second half of the 3rd mill. BC, located few hundred meters north of HD-6 on the beach.

Over the past decades, some of the tombs of HD-7 group 3 have been excavated (Munoz, Seguin 2023; Munoz 2007), as well as other cairns of the cluster labelled as HD-10, south of the settlement of HD-6, were investigated by the Italian Archaeological Mission (Salvatori 2001).

During the survey carried out in January 2022 by

the team of the University of Bologna (Cattani, Barchiesi, Bonazzi 2022), an updated GIS map delineated the location of all ancient structures and warned their endangering due to the recent expansion of the modern village.

In January 2023, a team of archaeologists and anthropologists of the University of Bologna started a new phase of excavations with the support of the Ministry of Heritage and Culture of Oman. Since the graves are clustered in small groups (usually between three to six tombs), identified by a code number, initial focus was directed towards small cairns within group HD-7.12 and few other structures in the nearby site of HD-15.1, at the foot of the terrace, selected for their presumed high informative potential and for proximity to the previously excavated group of HD-7.3.

not unexpected, given that the architectural layout of this tomb markedly differs from the preceding ones and more closely resembles the ‘Umm an-Nar tomb’ models, albeit on a smaller size.

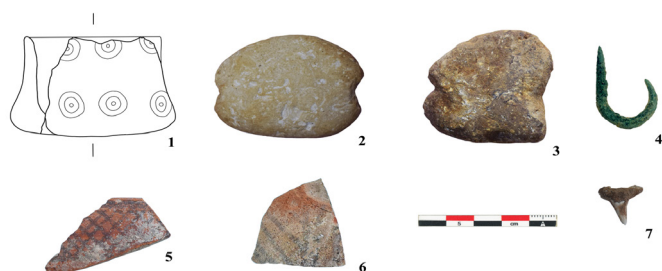


Figure 6. Selection of special finds from various tombs. 1 and 4: HD-7.12 tomb 3, soft-stone vessel and copper hook. 2 and 3: stone net sinkers from HD-7.12 tomb 1. 5 and 6: painted pottery sherds from the area of HD-7.12 tomb 2. 7: shark tooth from the area of HD-7.12 tomb 2.

Furthermore, the identification of craft activities (conus rings, steatite beads) and tools (flint borers) in the layers surrounding HD-7.12 tomb 1 offers valuable insights into the funerary rituals practiced in the vicinity, prompting broader discussions, also regarding the complex topic of bones manipulation.



Figure 7. Steatite and conus industry, and tools from HD-7.12 tomb 1.

The investigation of these tombs contributes to a broader discussion at the regional level concerning a potential local variation of the commonly termed ‘Hafit tomb’ model, characterized here by the use of white beach-rock to delineate the structure’s outer perimeter. Another primary aim of our research is to establish a more precise chronological sequence for these structures and their utilization during the 3rd mill. BC (Williams 2023).

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Sohar Project: The Archaeology of an Indian Ocean Port in Arabia

By Seth Priestman, Derek Kennet, Eve MacDonald, Nasser al-Jahwari, Talal al-Balushi, Peter Brown, Katie Campbell, Guillaume Chung-To, Rosalind MacDonald, Waleed al-Mahroqi, Sultan al-Maqbali, Anaïs Marrast, Tatia Mamalashvili, Davit Naskidashvili, Shurooq Al-Sharqi, Aila Santi, Taro Shiokawa and Karl Smith



Figure 1. Dawn view on the Indian Ocean. Photo Davit Naskidashvili.

The Sohar Project is an international collaboration that aims to look at the history and archaeology of the port of Sohar, Oman. We wish to examine the once famous early Islamic port city in the broader context of its foundation, development as a vibrant entrepôt on the Indian Ocean (Fig. 1), and subsequent transitions through mid to late Islamic phases.

Sohar is a site of outstanding international significance. At a time when a large portion of western Eurasia had been united under the newly established Islamic Caliphate, Sohar rose to prominence as a leading centre of trade in the Indian Ocean and the primary point of maritime exchange in Arabia. During these early centuries the urban landscape, constructed largely of fired brick, stretched over 2km along the shore. The remains of the city form the archaeological settlement mound – perhaps the largest tell in Arabia. The story of Sohar and its material culture are of crucial significance to understanding the early development of economic pathways that connected the Middle East directly with China, India, and East Africa for the first time in history. These routes were primarily developed by Omani sailors via Sohar, as has been recognised in the historical record dating from as early as the 9th century.

In 2023, a targeted survey took place in and around Sohar Fort yielding excellent results including areas where large quantities of early Chinese ceramic imports are easily accessed on the surface. In January/February of 2024 a full seven-week fieldwork season took place. Our work is generously supported by the University of Chicago – Institute for the Study of Ancient Cultures (ISAC) - and represents an international partnership and collaboration also involving Sultan Qaboos University, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and Durham and Cardiff Universities in the UK.

