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Historical Archaeology and Heritage in the Middle East: A Preliminary Overview

ABSTRACT

While not a traditional focus of archaeological research in the region, historical archaeology has a growing presence in the Middle East. Themes explored by colleagues interested in the post-1500 archaeological record include both topics of globalization and colonialism relevant to historical archaeology around the world and topics specific to local cultural and historical postmedieval developments—and sometimes both simultaneously. Such has been the growth in relevant studies in the past two decades that a preliminary overview of historical archaeology from Anatolia to Oman and Cairo to Khorasan can now be offered.

Introduction and Regional Context

The purpose of the present discussion is to draw attention to current and recent historical archaeology projects in the Middle East region, and outline some of the background to local approaches to the subject. While historical archaeology has strong roots in both the Western Hemisphere and Europe (particularly the UK, the Netherlands, and parts of Scandinavia) and has taken hold in Australasia and South Africa, it has been much slower to be recognized in other parts of the world, including the Middle East. However, there has been a recent growth in Middle Eastern projects that have been developed explicitly with historical archaeology research questions and methodologies in mind, others that have developed more serendipitously as material culture from postmedieval (or, to use terminology often preferred regionally, "late Islamic") contexts has been exposed via research on other periods and issues, and cases where late Islamic sites and material culture have been studied as part of understanding continuity and change in Middle Eastern cultures over time.

The region covered here—the "Middle East"—can be defined in numerous ways and include or exclude various countries and areas. The term is itself Eurocentric, emphasizing a geographical position defined in relation to Europe (especially in conjunction with its now less common counterparts "Near East" and "Far East"). "Middle East" is, however, so universal in contemporary usage that it would be counterproductive to find an alternative term. Defining the boundaries of the region can also be politically loaded, especially given the fluid political situation in several countries. While recognizing that this is itself not a wholly neutral definition, for the purposes of the present discussion, the Middle East is defined as consisting of the following (as of August 2015) 15 full members of the United Nations and 1 nonmember UN observer state: Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

It is important to acknowledge that while this discussion is based on modern sociopolitical geography and modern nation states, a case could made to organize discussion around the pre–World War I dominant territorial states, as per the 2000 Baram and Carroll volume, *A Historical Archaeology of the Ottoman Empire*. This approach has merit, and an understanding of the role of the Ottoman and Persian (particularly Safavid Dynasty) empires is crucial to understanding the development of the post-1500 Middle East. Nonetheless, while the important role of the relevant imperial states is outlined briefly below, readers unfamiliar with the historical context of the region will likely find it easier to read an overview based on modern boundaries.

While it is clear that the Middle East as defined here extends far beyond the area of the traditional "Fertile Crescent," the core of the region does correspond to the area that

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has received so much attention in terms of the origins of farming and sedentary settlements (Zeder 2011). Contrary to some popular perceptions of the region as a predominantly homogeneous Arab and Islamic cultural unit (with Israel and Lebanon the notable exceptions), the Middle East has traditionally been an area of great diversity; see Stanton (2011) for a more detailed outline of the region's cultural sociology. While Islam provides the modern plurality or majority of believers in most of the region's states, numerous religions have emerged, have been, and still are practiced here, including Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Baha'i, Samaritanism, Mandaeanism, and Islam. Christianity and Islam (and indeed Judaism) are further distinguished by a diversity of traditions local to their original home region, and these traditions often color understanding of Middle Eastern heritage. The region is also home to distinct ethnoreligious groups, such as the Druze and Yazidis, and many different ethnic groups, such as Arabs, Kurds, Iranians, Armenians, and Turks, that have not always been narrowly associated with a single religious tradition. Until fairly recently the region was therefore characterized by ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity and pluralism despite the political dominance of Turks, Arabs, and Persians, and the religious dominance of Islam. The modern emphasis on monoethnic and monoreligious states based on European conceptions of nationalism and ethnicity is largely a post-WWI phenomenon brought about by a combination of often-interrelated factors, including the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the granting of full independence to the region's Arab states, the foundation of Israel, the growth (and, arguably, the subsequent failure) of secular Arab nationalism, the recent collapse of central government authority in Iraq and Syria, and the growth of both Shia and Wahhabi fundamentalism (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997).

