

Introduction

Born out of the very successful experience of the 2013 congress,¹ the idea of organising a workshop on the theme of connecting the archaeological evidence from Arabia was due mostly to wishful thinking. On the one hand, it acknowledged the need to create a venue recurring at least biannually to convey the latest results from mostly but not exclusively field research with a specifically archaeological perspective. It had clearly emerged that the focus must extend to the totality of the Peninsula as this enormous² part of the world, east of the Mediterranean, seldom received its due attention from the scholarly community. On the other hand, we pursued going beyond a collection of data and aimed to find connections between the results of different investigations. The size of the region under discussion, the distances to be overcome, the stark differences in landscapes even within Arabia and the demands of the arid climate surely made interconnecting in intra-peninsular relationships a challenge and one worthy of detailed investigation.

The international workshop, ‘Archaeology of the Arabian Peninsula: Connecting the Evidence’ was organised within the framework of the 10th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East (ICAANE), hosted by the OREA Institute and the University of Vienna between April 25th and 29th 2016 in the Austrian Academy of Sciences venues. The workshop convened fifteen scholars who gave a total of thirteen talks, including an introduction and concluding remarks (see the programme below). One scholar, J. M. Tebes, who had been prevented from participating due to a conflicting schedule has happily agreed to submit his paper for publication.

In this volume, for the first time we attempt to straddle the entire expanse of the Peninsula (Fig. 1) and beyond in an effort to counter the usual relegating of research in the various modern countries to different academic disciplines. Therefore, using a number of examples we range from the north-west peri-maritime Neolithic landscape on the Red Sea coast,³ the Hejazi inland⁴ and all the way north to the Southern Levant,⁵ to the south-west area of present-day Saudi Arabia in the Islamic period.⁶ Equally significant is including the south-east of the Peninsula with the Iron Age data from Adam in central Oman⁷ and the central part of Arabia.⁸ And yet the known divide between the scholarship dealing with the archaeology of the Persian-Arabian Gulf and the rest of the landbound sites, a disconnect largely due to occupational, cultural and historical⁹ differences between these two regions, still requires increased attempts in order to bridge the remaining substantial gap.

It is also the first time there has been a focus on a significantly wider chronological spectrum from the archaeological perspective than has ever considered before: from the Pre Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) to the Islamic period (Abbasid era) in an effort to address fundamental

¹ Published in Luciani 2016a.

² Magee 2014.

³ Fujii et al., this volume.

⁴ Luciani, this volume; Tourtet et al., this volume.

⁵ Tebes, this volume.

⁶ Al-Zahrani, this volume.

⁷ Gernez – Jean, this volume.

⁸ Chevalier et al., this volume.

⁹ Macdonald 2010.

phenomena such as the neolithisation and origin of pastoralism¹⁰ in arid areas as well as the formation of large permanent settlement oases in the Bronze Age¹¹ or productive activities such as the exploitation of precious metals down to the Middle Ages,¹² that have a direct bearing on major economic choices made by the Peninsula's communities throughout time. It is hopefully through such case studies that we may reach a deeper understanding of structural aspects of the anthropic presence on the Arabian Peninsula, humans' interplay with landscape(s) and natural resources and their role in the genesis and survival of permanent settlements.

For the first time we discuss non-residential sites with specific investigations on burial customs (Chevalier et al.) and cultic landscapes (Tebes, Gernez – Jean), both seen synchronically and diachronically, or epigraphic and regional trade connections and routes throughout an extended region (Nehmé) down to the formation of mining landscapes and specialised sites for the selective exploitation of mineral resources such as copper, silver and specifically gold (Al-Zahrani).

Through this first effort to attain the broader picture, we glean the first elements of analogy and contrast. If we look at the analysis of landmarks, territorial appropriation and the environmental conditions of the Early Bronze Age funerary landscape in the al-Kharj oasis (Chevalier et al.) in Saudi Arabia, although we do find significant similarities with those attested in the north-west of the Peninsula, in Qurayyah¹³ and Tayma,¹⁴ we must also underline a significant difference in settlement organisation. Are differently organised communities part of the same (partially nomadic) society? Do oasis dwellers and pastoralists share common funerary beliefs? Or do they share the same material culture (round stone-built graves, metal weapons) to which they attribute different meaning?

Moving on to other highly symbolic and ceremonial aspects of past societies, it has rightly been underlined that there has been little encompassing work on cultic installations in arid areas in previous scholarship. Investigations have been disproportionately concentrated on the Levant without adequate research on the long history of local cultic architecture produced by nomadic pastoral peoples (Tebes). Therefore, the two case studies presented here: the very northerly Negev and the very south-eastern Oman, are crucial. And the lack of comparisons for the Omani site of Adam (Gernez – Jean), increasingly underscore its unique character as a cultic station for metal weaponry and, at the same time, it suggests a continued, possibly structural (?) link between nomadic communities and the spread, use and symbolic value of copper-alloys metallurgy from the Bronze Ages down to the Iron Age.

A further important methodological question that emerged in the workshop is the one pertaining to the evaluation of archaeological versus written evidence. Is a revision of old chronological schemes (Rohmer) justified for the Iron Age in north-west Arabia, where epigraphic evidence is far from comprehensive? How much of the traditional reconstructions based on Greek and Roman textual evidence are actually matched by the archaeological study of local epigraphic data and material remains? Who was the agency (Nabataean versus Ancient South Arabian, i.e. Sabaeen, Minaean, Qatabanic, Hadramite) and what were the exact modalities of trade relations? While different scholars may have varying stances on these questions, the value of discussing routes on a regional scale for the first time (Nehmé), thus highlighting the relationships linking the north and the south of the Arabian subcontinent, constitutes an important attempt to 'connect the evidence', to better develop interpretations that encompass the Peninsula as a whole, beyond the single site perspective.