This is a multi-faceted project involving a range of experts in the field who are focused on the phasing, topographical, environmental, and broader social impacts of the city in its heyday. The first season involved the work of 14 specialists from seven countries (USA, UK, Canada, France, Italy, Georgia and Japan) working together with

local participants from the Sohar Fort Museum, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism Office in the North Batinah Governate and a recent Omani graduate from Sheffield University. Our work is authorised by the Omani Ministry of Heritage and Tourism.

The aims of the 2024 excavation season were centered on accessing the material remains of the archaeological mound, where the earliest contexts can lie up to eight metres below the current ground surface. A series of deep archaeological probes has begun to draw out the pattern of the buried town. The strategy involved a combination of deep shafts requiring temporary shoring (Fig. 2) and more extensive exposure in shallower areas of the outer town (Fig. 3). The success of this season offers a certain way forward for future investigation.



Figure 3. Trial excavation south of Sohar Fort close to Sultan Qaboos Mosque. Photo Derek Kennet



Figure 2. Deep sondage inside the fort requiring temporary protection. Photo Seth Priestman.

Excavations targeted the fort itself, where two trenches were opened, and two other areas sitting outside of the existing fort walls to the south and east. The existing fort, sitting near the highest point of the tell has only recently been renovated and encompasses a still visible earlier structure that had been the subject of excavations in the early 1980s by Monique Kervran. One goal of the season was a full assessment of the function and phasing of this visible structure and its relationship to the existing fort. What became clear is that the original fired brick fort has been intensively reconstructed and reworked from what is possibly the mid-Islamic period through

the Portuguese occupation and well into the late Islamic period (Fig. 4). There is clear evidence for the successive construction of massive supporting walls added to the exterior of existing structures, most likely because of the increasing force of contemporary weaponry.



Figure 4. Part of a pre-existing phase of fort construction forming a SW corner tower. Photo Davit Naskidashvili



Figure 5. Soil flotation system for archaeobotanical sampling. Photo Davit Naskidashvili.

An intensive archaeobotanical assessment of the excavated contexts was aimed at adding to the limited bioarchaeological information available for the early historic period in the Arabian Peninsula (Fig. 5). Intensive sampling was conducted that included sieving, hand picking and floatation collection across stratified contexts both inside and outside of the fort. Analysis of the environmental remains, animal and fish bones and shell will enhance the broader understanding of the city of Sohar within its agricultural hinterland and marine environment including the possible importation of foreign species of plants and animals.

A detailed ceramic analysis has begun to quantify the links and connections in the network of Sohar over the whole phase of its existence (Fig. 6). From Mesopotamia to Iran, India, China, East Africa, Europe and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula – Sohar was globally connected from its very beginnings and remains a key port and conduit for trade into the Gulf and the Middle East.

Figure 6. Right. Ceramic study getting under way in one of the corner towers. Photo Davit Naskidashvili.



The team of GIS experts involved in the project have worked on the topographical mapping of the existing old town of Sohar and its relationship to the archaeological mound (Fig. 7). This has been essential for understanding the archaeological potential across landscape of the earliest contexts. There is a great deal of current urban development in the city of Sohar whose beachfront location and old town makes it an attractive tourist destination. We hope that our work in identifying areas of key archaeological potential will help to foreground the heritage of Sohar in future plans of urban development and renewal.



Figure 7. Topographic mapping of the town with a total station system, photogrammetry and GIS. Photo Peter Brown.

Another key aim of the Sohar Archaeological project is to develop a comprehensive community engagement programme (Fig. 8). We hope to work together with key stakeholders to widen the local participation and knowledge of the outstanding heritage of the city of Sohar. A focal point for our activity is the Sohar Fort Museum, which acts as one of the main visitor attractions in the region. This season we welcomed school groups, visiting dignitaries and tourists across Europe, North America, and the Middle East. Encouraging further community participation in and expanding the local appreciation of the unique heritage of Sohar is a key ambition of the project and all its participants.



Figure 8. Team member Shurooq al-Sharqi addresses a visiting school group. Photo Eve MacDonald

These promising initial results have begun to open up an understanding of the earliest development of the city of Sohar and its thriving trade across the Indian Ocean. The impact of the city and its contacts on the local environment and agricultural hinterland will continue to be investigated. The specific details of the excavated results from the 2024 season await full scientific analysis.

