Seminar for Arabian Studies 2016
Poster Abstracts

Microbotanical and elemental analyses on sediment contained in an early third millennium BC vessel from Zukayt, ad-Dākhilyyah, Sultanate of Oman

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Tomb ZKT109 in the Oasis of Zukayt (al-Dākhilyyah, Sultanate of Oman) yielded a small biconical Mesopotamian jar (dated to Jemdet-Nasr/Early Dynastic I–II period; c.3100–2700 BC) made of fine, buff-coloured paste. The vessel is entire and well preserved apart from severe abrasion of the external surface. This find testifies to the penetration of southern Mesopotamian material culture (or to the contextual production of local imitations) into central Oman during the first half of the third millennium BC.

Microbotanical and elemental analyses were carried out on the sediment contained in the vessel to: a) try to infer possible uses of the vessel, b) explore depositional and post-depositional processes, and c) check the feasibility of such analyses in this context. Results show a relatively good preservation of microbotanical remains, including pollen and phytoliths (mostly from palms and dryland grasses). Elemental analysis shows presence of phosphates, suggesting preservation of organic matter (which will be further tested through lipid analysis). These results open interesting scenarios for the study of date palm exploitation during the early third millennium BC, and may pave the ground for residue analyses to be carried out directly on the vessel.

Keywords:

Al-Ain Oases Mapping Project 2016: Jimi Oasis

Timothy Power, Fatima Nasser Al Mansoori, Mai Hareb Al Mansoori, Maitha Saleh Al Mansoori & Mariam Nabeel Mohammed

The historic Buraimi Oasis is divided by the modern border between the United Arab Emirates and Sultanate of Oman, providing the basis for the modern cities of al-Ain and Buraimi respectively. The oasis consists of nice discrete palm groves, with two in Oman and seven in the UAE, including Jimi
Oasis, that provides the subject for the present study. The palm groves of Jīmī are owned by the Dhawāhir and Bani Yās tribes. The associated settlement of Harrat al-Khīyṣṣ constituted the main settlement of the Dhawāhir, and contained the fort of Shaykh Aḥmad b. Hilal al-Dhaferi, the wali designated by Shaykh Zayed b. Khalifa Al Bu Falahi. It is therefore of outstanding importance to the history of the UAE.

Jīmī Oasis was, in 2016, the focus of the HSS 383 Archaeological Field School, a course run each Spring Semester as part of the Major in Emirati Studies at Zayed University (Abu Dhabi). The Field School aims to introduce students to archaeological field methods and techniques, whilst at the same time exploring the historic environment and material culture of the UAE. Students were engaged in a non-invasive field-walking survey of the oasis, that aimed to record surviving archaeological features, particularly historic field-boundary walls, allowing for the development of the oasis to be charted through time.

**Keywords:**

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**A Crowded Desert: Early Results from Survey and Excavation of Nomadic Sites in north-west Qatar**

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This poster will present the results and preliminary conclusions of the campaign of 2016 of the Crowded Desert Project. The project aims to find out about the nomadic occupation and its relations with the settled peoples in the region. Activities include extensive and intensive surveys and excavations in the area delimited by the areas of Umm al-Ma’ and Meleiha (Milāhah) in the north-west desert of the Qatar Peninsula. Conclusions so far complement and expand ideas developed during the pilot season of the project in 2015, but also provide finer chronological detail and a wider coverage of the area of research. The results at the moment allow us to detect at least three chronological phases: the Tylos period (third century BC to third century AD), marked by the cairn-type tombs, and two determined by ceramic finds: the late Sassanian-Abbasid period (fourth to thirteenth cent AD) and finally the Late Islamic period (fourteenth to twentieth cent AD). The poster will also explore the wider implications of observed differences of spatial distribution of features and material culture from different chronological periods, offering a unique insight on the historical development of nomadic peoples in the Gulf.