Despite this, there is still considerable diversity in the Middle East in terms of religion and ethnicity, which is often crucial to an understanding of the region's postmedieval archaeology and heritage. In Oman alone, for example, the population practices three different types of Islam, with the majority (by some estimates) practicing the Ibadi tradition (Owtram 2004), which is wholly distinct from the better known (to Westerners) Sunni and Shia traditions. Oman is also home to Hindu populations of several centuries' standing whose origins lie in trans–Arabian Sea trade; one of these Hindu groups, the Liwatiyah, still lives within a separate walled community in the urban center of Mutrah. Significant communities from Baluchistan (modern Pakistan) settled in Oman to serve the political needs of the British East India Company (Allen 1987; Valeri 2009), and Oman's own 17th- through 19th-century expansion into East Africa has resulted in long-standing links with Zanzibar, Tanzania, and Kenya (Allen 1987). The separate phenomenon of the recent surge in Western and Asian expatriate groups has its roots in Oman's oil wealth of the last 40 years. Despite a determined modernization and Westernization program, Oman also still retains an important traditional Bedu population. Finally, the south of the country is, along with eastern Yemen, a stronghold of the modern South Arabian languages, which are more closely related to the languages of modern Ethiopia and Eritrea than they are to Arabic (Peterson 2004). Oman is by no means unique, but it does help to emphasize the extent to which this is a region characterized by heterogeneity alongside the dominant ethnoreligious groups, as the current political, religious, and ethnic conflicts in Iraq and Syria only further emphasize. These modern examples also implicitly serve to demonstrate the extent to which regional imperial predecessor states such as the Ottoman Empire were also multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural entities rather than monolithic states.

Historical Continuity and Ideology: The Status of Historical Archaeology in the Middle East

Regional diversity is one of the factors that offers such exciting potential for historical archaeology in the Middle East. Traditional

historical archaeology tropes, such as colonialism (both economic and territorial), cultural contact, population movements, and enslavement, are very much present. The Portuguese engagement with the region dates to the early 16th century, when Afonso de Albuquerque and other explorers attacked existing regional polities and founded a series of forts along the coast of modern Oman and the approaches to the Strait of Hormuz. Britain's presence in India led to extensive political and economic engagement across the region, with the last British protectorates in the Persian Gulf only achieving full independence in 1971. France, the Dutch East India Company, Imperial Germany, and other European states and entities also had varying degrees of engagement with the Middle East across the post-1500 period. As such, the theme of the impact of the expansion of European global engagement that defines much historical archaeology is also relevant to the Middle East, and this does form the basis of some of the case studies outlined here.

However, to focus narrowly on these European themes would be to take a Eurocentric viewpoint that would obscure sociocultural themes that are unique to the Middle East, particularly when it comes to continuity of culture and trade networks over time. This sense of continuity continues into how historical archaeology is perceived regionally. In many of the countries reviewed here (Israel and, to an extent, Lebanon are the obvious exceptions), there is an understanding that it is "Islamic archaeology" that is the rightful focus of the archaeology of historical periods, with "late Islamic archaeology" the core focus of what readers of the present journal would consider historical archaeology (Brooks 2014b:431). As Islam was founded in the 7th century, the Islamic period stretches across what in Europe would be considered the medieval period, and the focus on Islamic continuity means that until relatively recently there has been little engagement with the archaeology of colonialism, increasing global contact, and the consequences thereof, in comparison to Europe, the Western Hemisphere, or Australia; see Milwright (2010) for an overview of Islamic archaeology as a discipline.