For regular updates and to support our research please join us on IG @soharancientport

United Arab Emirates

A newly discovered 'Gulf type' seal from Kalba

by Christoph Schwall (LEIZA/Mainz), Hélène David-Cuny (CEFREPA/Kuwait), Eisa Yousif (SAA/Sharjah), Sabah A. Jasim (SAA/Sharjah), Barbara Horejs (OeAW-OeAI/Vienna)

The excavations conducted as part of the collaborative research initiative involving the Austrian Archaeological Institute (OeAI) of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (OeAW) and the Sharjah Archaeology Authority (SAA) in Kalba (Emirate of Sharjah, UAE) concentrated in 2023 on the north-western area of trenches E2 (Figure 1). The objective was to investigate the occupation layers beyond the enclosure walls,

covering the time from the Early Bronze Age to the Iron Age I period.

A 'Gulf type' seal was discovered while excavating remains of hard dried clayish mortar (SU 709=725) belonging to the exterior Iron Age I retaining wall preserved in trench E2-NW (Figure 2). The presence of small-sized fragments of Umm an-Nar pottery

(i.e. fine red wares with raised ridges [Figure 4.1–2], painted decoration [Figure 4. 4–5], a fragment of a large, black-slipped storage vessel originating from the Indus valley [Figure 4.3]) within the mortar of the construction layer, suggests that material from older occupation layers was used as building material for the Iron Age I retaining wall.

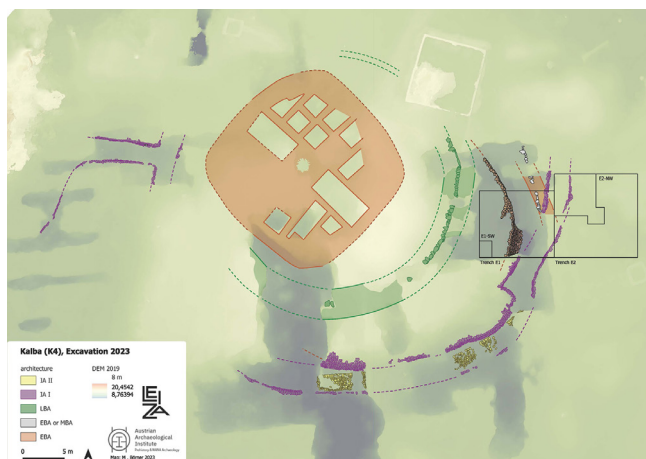


Figure 1. Architectural plan of Kalba including the location of the trench (E2-NW). (map: OeAW-OeAI/M. Börner)

The presence of a softstone seal of the ‘Gulf type’ is particularly noteworthy (see Laursen 2010 for this seal type). Seals of this type have been found at sites such as Tell Abraç (Potts 2000) and Al-Ashoosh (Contreras et al. 2016) in the United Arab Emirates. Additional comparisons were made with examples in Bahrain (Kjærøum 1994; 1997; 2007) dating back to the Qala’at al-Bahrain period IIa (Ur III) towards the end of the 3rd millennium BC (Højlund 2007).

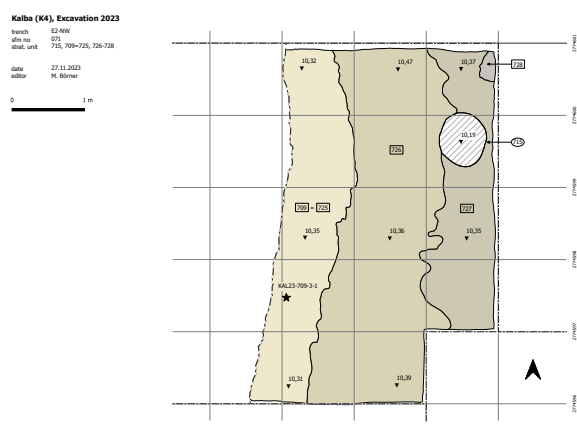


Figure 2 - Plan showing the context and find spot of the ‘Gulf type’ seal. (plan: OeAW-OeAI/M. Börner)

The two stylized animals depicted on the seal are particularly significant: a bull and most likely a lion in an offensive pose. The bull motif is well-established on such seals (Laursen 2010, 108–115) and is evidently influenced by the iconography

of seals in the Indus valley (cf. Joshi – Parpola 1987). However, the depiction of a lion is intriguing, as this animal is not commonly depicted on Indus seals but is more frequently used as a motif in the more western region of Mesopotamia (cf. Aruz – Wallenfels 2003), where it is also attested on cylinder seals(?) (Collon 1987).



Figure 3 - ‘Gulf type’ seal with depictions of a bull and most probably a lion. (graphic: H. David-Cuny)

Consequently, the motifs portrayed on the recently discovered ‘Gulf type’ seal from Kalba appear to draw inspiration from both genuine eastern and western traditions, amalgamated in this distinctive local seal type found on the south-eastern Arabian Peninsula.