Keywords:
Despite this fact, visual assessment of 200 kg of ferrous remains, along with detailed analysis of 50 artefacts through optical microscopy, and SEM-EDS (scanning electron microscopy with Energy Dispersive X-ray Spectroscopy) provided key insights into the nature of iron products. The major steps of the present approach are as follows: 1) Typological examination of artefacts. 2) Detection of welding lines in artefacts in order to understand smithing techniques used for their manufacture. 3) Comparative analysis of remnant microstructures of carburized areas to assess carbon content of iron. 4) SEM-EDS elemental analysis of slag inclusions to assess provenance against a database of iron ores from known sources.

Keywords:

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Yemeni tribe female dress, based on two private collections

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Traditional tribe costume is an important part of Yemeni culture. A vast and unique collection belongs to Arwa Othman who set up a private museum of the House of Folklore in Sana’a. The biggest private collection of Yemeni clothes in Russia belongs to Anna Moiseeva and it enables the study of and represents Yemeni culture in Russia.

In Yemen tribal female costume is often used today, especially for festive ceremonies (e.g. wedding day, henna day). Stylistic features and differences in Yemen’s dress and ornament of various tribes are largely due to the specific elements of local handicrafts: weaving, production of materials for ornamentation, embroidery, etc. Unfortunately, some of crafts (including dyeing by indigo, Jewish embroidery, etc.) are extinct. Substantially, new dresses are made of import materials and furniture.

There are various styles of dress in Yemen depending on the local area: ‘al-Kames’ and ‘al-Zanah al-Arabia’ are typical for the regions of Tihāmah and the mountains. In Ḥaḍramawt woman wear ‘Dhil wa Qadamah’ and ‘al-Khalla’; ‘al-Dir al-Adani’ – in Lahij and Aden. The female style of dress in Socotra is original and unique in the Middle East.

Keywords: ornament, Yemeni female costume, embroidery, textile, handicrafts, collection.

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The excavation at the Bronze Age tower of al-Khutm (Bat, Sultanate of Oman): a preliminary evaluation of the monument

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Along with other towers of Bat and the tombs of al-Ayn (Dhāhirah), the tower of al-Khutm is one of the monuments inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage list of the Sultanate of Oman. A recent programme of investigations, led by the Ministry of National Heritage and carried out by an Italian team, began in April until June 2016 with the aim of completely uncovering the monument and to validate its provenance. In this poster we present the results of the excavations that enabled us to expose the overall plan of the tower. In addition, main features could be detected in the inner part while several additional structures in its surroundings. These were connected to the use of the tower and belong to several phases of occupation of the site. Among the most interesting results we include the quite good preservation of the outside wall; the presence of inner rooms with doors and thresholds, usually not preserved in other similar monuments; a possible pathway to enter into the tower; and several finds, including archaeobotanical remains of charred stone dates, cereals and fruits. Some final remarks about the three-dimensional documentation carried out on a daily basis during the excavations will be presented for a discussion and reflect evolving methods of archaeological excavations.

Keywords:

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The Faunal Remains from Sarūq al-Ḥadīd: an Insight into human-animal Interactions in prehistoric Arabia

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The faunal assemblage from Sarūq al-Ḥadīd, a prehistoric site located within the emirate of Dubai, UAE, is one of the largest collections of animal remains excavated in the region. The remains date from the Wadi Suq/Late Bronze Age (2000–1300 BC) and Iron Age II periods (1100—600 BC). They have been studied as part of the Saruq al-Ḥadid Archaeological Research Project, at present using
only conventional zooarchaeological methods yet with other avenues of study are planned in the future. This poster will discuss the preliminary results of this study, demonstrating the assemblage’s role in establishing how the human population of Sarūq al-Ḥadīd interacted with the animals in their environment in order to utilise this hostile landscape and prosper within it.

The poster will also highlight several research areas that have arisen from the assemblage, such as evidence for the seasonal exploitation of multiple environments by the human occupants at the site, the evidence of bone working and the potential for these remains to contribute to discussions regarding the domestication of the dromedary camel. This study will provide insight into human activity in the region, highlighting the importance of animals in this activity, and will contribute to the understanding of Arabian prehistory.