Two quick examples demonstrate that the sense of continuity is by no means an abstract influence on archaeological method and theory, but also has practical manifestations within the archaeological record. Many modern heritage sites in the Middle East feature traditional *aflaj* (or *qanat*) irrigation systems (Figure 1). These are based on narrow artificial channels (some exposed, some underground) used to transport water from higher elevations to agricultural land; *aflaj* water supplies are often administered communally and are found across the region (Wilkinson 1977; Al Tikriti 2011:47–53). Historical archaeology has taken place at late Islamic sites where *aflaj* systems are an important part of settlement complexes (Young et al. [2017]). Equally, a full understanding of *aflaj* systems across time requires grappling with archaeological evidence of a local cultural practice that dates back to the Iron Age (Wilkinson 1977; Al Tikriti 2011). Separately, the large-scale intercontinental trade that many introductions to the discipline cite as a defining characteristic of an historical archaeology of the modern world, e.g., Orser (2004:14–17), is by no means a new phenomenon in the Middle East. For example, the trade networks used to bring 19th-century British and Asian ceramics to the Persian Gulf via the Indian Ocean and British India are often identifiable as being firmly rooted in intercontinental networks with a continuous history dating back at least to the early medieval period. The late-15th-century route around the Cape of Good Hope was new, but once in the Indian Ocean, European engagement appropriated, rather than transformed, existing—and often highly resilient—trade networks that in many cases survive into the present (Brooks et al. 2015).

Empires or dynasties have also garnered a great deal of archaeological attention in order to gain a wider understanding of Middle East historical periods, and these imperial entities provide important context. The Byzantine (Eastern Roman) and Persian Sassanid empires dominated the region immediately before

FIGURE 1. *Left*: A *falaj* channel in a wadi valley, Al Banah, Oman; and *right*: a *falaj* irrigation channel in central Bat, Oman. While these examples are from Oman, *falaj* are common in much of the Middle East. (Photos by Alasdair Brooks, 2015.)

the rise of Islam, and the Byzantine state endured (albeit much reduced) until it was conquered by the Turkish Ottoman Empire in the mid-15th century; its cultural legacy, however, endured into the postmedieval period, particularly at regional sites connected to Orthodox Christianity. At its height, the Ottoman Empire, in turn, controlled much of the Middle East, including Egypt, much of the Arabian Peninsula's coast, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, and modern Turkey. In the immediate aftermath of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was carved up into new states, many under European mandates.

The history of Iran (Persia) following the 7th-century Islamic conquest is too complex to outline here, but it is important to stress that Persia remains a distinct social, linguistic, and cultural unit in the Islamic period, and one that by no means ignored the cultural traditions of the pre-Islamic Persian states. The Safavid Dynasty (1501–1722/1736) is generally considered to mark the beginning of "modern" Persia and dominates historical, archaeological, and art history understandings of the period after the Islamic conquest. The Safavids adopted Shia Islam as the royal and state religion and ruled over an empire that not only united a vast geographical area from modern eastern Turkey through Afghanistan, but—like its Ottoman counterpart—also encompassed multiple ethnic groups, including Kurds, Azerbaijanis, Circassians, and Armenians, alongside Persians. Shah Abbas I (reigned 1588–1629), arguably the greatest of Safavid rulers, was the subject of major exhibition at the British Museum in 2009 (British Museum 2009).

The Role of Political Ideology in Shaping Middle Eastern Historical Archaeology

The broad historical sweep across empires (not to mention the existence of a written historical record dating back to Sumerian cuneiform and Egyptian hieroglyphs), of which the Ottomans and Safavids were the latest in a long historical line, has led to a research agenda dominated by earlier periods of archaeology, whether prehistoric, early historical, or early to mid-Islamic, at the expense of what is understood in North America and Europe as "historical archaeology." The Fertile Crescent, the riverine civilizations of the ancient and classical world, and the civilizations of the Persian and Anatolian plateaus have received significant attention, but the more recent archaeology has been largely neglected. This raises interesting questions about what is archaeologically significant (to professionals and public alike), what ideological motivations might lie behind the decision to ignore—and sometimes destroy—postmedieval and late Islamic archaeology, and indeed precisely what constitutes "heritage" in the Middle East (Exell and Rico 2013).