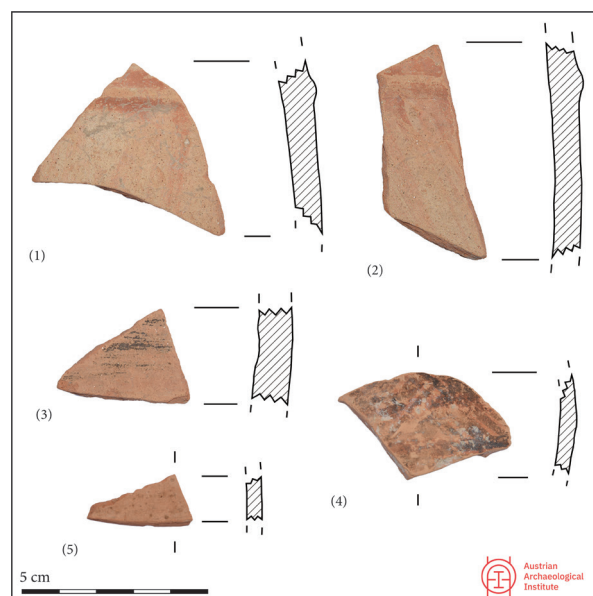


Figure 4 - Umm an-Nar pottery recovered from SU 709=725 in trench E2-NW. (photos: OeAW-OeAI/F. Ostmann; graphic: OeAW-OeAI/D. Blattner)

Acknowledgements

The excavations in Kalba were conducted with the authorization of the Sharjah Archaeology Authority and the Ruler of Sharjah, HH Sheikh Dr Sultan bin Muhammad al-Qasimi.

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The Second Season of the Sīniya Island Archaeological Project: A Late Antique to early Islamic Pearling Town and Monastery

By Timothy Power (United Arab Emirates University), Michele Degli Esposti (Polish Academy of Sciences / Italian Archaeological Mission in Umm al-Quwain), Robert Hoyland (Institute for the Study of the Ancient World), New York University), Rania Hussein Kannouma (Tourism and Archaeology Department, Umm al-Quwain).

The first season of the Siniya Island Archaeological Project, undertaken in February and March 2022, included a comprehensive survey of the island, excavation of the Friday Mosque of the late Islamic town and the core of the Late Antique monastery (Power et al., 2022a; 2022b; 2023). The second season’s work began in January 2023 and with thirteen weeks of excavations, it took us to the end of March. The results are extremely encouraging with a number of important discoveries made.



Figure 1. Excavation of the double-courtyard building (‘abbot’s house’) next to the core cluster of the monastery.

Excavation began last year on a large double-courtyard building located next to the core cluster, tentatively identified as an abbot's house (cf. Insoll et al., 2020). Work on this building continued this year with some surprising results. The final occupation produced a mid-sixth to mid-seventh-century CE radiocarbon date together with a late Sasanian ceramic type fossil. This suggests that occupation at the site may have begun slightly earlier than was previously thought, potentially pushing the sequence into the sixth century. The demolished building was built over by a small double-roomed building, interpreted as a monk's cell, and cut by a cemetery that presently appears to have been used by the coenobitic community. Work recommenced in March when our osteoarchaeologist arrived to assist with the lifting of fragile human remains, allowing us to continue to explore the early levels of the large double-courtyard building.



Figure 2. A large courtyard building ('merchant's house') measuring c. 30 x 30 m.

The main aim of the second season, however, was to start excavation of the settlement to the south of the monastery. This constitutes an area of dense mounding, 600 m x 200 m, covered with building materials, pottery, glass and shells. The ceramic assemblage and buildings typology indicates that the settlement is contemporary with the monastery. Excavations revealed large courtyard buildings surrounded by densely

packed small double-roomed buildings, indicative of social stratification, perhaps the houses of richer merchants and poorer fishermen. Evidence that pearling contributed to the economy was provided by oyster shell middens, two pearls, and a pearl diver's weight: the earliest well-dated example yet found in the Emirates. The relatively large size, high population density, and apparent social stratification suggest we are dealing with a Late Antique to early Islamic pearling town.



Figure 3. A cluster of small double-roomed buildings ('fishermen's houses') at the edge of the settlement.

The relationship between the monastery and the settlement remains a subject of ongoing research. We might well imagine that the monks arrived on Siniya and attracted a following among the local Christian Arabs, who settled nearby and earned their living from the sea, growing over time into a sizeable religious community. Or else that a thriving pearling town attracted the attention of proselytising monks, who established a nearby monastery to convert the local pagan Arabs to Christianity. Other explanations are of course possible. Perhaps the Nestorian Church, whose economic importance is increasingly recognised, established a pearling outpost off the coast of Bet Mazunaye. We might alternatively speculate that the monastery was patronised by an ambitious local Arab phylarch wanting to

secure political legitimacy, which might further be associated with the Sasanian occupation of Oman or the fragmentation of Lakhmid authority in East Arabia.