Keywords:

Aynuna on the Red Sea

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A new Saudi-Polish project started in 2014 at Aynuna (ʾAynūnā), at the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba. The site was a Nabataean port linked by a caravan road with Petra, and was most likely identical to Leuke Kome of the Periplus and other ancient sources.

While the port itself on ʾAynūnā Bay lies beneath a modern settlement, there are two more sites some 2 miles inland along Wādī Aynuna. One is a small town atop a fossil coral reef, the other a complex of storehouses on a terrace above the wadi. Excavations have confirmed so far the Nabataean date of both and their continued use at least in the fourth century AD.

Keywords:

Meccan Society at the end of the Middle Ages

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The history of Mecca is one of the most important, and at the same time one of the most unknown, amongst all of the cities of the medieval Islamic world. Even though this city was marked by its religious position, numerous traits such as its economic, political, cultural and social situations bring it closer to and distinguish it from the other large cities in the region. This study has the object of better outlining the great Meccan families who lived in this city between 1250 and 1517, and to observe the role that they played in all domains.

This study is essentially carried out using prosopographical methods. The counting of sources is based on a database in French and in Arabic (Filemaker), that gathers all the information
corresponding to individuals, classed by name. The study of kinship and intermarriage allows for genealogical trees to be drawn up for different families.

The final objective of this work is to define the political and social profile of every large Meccan family for the two and a half centuries that this study covers. Today, the example of the Ṭabarī family will be used, one of the most imminent families in Mecca during the course of that period. The history of this family can be traced back nearly six centuries, or twelve generations. Through the study of the data of five sources, the irregularity of influence of the Ṭabarī family can be recognised.

Keywords:

The inspiration of pre-Islamic Architecture on the Early Islamic Palatial Design

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This poster illustrates the relationship between pre-Islamic architecture and early Islamic architecture through the analysis of the archaeological evidences of both eras. In particular, the complex Royal Palatial design provides examples of how this relationship is expressed in terms of architecture and decoration. The extensive damage suffered by much of the palatial architecture and dearth of archaeological evidence makes it a challenge to identify specific commonalities between these types of architecture. Gaining an understanding the function of Royal Palatial architecture, however, gives an insight into the social, economic and political aspects of communities of the time.

The pre-Islamic Byzantium and Sasanian Empires are identified by their distinctive architecture and there is a degree of commonality between these and the structures of the Early Islamic period. Examining the visual cultural vocabularies of both eras is one way of understanding the similarities and differences between them. Architecture shapes and forms identity of different time periods yet they are not entirely separate. There is evidence that the Islamic period borrowed and appropriated many aspects of the previous Sasanian period.

The poster will demonstrate the archaeological remains and the architectural features in royal palaces and monumental buildings during both.

Keywords:

Survey and excavations at Shi’yah (Sūr, Sultanate of Oman) – First campaign of the Archaeology and Digital Imagery in Oman (ADIO) project

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The poster presents the results of the first fieldwork campaign at Shi’yah. Drone-aerial survey, pedestrian survey and excavations were carried out in order to obtain a first overview of the archaeological potential of the area, already known from previous researches as an important protohistoric necropolis. Over 400 cairns were identified and integrated into a 3D model of the landscape providing an accurate map. Three Hafit-type graves, with different localization within the landscape (low and high terraces), were excavated to test the degree of preservation of the structures, grave-goods and osteological remains.

The results of this first campaign are very encouraging, and underline the high potential of the area. Further investigation may allow reconsidering a series of questions related to coastal occupations in the region. The high amount of graves and their diversified localisation might offer insights concerning the typo-chronology of the monuments, the correlation between tombs density and number of individuals per tomb (MNI), the degree of congruence between monumentality of the structures and value of associated grave-goods. Furthermore, the numerous EBA tombs suggest a long term occupation, and hint at the presence of an important settlement in the area, which would allow considering more closely the relation between graveyards and settled areas.

Keywords: Bronze Age; Oman; funerary landscape; 3D model; Hafit-type graves.