The ideological processes at work vary tremendously between countries, and it is difficult to make generalizations. In Turkey, Dikkaya has convincingly argued that the lack of a developed archaeology of the Ottoman period (ca. 1300–1923) can be attributed to a deliberate decision by the early republican government to reject an Ottoman Empire that was simultaneously predominantly Islamic and heterogeneous as a worthy ideological predecessor of the new secular and monoethnic state (Dikkaya [2017]). Much of the historical archaeology of the Ottoman Empire has therefore taken place outside the borders of the modern Turkish republic, though see Baram and Carroll (2000) for a notable exception. Even where Turkish studies of Ottoman ethnic and religious minorities have taken place, these can studiously avoid controversial topics. A recent study of 19th-century Armenian gravestones in the western Anatolian city of Izmir (historical Smyrna) is a welcome addition to Ottoman historical archaeology, but, in addressing the absence of Armenians in the modern city, merely notes that "between 1915 and 1922 a large number of Armenians ... left İzmir and went to France and the USA" (Laflı and Bozkuş 2014:287). The reasons Armenians might have left the city, notably the deeply sensitive (in Turkey) topic of the Armenian Genocide of 1915, are left to one side.

Historical archaeology's traditional low profile in Israel similarly lies in conscious decisions to ideologically root the new nation's archaeological past in antiquity rather than on the more recent Ottoman period (which began in 1516 in Israel and Palestine). The 1948 foundation of the state of Israel—only 25 years after the foundation of the Turkish republic—was accompanied by efforts to turn the archaeology of the Jewish past into a "cornerstone of Israel's civic religion" (Shavit 1997:50) that was often subject to nationalist discourse stressing the antiquity of Jewish settlement; see the contributions in Silberman and Small (1997) for several nuanced discussions of this complex issue. The political situation in Palestine is even more fraught, as is the ideological practice of archaeology. For example, American archaeologist Albert Glock (who was shot and killed on the West Bank by an unidentified gunman in 1992) argued in a posthumous essay that most archaeology in Palestine had been Biblical archaeology selectively undertaken by Christian and Jewish scholars to "justify the present occupation," resulting in "the alienation of the native Muslim and Christian Palestinians from their own cultural past" (Glock 1994:71). Despite these ideological obstacles, the body of historical archaeology for Ottoman Palestine (including both Israel and modern Palestine) has grown tremendously over the last 15 years. Uzi Baram has been particularly active in studying and promoting the archaeology of the period, publishing relevant studies on Ottoman archaeology both in this journal (Baram 2002, 2004) and elsewhere (Baram 1999, 2007). Studies have also taken place on the events of 1948 and its aftermath, particularly from the Palestinian perspective; e.g., Nairouz (2008).

Farther south, many of these countries are 19th- or even 20th-century colonial or

post-colonial foundations where the majority population groups were either nomadic Bedu or coastal pearl fishers well into the last century, and where the 20th-century discovery of petroleum and natural gas reserves wholly transformed the incipient states. This had led to extensive debates on what even constitutes heritage in these countries. In Qatar, for example, the concept of a national cultural and historical heritage was only really advanced from the 1970s, and largely focused on linking modern ruling dynasties to "a long history of progress and heritage" and defining and controlling existing cultural traditions within a framework seeking to define modern "authenticity" as deeply rooted in the Bedu past (Exell and Rico 2013:277). In Saudi Arabia, these factors intertwine with the dominant Wahhabi interpretation of Islam, resulting in the deliberate and ongoing destruction of significant medieval and postmedieval heritage in the religious centers of Mecca and Medina. While Saudi authorities rightly note the need to improve the infrastructure for the millions of pilgrims visiting both cities, the impact has also been to destroy sites suffering from the taint of idolatry (as defined by Wahhabis). By some counts, 95% of the buildings dating to the Ottoman and earlier periods have been destroyed in the last 20 years; these include the houses of the prophet Mohammed, his first wife Khadija, and the first caliph Abu Bakr, and the Ottoman era Ajyad Fortress, the latter demolished to make way for the enormous clock tower that now overlooks Mecca's Grand Mosque (Page 2014:324).