Although much remains mysterious, a picture is now emerging of a pearling town and nearby monastery that flourished between Late Antique and early Islam on the coast of the northern Emirates. We look forward to continuing the project with the support of the Tourism and Archaeology Department, Umm al-Quwain, and the Ministry of Youth and Culture of the United Arab Emirates.



Figure 4. A pearl fisherman's weight found in one of the double-roomed buildings.

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Research Notices

5th - 6th December 2023 Crossing Ancient Sacred Landscapes: Contacts and Continuities in the Ancient Desert Cults and Beliefs of Northern Arabia and the Arid Southern Levant, Seminar of the Faculty of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Oxford. Conveners: Juan Manuel Tebes (British Academy Visiting Fellow) and Michael C.A. Macdonald (Fellow of the British Academy)

I rose and climbed a mountain dry, the greenery there had still not shown; So putting shoes to both my feet, I sought a spot where pasture had grown. When I came to high Ghadir, that mountain thick with shrubbery lay; So we broke camp, got under way, and stopped at Asbah's tomb to pray. Introduced by this beautiful Bedouin poem¹, Michael Macdonald and I organized this hybrid Oxford seminar with the aim of bringing together a group of top-level international scholars to discuss different case-studies informing the sacred landscapes of northern Arabia and the southern arid margins of the Levant in ancient times.

¹ From C. Bailey, *Bedouin Poetry from Sinai and the Negev: Mirror of a Culture*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, 46-47, no. 1.9.

Twenty-one scholars presented several studies with synchronic and diachronic analyses of the cultic and mortuary traditions of the region from the Neolithic to the Early Islamic period, from the point of view of archaeology, history, epigraphy, rock art research, and digital humanities. “Crossings” was the key word. Cults and beliefs of ancient northern Arabia and arid southern Levant cut across different landscapes and periods. They were synchronic, traveling over diverse geographical landscapes and socio-cultural entities, and also diachronic, traversing through different temporal periods. And “Crossings” was an apt word also for the seminar itself, with scholars coming from different fields and background discussing and comparing each one’s kind of evidence.

The presentations highlighted specific cases of phenomena of cultural continuity of cultic and ritual manifestations throughout large geographical spaces. We aimed to discuss several important historical questions: how did the ancient desert cults and beliefs navigate between different geographical landscapes and socio-political settings? Did these settings represent “barriers” or “bridges” in the transmission of cultural features? Did the cultural transmission across different periods entail religious conservatism, or involve innovation and adaptation? How were the ancient cults and mortuary traditions related to the landscape? The seminar was particularly timely, as the archaeology of Arabia and the southern Levant, two fields that have developed for a long time in parallel without contact, are increasingly communicating thematically and personally.

The lecturers were Juan Manuel Tebes and Michael C.A. Macdonald (welcome address), Bill Finlayson (Neolithic roles for the dead), Steven Rosen (Negev cult sites), Jérôme Rohmer and Josselin Pinot (religious topography of Dadan), Melissa Kennedy (desert cult in Neolithic NW Arabia), Uzi Avner (cultic eruption in the desert), Maria Guagnin (monumental rock art), Lena Dubinsky (rock art from Timna), Meinrat O. Andreae (rock art from NW Arabia), Ahmad Al-Jallad (Safaitic inscriptions), Jérôme Norris (theophoric onomasticon in pre-Islamic NW Arabia), Fokelien Kootstra (Dadanitic epigraphic material from Dadan), Nicolai Sinai (sacred locales in the Qur'an), Ilkka Lindsted (ethico-religious vocabulary on the eve of Islam), Harry Munt (Medina as Late Antique sacred space), Aleksandra Kubiak-Schneider (Allat and the desert), Michael Fradley (remote sensing on funerary monuments), Wael Abu Azizeh (Neolithic desert cults), and Marta Luciani (cultic and funerary landscapes in Qurayyah).