References


Beads in subfossil organic resin found at Wādī al-‘Arad (Sohar, al-Bāṭinah), Sultanate of Oman

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This poster presents the preliminary results of the study of three tabular beads made using a subfossil organic resin. These beads were found together with other beads in shell, banded agate and carnelian within two still undated graves excavated at Wādī al-'Arad, near Sohar, in the Sultanate of Oman. Explorations in the area were required by the construction of the Bāṭinah Southern Expressway (5th Package), as part of a wider project of archaeological safeguard promoted by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture of the Sultanate of Oman in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport and Communications. Assuming that they were made from succinite, the so-called Baltic amber, and were traded to Oman by Sasanian merchants, the beads were analysed instrumentally at the Department of Geosciences, University of Padua, using infrared spectroscopy. All three beads resulted manufactured from the same type of subfossil resin, which unexpectedly is not succinite but possibly copal from eastern Africa or another type of resin from southern India. The exact identification of the type and origin of this specific subfossil resin is still in progress, but this evidence opens a completely new scenario for the definition of the long-range exchange networks that involved the communities settled in al-Bāṭinah region of northern Oman.

**Keywords:**

The early development of personal ornamentation in the Oman Peninsula during the Neolithic period (c.6000–3200 BC)

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The poster presents the preliminary results obtained from a specific documentation work of artefacts related to personal ornamentation found at sites dated to the Neolithic period in the Sultanate of Oman. This research, eventually aimed at reconstructing the early development of personal ornaments within the Neolithic communities of the Oman Peninsula, considers both the functional and symbolic meaning of these artefacts as an expression of collective and personal identity and their socioeconomic value. The research was conducted on more than 1000 objects (1093), from ten sites distributed in different regions of Oman, and the interest was mainly sea-shell and soft-stone beads (796), but also other types of ornaments such as earrings, pendants and bracelets made using local materials. Documentation included obtaining, for each object, detailed stylistic and morphometric data, high-resolution digital photographs, impressions of the perforations and all other manufacturing traces, using inert silicone resins. The number and accuracy of information collected will allow researchers to define typological variations thoroughly over the period, and within different regions, and to describe the technical and technological advancements at the base of these productions. This comprehensive approach will allow a better understanding of comparable evidence from previous publications.

**Keywords:**

Cultural Relations between Oman and North Africa during the Islamic Era

Hasan M. al-Naboodah
This research attempts to shed light on some of the historical aspects of the cultural relations that existed between the followers of the Ibāḍī sect in Oman and North Africa, by tracing historical accounts and the little information that is scattered in a variety of Ibāḍī sources. The topic of this poster is both important and complex and has not yet been subjected to careful examination by researchers. This may be partly due to the scarcity of information and resources available and the difficulty of obtaining access to them, which makes the research itself challenging.

At the same time, however, there are a number of other factors that have had an effect on the strong connections that originally existed between the Omani and North African Ibāḍīs. These include the distance separating the two groups, the numerous wars launched by the Islamic Caliphates against beliefs inconsistent with their own and the rugged and inaccessible nature of the terrain in which Ibadism took root. Despite these obstacles, however, relations persisted between the two groups, these being maintained through a number of means, the most important of which were correspondence between the two and encounters during the Hajj season, during which the sect's followers met in the Hijaz, discussed political and confessional matters, and exchanged books and letters.

This poster discusses the results of research into the important historical aspects of these relations. It is hoped that it will permit researchers and scholars to shed additional light on the nature of the cultural relations that tied some of North Africa's inhabitants with Oman during the Middle Ages and will help to lead to the identification of much-needed further sources on the Ibāḍī communities and Ibadism.

Keywords: Ibadism, Oman, North Africa, cultural relations, Ḥajj

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Morphometric analysis of Arabian camels from Late Iron Age graves in Wādī ʿUyūn at Sanāw (Al-Sharqiyyah, Sultanate of Oman).