Nonetheless, there has been real growth in historical archaeology in the Persian Gulf in the last decade. Pearl fishing was an important component of the international gulf economy for centuries and has been the subject of extensive archaeological study across periods (Carter 2012). For example, the Qatari site of Al Zubarah, an abandoned pearling town that is unusual in the Middle East for being an archaeological site granted UNESCO world heritage status specifically for its postmedieval heritage significance (Figure 2), has been the subject of extensive archaeological work since 2009 that seeks to understand the significance of pearling in the development of modern gulf economics and politics (Richter et al. 2011). Work in Kuwait directed by Papoli-Yazdi has examined several sites built by Sheikh Khazal Khan, a charismatic Iranian figure who ruled the province of Khuzestan and Kuwait, and acted as a British political agent in the region in the later 19th century (Papoli-Yazdi and Naeimi 2012; Papoli-Yazdi 2013). Papoli-Yazdi's work not only explores the gaps and tensions among historical records, folk accounts, and material culture, but also makes a close study of personal identity and agency. Other examples of relevant Persian Gulf work can be found in the two case studies later in this discussion.

While ideological issues are important to the status of historical archaeology in the Middle East, logistical issues should not be overlooked. The region is the home to one of the oldest continuous archaeological records of civilization in the world, with Egyptian and Sumerian civilization emerging at the end of the 4th millennium B.C. Going farther back, ancient settlements such as Çatalhöyük in Turkey (ca. 7500–ca. 5700 B.C.) are among the oldest proto-urban centers known (Hodder 1996), while archaeological evidence of permanent settlement in Jericho, Palestine, while not continuous, dates back to the 10th century B.C. (Kenyon 1957). Given the richness of the long archaeological record in the region, it is wholly understandable that financially strapped academic programs and hard-pressed local authorities have given priority to the pre-Ottoman and pre-Safavid—in many cases pre-Islamic—past when it comes time to decide where to focus archaeological resources. Nonetheless, relevant work takes place even in the "cradles of civilization." Le Quesne's work at the Ottoman and Napoleonic Quseir Fort on the Egyptian Red Sea coast, for example, draws together the results of excavation within the fort, historical records, and building analysis in order to learn more about the origins and development of the fort and its role in the late Ottoman and Napoleonic Red Sea world, among other objectives (Le Quesne 2007:7). The Quseir historical archaeology work was carried out with the aim of conserving and

FIGURE 2. Archaeological fieldwork in the 18th- to 19th-century "palatial compound" at Al Zubarah World Heritage Site, Qatar. (Photo by Alasdair Brooks, 2013.)

presenting heritage monuments on the Red Sea Coast, and building a visitor's center at the fort itself (Le Quesne 2007:5–6). Elsewhere, the work of Saunders and Faulkner (2010) in Jordan on the archaeology of the Hijaz railway draws on both the close historical links between Britain and the emergence of Jordan as a nation, and the current interest in WWI and conflict archaeology.

Iran, where historical archaeology is a very new and underexplored discipline, faces twin pressures of ideological and logistical challenges. The exceptional richness of prehistoric and early historical sites, the explicit linking of early historic dynasties and states to modern power, and limited national budgets have meant that the main focus for government ministries and universities has been more "traditional" archaeological sites and research questions. There are two main exceptions. One is explored below, while the other is the work by Papoli-Yazdi (along with Maryam Naeimi) in the city of Bam. In 2003 a powerful earthquake hit southern Iran and devastated Bam, and Papoli-Yazdi (2010) was part of the subsequent Bam Ethnoarchaeology Project. One of the central themes of this work was exploring the public and private lives of families and individuals in the city based on analysis of material culture, including structures and material recovered through excavation (including diaries and letters), and

interviews with families linked to specific houses (Papoli-Yazdi 2010:35–44).

There is naturally a huge overlap between archaeological projects and heritage work, with archaeology often leading into or informing heritage opportunities. In some instances heritage work is taking the place of historical or contemporary archaeology as a means of describing, creating, or validating group identities. What is crucial then is the need to demonstrate the relevance of historical archaeology to local archaeologists, heritage professionals, and communities, and the ways in which archaeology can support heritage developments.