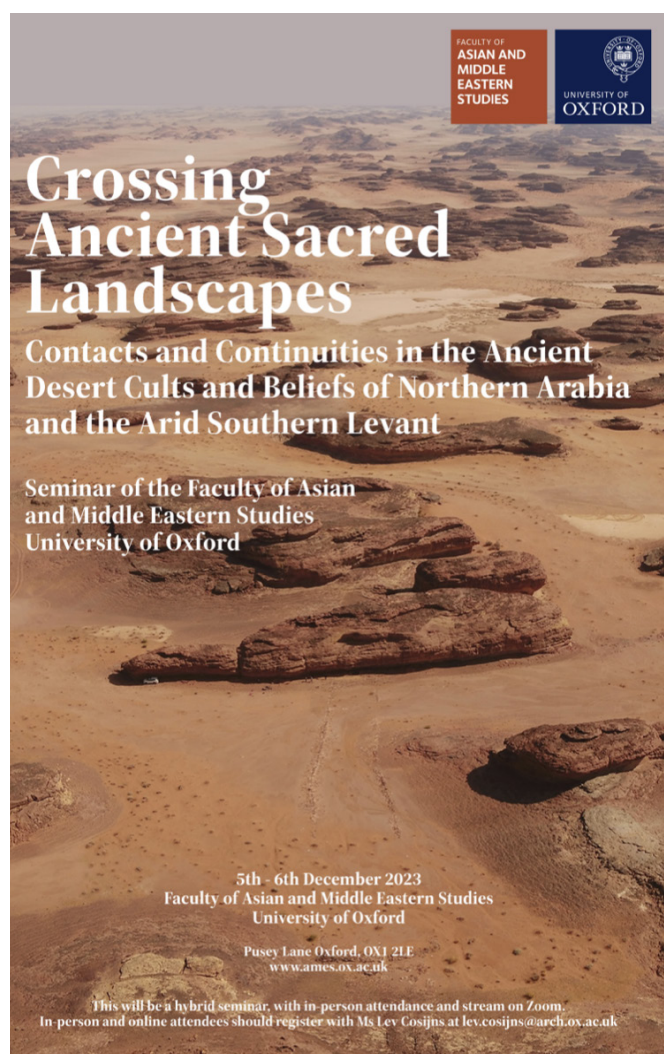
The seminar was a successful event, with almost 200 people registered for attending in-person and stream on Zoom. The proceedings will be published in Archaeopress (Oxford), plus the addition of other case-studies that could not be included in the seminar.

Michael and I wholeheartedly thank all the scholars for their great presentations and discussions. We also thank Ms Lev Cosijns (Wolfson College) for her help in the organization of the event.

The program of the seminar can be found [here](#):

<https://www.ames.ox.ac.uk/event/crossing-ancient-sacred-landscapes-contacts-and-continuities-ancient-desert-cults-and-beliefs>

The recordings of the seminar can be found [here](#):
<https://www.youtube.com/>



The Final Word

The “In the Footsteps of Ryckmans” survey from Jeddah to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

By Elynn Gorris (FNRS, UCLouvain), Manhal Makhoul (FNRS, UCLouvain), Perrine Pilette (CNRS, UMR8167), Amr Ryad (KU Leuven), Jan Tavernier (UCLouvain)

In October 2023, a joint Saudi-Belgian team of the UCLouvain and the KU Leuven, in close partnership with the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah, Saudi Arabia), the Heritage Commission of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the King Saud University, conducted a large-scale “In the Footsteps of Ryckmans” epigraphic survey in Saudi Arabia, retracing significant parts of the 1951-52 Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition.

This Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition took place from November 1951 to February 1952 under the auspices of the Saudi King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud, who had personally invited three Belgian scholars, Gonzague Ryckmans (1887-1969), Jacques Ryckmans (1924-2005) of the unitary Catholic University of Leuven, and Philippe Lippens (1910-1989), to study the Kingdom's pre-Islamic and early Islamic (Kufic inscriptions) cultural heritage in situ. Accompanied by Harry St. John Bridger Philby, the British representative to the King of Saudi Arabia on the expedition, they carried out a systematic scientific documentation mission, recording rock art, inscriptions, ancient architectural structures and artefacts across the Arabian Peninsula.



Figure 1: “Riyadh: Philby, chanoine, Jacques, Lippens en costume arabe”, 12 February 1952. © Archives de l'Université catholique de Louvain, BE A4006 F1 387-V-45Lcol5. archives.uclouvain.be/ark:/33176/dli000000sk1V

On a three-month journey from Jeddah to Riyadh, these four researchers and their local guides covered an impressive 5,400km, exploring the western, southern, and central regions of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The itinerary of 1951-52 team was based on previous exploratory expeditions of Philby along the northern edge of the Rub' al-Khali and in the Najd region, but also on the topographical maps produced by the Aramco geological surveys in the 1940's. The journey covered multiple historically significant locations such as Ta'if, Qal'at Bisha, Abha, Khamīs Mushāṭ, Tarīb, Tathleeth, Najrān, Qaryat al-Faw, Hasat Qahtan, Halaban, al-Ruwaidha, and Māsīl.

The Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition identified almost 12,000 pre-Islamic and early Islamic rock inscriptions, and/or wasms. The highest concentration of early Arabic texts was found around the region of Ta'if (Makkah province), including the ancient cemetery in the Wādī al-'Ikrimah with numerous Kufic tomb stones and the then already famous Kufic inscription of the caliph Mu'awiya I (58 AH) at the Saysad dam.