We closed the publication of the first volume on the Archaeology of Arabia (OREA 4) with more questions than answers. But these questions have directed and influenced our successive steps in research. The sheer increase of (at times surprising) data has significantly changed our scientific perspectives. However, this latest volume also leaves us with more questions than when

¹⁰ Fujii et al., this volume.

¹¹ Luciani, this volume; Tourtet et al., this volume.

¹² Al-Zahrani, this volume.

¹³ Luciani et al. 2018.

¹⁴ Hausleiter – Zur 2016.

we started: now that we have the first fully-excavated PPNB settlement in the Arabian Peninsula, can we obtain more detailed data on the climatic conditions in which Neolithic settlements developed? If we broaden the observation also to the western shore of the Red Sea, how does the phenomenon of the Neolithic in present day Egypt and Sudan compare with the evidence from Arabia? Was there contact and were there exchanges across the Red Sea or via the Sinai? The persisting dearth of data for the subsequent periods pushes us to develop new models for better defining the developments of the ensuing 6th, 5th and 4th millennia BCE. Is the documentation from Tayma, increasingly filling the gap starting with the 5th millennium BCE, an isolated example or simply the better investigated one? In view of the seeming paucity of human settlements in the phase running up to the formation of the large oases-settlements (Qurayyah, Tayma, al-‘Ulā), should we allow for a significant demographic input from outside of the Arabian Peninsula? And, if so, where from? Through which model of population dynamic? Which role should aDNA analysis play in finding accurate explanatory models?

One of the declared goals of the most recent international gathering and publication¹⁵ was to garner the involvement of scholars and cultural heritage managers stemming from Western Asia. Happily, this is reflected in the presence in the present volume of A. Al-Zahrani’s contribution. We are particularly grateful for his willingness to participate as we acknowledge that producing this paper at a time of heavy administrative duties must have been a real challenge.

In conclusion, not only has the geographical horizon been significantly broadened, now ranging from Oman on the south-eastern tip of the Peninsula to the Negev in its the north-western corner, as well as the chronological one, but with them significant new methodological perspectives and avenues of research are becoming important. Moreover, diverse voices with different perspectives are now taking part in the scientific discourse. Since the discipline remains young and the evidence is still often patchy, we felt the need to continue pursuing the idea of a scholarly meeting focused on the study of the archaeology of Arabia. This resulted in a third workshop on the subject of Mobility in Arabia which took place in April 2018 in Munich within the framework of the 11th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East and will be published as an additional OREA volume.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank all participants in the workshop for adhering to the idea of jointly discussing the archaeology of Arabia, for contributing in so many interesting papers and for their great patience in waiting for these proceedings to appear. For the publication of the volume I am indebted to Prof. Dr Barbara Horejs, Director of the OREA Institute at the Austrian Academy of Sciences for having proposed that both this volume and the next one dealing with Arabia find their place in the prestigious OREA series she directs and edits. To her and her ever competent staff, in particular Mag. Ulrike Schuh, BA who has never been sparing with her pro-active help and support, goes our heartfelt appreciation.

Marta Luciani
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¹⁵ Luciani 2016b, 10.

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Workshop 5: Archaeology of the Arabian Peninsula: Connecting the Evidence			
MONDAY 25			
10:00	Archaeology of the Arabian Peninsula: connecting the evidence. Introducing the Theme	Marta Luciani	ISAW, New York / University of Vienna
10:00	Early to mid-Holocene vegetation and crop cultivation and the beginnings of settlement at Tayma, NW Arabia*	Michèle Dinies, Reinder Neef, Birgit Plessen, Arnulf Hausleiter	German Archaeological Institute, Helmholtz Centre, Potsdam, ISAW, New York / German Archaeological Institute
10:30	Wadi Sharma 1: excavations at a Neolithic settlement in the Tabuk Province, NW Arabia	Sumio Fujii, Takuro Adachi	Kanazawa University
11:00 COFFEE			
11:30	Tayma pottery: chronostratigraphy, archaeometric studies, cultural interaction	Małgorzata Daszkiewicz, Francelin Tourtet, Arnulf Hausleiter	Archea, Warsaw /Exzellenzcluster TO-POI FU Berlin; German Archaeological Institute; ISAW, New York / German Archaeological Institute
12:00	Urban oases in north west Arabia: new evidence	Marta Luciani	ISAW, New York / University of Vienna
12:30	Current research at the Um Darraj site, Alula north-west of Saudi Arabia*	Hussein Abualhassan	Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage
13:00 LUNCH			
14:00	A revised chronological framework for northwest Arabia in the Late 1 st millennium BC. New evidence from excavations in the al-‘Ulā area	Jérôme Rohmer	CNRS - Paris
14:30	Ancient wells in Madāin Sālih, Nabataean Hegra: their distribution, use, reuse, and the question of the settlement pattern of Hegra in Antiquity	Laïla Nehmé	CNRS - UMR 8167
15:00	Productive and economic landscape at the south west of Saudi Arabia	Abdullah Al-Zahrani	Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage
15:30	The oasis of al-Kharj as a case-study of the settlement process in Central Arabia	Jérémie Schiettecatte, Anaïs Chevalier	CNRS - UMR 8167
16:00 COFFEE			
16:30	A new Iron Age site in Central Oman: recent excavations near Adam	Guillaume Gernez	Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne
17:00	South Arabian architecture, the case of Awam Temple*	Zaydoon Ziad	American Foundation for the Study of Man
17:30	Concluding remarks	Laïla Nehmé	CNRS - UMR 8167

* These papers do not form part of the current publication.