Two Case Studies

While the preceding sections have engaged extensively with the existing literature on historical archaeology, they inevitably give a somewhat superficial overview of relevant studies in the Middle East. Two case studies are offered here, based on the authors' own ongoing research, that offer a slightly more detailed perspective on topics of particular relevance to readers of the present journal. Space constraints mean that these are by no means comprehensive, but it is hoped that they offer some insight into the considerable potential for historical archaeology in the region, both from the perspective of subjects relevant to both international studies of the subject (the ceramics trade) and subjects more specifically rooted in local cultural practices (traditional mud-brick villages in Oman and Iran).

European Ceramics

Most historical archaeologists working on 18th- and 19th-century sites in the Atlantic World (and indeed elsewhere) will have had cause to analyze assemblages of European mass-produced ceramics and consider their role in both the development of local economic and cultural issues, as well as signifiers of local engagement with the globalizing economy of the period. These subjects also turn out to be relevant to the historical archaeology of the Persian Gulf. A growing body of work exists on the presence of European ceramics in the Persian Gulf region, with a particular focus on British and Dutch ceramics of the 19th and 20th centuries. So far the work is concentrated on Qatar (Carter 2011; Grey 2011) and the United Arab Emirates (Sasaki and Sasaki 2012; Brooks 2014a), but now that some initial studies have been generated from both museum and archaeological collections, there is considerable potential for broader comparative expansions of these studies.

A few preliminary conclusions can be drawn on the local ceramics signature for imported ceramics; these can be summarized briefly. Few, if any, industrially mass-produced European ceramics arrive the region prior to the mid-19th century; the absence of earlier types, such as pearlware and creamware, strongly suggests that there was no significant British ceramics trade to the Arabian Peninsula until the General Maritime Treaty of 1820 (Brooks 2014a:7–8). Despite Britain's 19th-century political and economic dominance of the gulf, Dutch whitewares are often more common than their British counterparts (Brooks 2014b:433–434); Carter (2011) dates the Dutch ceramics recovered in the gulf to the period ca. 1870–ca. 1930, and this does appear to be the peak period of British and Dutch trade to the region.

While precise quantities differ between sites, the most common decorations are painted, cut-sponged, and Dutch brown transfer-printed wares (Figure 3), with a smaller quantity of British blue transfer prints (Carter 2011; Grey 2011; Sasaki and Sasaki 2012; Brooks 2014a). While more work needs to be done here, these European ceramics appear to be a subsidiary trade network rather than the primary intended destination. This is evidenced by the presence of Javanese-language makers' marks on Dutch ceramics of this period, whether found in Zanzibar (Croucher 2011) or the Al Zubarah archaeological site in Qatar—unpublished, but noted in Brooks (2014a:13). This suggests that many of the Dutch ceramics, at least, were a byproduct of the trade to the Dutch East Indies or modern Indonesia. There are also preliminary signs of significant regional variation; fieldwork undertaken by the present authors in Bat, Oman, in February 2015 was notable for the near total lack of European trade ceramics.