Most of the pre-Islamic texts were short rock inscriptions in various ancient Arabian scripts, mainly transcribing the names of individuals belonging to the various tribes of the regions they visited. However, the Ryckmans team would also discover larger texts, such as the rock inscription of the Sabeian king Abraha on the conquest of Arabia Deserta (552 AD) at the wells of Murīghān, contributing significantly to the history of the Himyarite Kingdom.

The corpus of inscriptions collected by the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition proved to be particularly important for the development of our knowledge of the ancient Arabian languages and dialects of the Arabian Peninsula, in particular Sabaean (south) and Thamudic (north), and would become the main corpus for Jacques Ryckmans' later academic career in Arabian Studies.

In the early 1950's, the members of the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition used simple methods for documenting their exploratory mission. They diligently marked their route on a map and recorded their daily observations in personal diaries. These notebooks included the description of the itinerary, but also sketches of pre-Islamic archaeological structures, geographical names (phonetic transcriptions of the local toponyms in Arabic), the names of Emirs,

guides and tribes that had assisted them on their journey. The location of the inscriptions and rock art was determined using a combined system of landmarks, with the kilometres count of the car's odometer and the direction of the wind on the compass. The group also meticulously copied and photographed as much inscriptions as they could. This photographic collection is currently housed in the Archives of the UCLouvain and online available in open-access (<https://archives.uclouvain.be>).

Seventy years after the initial Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition, a new collaborative Saudi-Belgian expedition with scholars specialized in archaeology, epigraphy, ancient history and archival studies is formed under the logistic leadership of the King Abdulaziz Foundation (Darah). From 7 to 22 October 2023, this international research group conducted a 14-day trans-Arabian survey from Jeddah to Riyadh, crossing consecutively the southern Hejaz, the northern edge of the Rub' al-Khālī, and the lower Najd. They roughly followed the initial 1951-52 itinerary via Ta'if, Bisha, Abha, Khamīs Mushāṭ, Tathlith, Qaryat al-Faw, Wādī Dawāsir, and Māsīl. Due to the restricted time frame of the new expedition, the 2023 team opted to visit only the most remarkable epigraphical sites of the 1951-52 expedition in the most efficient geographical order. In total, the team did a prospection of 49 cultural heritage sites, of which 26 sites in the Hejāz, 12 sites on the edge of Rub' al-Khālī and 11 sites in the Najd.

While the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition was mainly an exploratory mission, the primary objectives of the 2023 expedition project are to accurately locate, re-document, and contribute to the preservation of the rich heritage of Ancient South and North Arabian, as well as rock art and Arabic inscriptions recorded during the Ryckmans-Philby-Lippens expedition.

Firstly, the 2023 expedition intended to digitise and enhance a part of the inscriptions and petroglyphs previously documented by the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens journey. In preparation of the 2023 survey, the Saudi-Belgian team used the Ryckmans photographic collection and notebooks to pinpoint the approximate locations of the 1951-52 documented sites. During the expedition, the 2023 team was provided with state-of-the-art tools, cutting-edge technologies, and a comprehensive logistical support to document of the pre-Islamic heritage. While at most sites the 2023 team was able to collect data corroborating that of the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition (including new

data that can be used for applications such as photogrammetry, e.g. at Jebel Māsil), other sites yielded epigraphical materials far exceeding the description of the Ryckmans diaries, enlarging research data available for these regions.



Figure 2: Photo of the two Ryckmans teams 1951-2023 working at the Jebel Māsil, 20 October 2023: BE_UCL_RYC_2023_MAS_Z0_1; “Wadi Masil: vues d'ensemble. Le chanoine Gonzague Ryckmans et Jacques Ryckmans (sur l'échelle) copiant”, 7 February 1952, © Archives de l'Université catholique de Louvain, BE A4006 FI 387-N-63L10. archives.uclouvain.be/ark:/33176/dli000000Akt7

For instance, Gonzague Ryckmans did not give much information on Jebel Wāsiṭ in his diary, except for the fact that his team copied some inscriptions on the site, while the Ryckmans photo archive provided a few pictures of seemingly the same boulder from various angles. When the 2023 expedition surveyed the Jebel Wāsiṭ, they discovered a trove of undocumented rock art: the boulders at the foot of the isolated mountain displayed many Thamudic inscriptions, graffiti's, wasms, and petroglyphs of wild animals (camels, snakes, ibexes, bezoars, Arabian oryx, gazelles, lion, Arabian wolf), domestic animals (cattle), and human figures conducting various actions (running men, hunting men with spear and shield or with bow, childbearing mother figure, hand palms,...).