Antonio Curci & Elena Maini

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This poster presents the preliminary results of the zooarchaeological study of two entire skeletons of Arabian camel (Camelus dromedarius) found buried in two separate graves, part of a large necropolis excavated in Wādī ʿUyūn at Sinaw (Sanāw, al-Sharqiyyah, Sultanate of Oman). Archaeological explorations in the area were promoted by the Ministry of Heritage and Culture of the Sultanate of Oman in collaboration with the Ministry of Transport and Communications in view of the construction of the Sinaw-Mahut-Duqm road. Excavations brought to light the exceptional deposition (G.58) of an adult male buried with an iron sword of the Yatagan type and two iron daggers that date the grave to the last three centuries BC. Two burials (G.50 and G.59), including
each the entire skeleton of a dromedary, were found in close proximity to G.58 and formed a single funeral cluster. Both animals, one adult and one sub-adult, were found in kneeling position and were probably sacrificed during a funeral ritual for the deceased. Logarithmic size index (LSI) statistics based on a comprehensive morphometric analysis of the two skeletons will add important data to the debate about the exploitation of camels in the Arabian Peninsula during the 1st millennium BC.

**Keywords:**

**Three men in a boat. The seal of a Dilmunite slave trader?**

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The poster presents a novel provocative interpretation of a round stamp seal of Dilmun type (Kjærum 1983: Cat. No. 262) found at Tell Sa’ad, Faylakah, dated to c.1900 BC. The seal features three men standing in a boat. The excavators described two of these individuals as wearing garments indicated by ‘four horizontal lines’ across their legs, while the third one was apparently naked. According to this new iconographic analysis, rather than edges of garments, the horizontal lines are cords that tie the legs of captives. This interpretation is supported directly by the use of the same graphic rendering for these lines and the lashings that sew up the centre of the boat and indirectly by the opposition with the man trespassing the stern with a single, large step. The seal carver possibly meant to show without ambiguity that the individual on the left, probably a member of the crew, was free to move. In spite of the opinion that ‘there were no “slave merchants” in the Ancient Near East’ (Mendelsohn 1949), the visual decipherment of this seal seems to support the hypothesis of entrepreneurial slave trading at Dilmun and presumably in other cultural contexts of the region.

**Keywords:**

**References**


**An unusual second millennium BC stamp seal from Dhank, Oman**

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The Shokur site is located near Dhank, Sultanate of Oman. Excavation and survey in the Dhank area have focused on Hafit period mortuary features, but during the 2016 season, our team began investigating the Umm an-Nar mortuary landscape to expand our knowledge of occupation of this region. Unexpectedly, a large Wadi Suq tomb was found on top of the presumed location of an Umm an-Nar tomb whose white ashlar stones are scattered on the surface. The excavation revealed a number of interesting mortuary goods including pottery, softstone and alabaster vessels, and beads; among them a well-preserved stamp seal made from heated softstone. Its shape, style and iconography show an unusual combination of features that relate it to Dilmun and Magan as well as Mesopotamia and the Iranian world. It sheds a new light onto a few other seals with similar odd characteristics, previously found in Faylakah and in the Oman Peninsula.

This poster will document and present this seal to the Arabian archaeology community and will discuss its possible origin, iconography, and place in the catalogue of known stamp seals from the eastern Arabian Peninsula.

Funding: Fulbright Award #48150626; National Science Foundation Award #1321203

Keywords:
archaeological evidence belongs to a wide chronological period, at least from Late Pleistocene, with some earlier more dubitative evidences, to the early first millennium AD. The huge amount of data, all conveyed in a geographic information system (GIS) database, will be used both for the investigations on land-use modalities, resources acquisition strategies, population dynamics and as an analytical tool that the MOHC (Ministry of Heritage and Culture) will use in all the phases of the archaeological valorisation of this region. Data will be also used to assist in the preservation of the archaeological heritage within the SEZAD economic zone.

Keywords:

Smelting tin-bronze at Bayt Bin ʿĀtī in the Qattārah oasis (al-ʿAin, UAE)

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Bayt Bin ʿĀtī is situated at the southwest edge of the Qattārah oasis and has a long occupational sequence that covers from the Iron Age until the Late Islamic period. During the Iron Age II, copper smelting played an important role in the economy of the site, as suggested by the find of more than 50 kg of production waste.

