



Seminar for Arabian Studies 2016 Paper Abstracts

Session 1: Islamic Archaeology. Chair: Andrew Peterson

Christian Stucco Production on Failaka Island: between Mesopotamia and the Southern Gulf

Agnieszka Lic

University of Oxford, St Cross College; e-mail: agnieszka.lic@arch.ox.ac.uk

The collection of stucco decorations from the site of al-Quṣūr on Failaka island, Kuwait, is among largest and most varied in the vast region of Mesopotamia and the Gulf. Examples of two stucco objects from al-Quṣūr reveal close affinity to stuccoes from Mesopotamia on one hand, and the Christian site of Sir Bani Yas island (UAE) on the other. A closer look into those similarities allow to establish that Christian artisans working at al-Quṣūr in the Late Antique/Early Islamic Period must have had access to portable stucco plaques imported from Sir Bani Yas and – most probably – also to incised plaster plaques from Mesopotamia, possibly from the region of al-Hīra. These observations, in turn, allow to draw certain conclusions on dating, i.e. that al-Quṣūr stuccoes were most probably created not earlier than in the eighth century.

The study of stucco decorations of the region has been a largely overlooked field of research and results that it can provide have been underestimated. However, with its potential to inform about artistic ties, import and export of objects as well as dating it is comparable to the research value of ceramics and should receive more scholarly attention.

Keywords: Christian; art; stucco; Gulf; Failaka Island

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Summer Crops and Spice Trade on the Indian Ocean (tenth to sixteenth centuries AD): first archaeobotanical data from Sharma (Yemen) and Qalhāt (Sultanate of Oman)

Vladimir Dabrowski¹ & Margareta Tengberg²

¹ Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Sorbonne Universités, CNRS; e-mail: vladimir.dabrowski@gmail.com

² Université Paris Sorbonne (Paris 4); e-mail:

This paper deals with the diffusion of summer crops and the spice trade in the western part of the Indian Ocean during medieval times. Excavations carried out by Dr Axelle Rougeulle (CNRS) on the port sites of Sharma (Yemen) and Qalhāt (Sultanate of Oman) have provided new archaeo-botanical data relating to the presence of exotic plant species. Seed and fruit analyses show the presence of tropical plants such as pepper (*Piper nigrum*), rice (*Oryza sativa*), sorghum (*Sorghum bicolor*), finger millet (*Eleusine coracana*) and Sawa millet (*Echinochloa colona*).

For the two last species, this discovery constitutes the earliest evidence so far of their presence in the Arabian Peninsula. These results raise issues about the food supply of the inhabitants of harbour sites along the Arabian coasts. Whereas the origin of pepper from the Indian sub-continent is not being questioned, the other species such as rice, sorghum and millets might either have been imported or resulted from local cultivation. Written sources are used in order to discuss their significance and their possible origin.

Keywords: tropical cereals; spice trade; medieval period; Oman; Yemen

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Surveying an Eighteenth-Century Merchantman off the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia

Chiara Zazzaro & Romolo Loreto

University of Naples 'L'Orientale', Department of Asia Africa and Mediterranean; e-mails: chiarazazzaro@gmail.com; [Loreto's email needed](#)

In September 2015 a team of the Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH) and of the Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale' started an underwater survey in the area between Yanbu and Umm Lajj on the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia. The main focus of the survey was to locate and survey an eighteenth-century merchantman wrecked at a reef off to the Umm Lajj coast. The wreckage area extended over about 36 m in length and 10–12 m in width. Parts of the hull and of the cargo were exposed and were clearly visible. The presumed stern was occupied by a mound of around one thousand jars, the midship by large storage jars, while some blue and white Chinese porcelain cups were spotted in the quarter board side. Scattered fragments of basins, glass bottles and coconuts were also identified on the site.

Frames and stringers running perpendicularly to each other emerged from the sandy bottom suggesting a massive hull structure. Surveying methods included the use of video recording and 3D reconstruction methods. Handmade measurements and drawings have been used for small objects, such as single pottery artefacts and isolated elements of the hull.

A preliminary analysis of the wreck and its cargo suggests that it was a merchant ship dating to the eighteenth century. The ship was sailing up to the north of the Red Sea, carrying exotic products from the Far East, such as Chinese porcelain and coconuts, but also perhaps coffee from Mocha (Yemen). The final destination of the ship may have been Egypt. Most of the cargo may have been dispatched to Europe through the Egyptian markets.

The Umm Lajj shipwreck has a great potential both for conducting a long-term scientific investigation and for underwater excavation training for archaeologists and students. The cargo, and the ship in itself, have an important historical value considering that they represent the last evidence of the Egyptian-Arabian trade circuit in the Red Sea before the opening of the Suez Canal.

Keywords:

Glass in the Arabian Peninsula: chemical evidence of Early Islamic finds from Kush, Ras al-Khaimah, UAE

Carolyn Swan,¹ Derek Kennet² & Thilo Rehren¹

¹ UCL-Qatar; e-mails: c.swan@ucl.ac.uk; th.rehren@ucl.ac.uk

² Sultan Qaboos University and Durham University; e-mail: derek.kennet@durham.ac.uk

The study of ancient glass and glassmaking in the Near East has largely focused on Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia and Iran but comparatively little work has been done on glass found within the Arabian Peninsula. This paper presents some of the very first chemical analytical data produced for glass artefacts excavated from archaeological sites within the Arabian Peninsula. The findings enable us to better understand and contextualize the production, consumption, and trade of glass objects within the early medieval world.

More than 5,000 fragments of glass were excavated at the settlement of Kush, and a typological assessment of the assemblage has been made (Price and Worrell 2003; Worrell and Price 2003; Keller 2010), which indicates that glass vessels played an important role in the daily lives of the inhabitants. In this paper, we discuss the chemical analysis of glass samples dating to Kush's Early Islamic period of occupation. The glass composition was determined using Electronprobe Microanalysis (EPMA) and Laser Ablation Inductively- Coupled Plasma Mass Spectrometry (LA-ICPMS). The data sheds light on three key aspects:

- 1) the raw materials used to make the glass,
- 2) the technological tradition of glassmaking and possible origin of the glass objects, and
- 3) changes in glass chemistry over time.

Keywords: Kush; Early Islamic; glass vessels; chemical analysis; LA-ICPMS

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Political and religious differences and its impact on Islamic monuments in Yemen

Mohamed Ahmed Abd El-Rahman Ibrahim Enab

Faculty of Archaeology, Fayoum University, Egypt; e-mail: maa25@fayoum.edu.eg

Yemen has witnessed many political and religious differences throughout history. These differences lead to many disputes affected negatively on life in Yemen. The most notable difference is the dispute between Sunni Ottomans and Shiite Zaydi (Houthi). Nowadays this conflict again arises between Shiite Houthi rebels and the Yemeni authorities. Several historic monuments across Yemen have suffered damage since start of this conflict, such as al-Ashrafiyyah mosque and the National Museum in Ta'izz, al-'Urdu Ottoman historical compound in Sana'a and historical buildings in Shibām Kokbān and Dhamār.

My paper will discuss the history of political and religious dispute in Yemen and its impact on Islamic monuments; the forms of impact, past and present, of this dispute. I will compare the original state of these monuments with their present damaged conditions. I will also consider the role of international organizations concerned with the preservation and maintenance of cultural heritage in Yemen. Critically, this paper aims to help preserve the cultural heritage of Yemen and document the historical buildings which have been vandalized.

Keywords: Yemen; Ottoman period; Houthis; al-'Urdu; Ta'izz; Dhamar

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