Figure 3: Jebel Wāsīt on 10 October, 2023 BE. UCL_RYC_2023_WAS_Z1.2_60 with reference picture of the Ryckmans Archive “Km 3, Jabal Wasit, graffiti Philby Wasit 10”, 13 December 1951. © Archives de l'Université catholique de Louvain, BE A4006 F1 387-V-R2312. archives.uclouvain.be/ark:/33176/dli0000000razN

Secondly, the 2023 team also surveyed previously undiscovered heritage sites along the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens itinerary. Some of the new sites were found with the help of local guides, others were studied on the request of the regional offices of the Saudi Heritage Commission.

For instance, as for rock art, when the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition had visited the Ibn al-Ashram village, they only saw the Ottoman “Jerjer” fortress on the hill from afar. The survey of this fortress by the 2023 team yielded numerous petroglyphs, mostly images with camels, on rocks reused as building blocks. Also, Haḍabat al-ʿArūs, an epigraphic site unexplored by the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition, displayed numerous petroglyphs such as camels, mounted hunters, wolf, oryx or domestic cattle, female figure often associated with a fertility goddess at the top of the hill. At the foot of this same hill, the 2023 team documented two ancient tombs.

These new findings contribute to the already extensive collection of inscriptions, petroglyphs and architectural structures known in the region.



Figure 4: One of the many panels engraved with animals and inscriptions near the summit of the Hadaba al-ʿArus hill. BE_UCL_RYC_2023_ARU_Z1.1_15

In addition to rock art and inscriptions, multiple larger stone structures mentioned in the notebooks of the 1951-52 expedition, could be digitally (re-) located and documented as well as undocumented sites along the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens itinerary: by scanning larger areas with the assistance of drone imaging, the 2023 team could detect previously unknown pre-historic stone structures. Especially pre-historic stone structures identified at sites in southern Hejaz, such as the Wādī al-Hāwī (Makkah province) and Maqābir (‘Asīr province), meet the conditions to be included in the UNESCO’s tentative list for “Prehistoric stone structures in Saudi Arabia”. With the expedition data, individual dossiers can be prepared.

Thirdly, by undertaking these activities, the “In the footsteps of Ryckmans” research project indirectly contributes to the preservation of the ancient cultural heritage of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, marking an essential third goal. The seventy years between the two expeditions allowed the 2023 team to study the impact of climatological factors, human activities and urban development on the selected group of cultural heritage sites.

The 2023 expedition could establish intense urban developments in the area around Khamīs Mushaīt. Constructions for regional infrastructure, such as dams for water management, have heavily impacted the historical landscape, resulting in a full (e.g. al-Khalaṣah) or partial destruction (e.g. Jebel Dūr, Tindaḥa, Shī‘b al-Shahī) of pre-Islamic and early Islamic cultural heritage sites.

Compared to 1951-52, the landscape of the Jebel Dūr (‘Asīr province) had considerably changed, as a modern dam was built on the location of the inscriptions. Since the first meters of this steep gorge leading towards the oasis are submerged by a water basin, most inscriptions of the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition are now below the water surface. According to the Saudi local colleagues, a longer inscription had been covered by the water of the barrage lake and can be seen when the water level lowers. Also, parts of the Wādī Tindaḥa are inundated with the construction of the Tindaḥa dam (‘Asīr province).

In al-Khalaṣah (‘Asīr province), the Philby-Ryckmans-Lippens expedition photographed Arabic inscriptions, traces of Thamudic graffiti, and petroglyphs of horses, camels and ostriches on the granite rocks. West of the al-Khalaṣah village, identified by Philby as possibly the ancient Dū al-Khalaṣah of the Kitāb el-Asnam, the group equally copied and photographed rock drawings

with Thamudic marks. Upon arrival, a local guide informed the 2023 expedition that the old al-Khalaṣah village was redeveloped in a modern residential area in Khamīs Mushaīt, with no traces of pre-Islamic and post-Islamic cultural heritage left.

Other sites had been impacted by human activities, often as a result of local beliefs and practices. At the ‘Ikrimah dam, for instance, local authorities had to remove the Kufic tomb stones from the site for heritage preservation, because people used to touch these Early Islamic stones for good fortune. Also, many of the Thamudic inscriptions and drawings on the Tumeitilah boulder are severely damaged by drilling holes, because people used to believe that golden treasures were hidden under these ancient drawings.

On other sites, such as Jebel Jamra and ‘Ayn Qaḥṭān, the 2023 team could clearly match a Ryckmans photo with the rock location or boulder, but the inscription on the photo was either heavily eroded or became invisible due to erosion.

In cases where the pre-Islamic heritage site has fully disappeared, the old Ryckmans archive becomes the primary source for research and evidence for lost heritage. For other sites threatened by the process of urbanisation, the 2023 team will be able to identify priority sites for rescue documentation missions, by comparing the old Ryckmans photographic archive with the new data.

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