A selection of this material has been examined by optical microscopy and scanning electron microscopy; namely fifteen tap slags, a crucible fragment and a large tongue-shaped metal lump were analysed. This study indicate that the slags are the by-product of the smelting of sulphidic ores with a special enrichment in tin, often accompanied by arsenic and nickel. This peculiar composition characterizes most of the prills trapped in those slags, indicating that the resulting product was a natural tin-bronze with different amounts of arsenic and nickel. Interestingly, this kind of alloy has been identified in other contemporary sites of Oman and Saudi Arabia, suggesting that this natural tin-bronze was traded long distance across Arabia. The preliminary results of an ongoing provenance study of those materials is confirming a similar geological ‘signature’, and hence provenance, among these materials.

Keywords:

Drones and Photogrammetry; a new perspective on Qatar’s Heritage

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This poster will address the potential benefits and pitfalls of using drone or unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) technology in the process of discovery, excavation and management of cultural heritage in
Qatar. The poster will be based on the results of aerial surveys of four sites: Ruwaydah, Zubārah, Murwab and Jazīrat Bin Ghanim (Jazīrat al-Khawr), using a variety of imaging techniques including thermal, near infrared, visible light images. The sites were selected on the basis of their different characteristics with the aim of highlighting the range of perspectives offered by this new technology. Ruwaydah was selected as part of an on-going excavation; Zubārah was used as an example of a heritage management project; Murwab was chosen because of its diffuse settlement pattern whilst Jazīrat Bin Ghanim was used to demonstrate the potential for mapping an entire landscape.

Keywords:

Late Bronze Age to Late Iron Age use and reuse of funerary cairns in the Bāṭinah plain foothills, Sultanate of Oman

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The archaeological rescue excavation carried out in the first months of 2016 along the Package 2 of the new Bāṭinah Expressway in the Sultanate of Oman led to the recovery of 31 funerary structures. The research area is located in the southern Bāṭinah plain, at the foot of low al-Ḥājar mountains. The most interesting and best-preserved groups of cairns are located in the inland of Jammah, along the slopes, the terraces and on the bed of an ancient dried secondary wadi. Preliminary analysis of the architectural, stratigraphic and anthropological evidences allowed a first in-depth description of the structures typologies, their usage, restoration, reuse and pillage activities, as well as of the rituals and the funerary practices in these area from Late Bronze Age to the 3rd century CE, according to the findings recovered from the graves. Taphonomic evidences allowed reconstructing the sequence of the depositional events. All the primary depositions are characterized by the concurrent presence of unrelated bones in the filling, testifying for a burial reuse. Nineteen burials contain very few, but
well preserved, bones in secondary deposition, testifying for an intentional removal of the missing bones, rather than their crumbling.

Keywords: graves, funerary-practice, re-use, Bāṭinah

Reflections on Ibāḍī religious architecture: study of the mosques of the Mzab, Djerba, Nafūsa and Oman

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The present poster addresses the Ibāḍīs’ religious architecture in the four major regions where this community has settled since the ninth century: the Mzab Valley (Morocco), Djerba Island (Tunisia), Jabal Nafūsa (Libya) and Oman. Their mosques are distinguished from those known as ‘Classical style’ of mosques by a number of characteristics that are discussed in the poster. This architecture is plural in its spatial organization, size, materials and technical aspects of their construction, presents a sort of air de famille that relates all these buildings to their Arab-Berber origins and Ibāḍī principles. These principles were generally expressed through construction regulations generated by Ibāḍī doctrine. The poster will present some unique samples of traditional Ibāḍī mosques. It aims to establish the fact that the religious texts developed by this school of thought contain a number of opinions that seem to have affected the constructive traditions of the Ibāḍīs community. It will also reveal cases where these regulations have been countered, and try to understand and interpret them in the light of the historical timeline of this community and the principles of its doctrine.

Keywords: Djerba, Ibāḍī jurisprudence, mosque, mihrāb, Mzab, Nafūsa, Oman [Sarah: there should only be five]

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