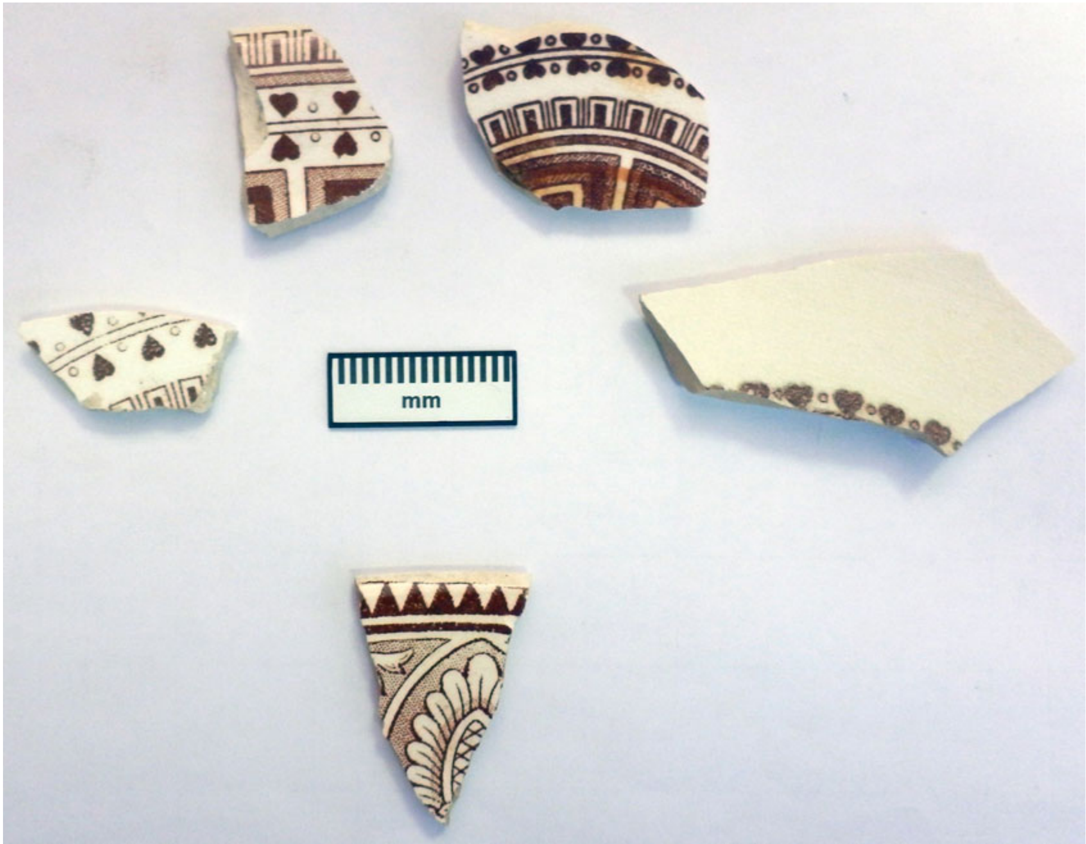

FIGURE 3. Late-19th/early-20th-century Dutch transfer-printed whiteware from the Al Ain World Heritage Site, Al Ain, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. (Photo by Alasdair Brooks, 2014.)

This is a topic that would no doubt reward further research.

While European ceramics are likely of primary interest to readers of the present journal, they by no means represent the totality of the imported materials in the regional ceramics record. Work on Arabian Peninsula Asian trade ceramics by Hanae and Tatsuo Sasaki has taken place in a context where the authors emphasize that the "Era of Great Voyages" begins in Asia and the Indian Ocean in the 8th century under the influence of the Abbasid Caliphate and China's Tang Dynasty; they explicitly make the point that the Portuguese and other Europeans were latecomers to this intercontinental trade (Sasaki and Sasaki 2012:226). Many of their individual sites therefore predate the period covered by the present discussion, but they have observed and catalogued imported ceramics from China, Myanmar [Burma], and Thailand dating from the 14th through 20th centuries (Sasaki and Sasaki 2012). An understanding of the role of Arabian Peninsula ceramics in long-distance trade networks is also beginning to grow. Locally produced materials understandably dominate local assemblages, but examples of the regionally important Julfar-ware pottery industry of the 14th through 20th centuries (based in the Emirate of Ras al Khaimah in the north of the United Arab Emirates) have been found not just across the Persian Gulf, but also down the east coast of Africa (Mitsuishi and Kennet 2013). Again, further study will help to unpick the relationship between imported and exported ceramics in the region, and the implications thereof for the study of globalizing trade in the postmedieval/late Islamic period.

Traditional Mud-Brick Villages in Iran and Oman

Some historical archaeology topics are more specific to the region's unique cultures. Fazeli and Young, between 2007 and 2009, directed an historical archaeology project aimed at exploring some of the near-ubiquitous, largely abandoned landlord villages of Iran (Fazeli and Young 2008; Fazeli et al. 2009). These landlord villages were one of the key social and economic systems of rural Iran until the "White Revolution" of the 1960s, where these mud-brick villages and surrounding land were owned by a powerful, usually absentee landlord, and the houses of both farmer and landlord were enclosed within the high village walls. The primary aim of the wider project was to use material culture and informant interview to understand more about the creation and reproduction of social structures and systems within these villages, particularly in terms of power and gender relations (Fazeli and Young 2013; Young and Fazeli 2013). This project has offered different understandings of the villages and relations between different groups within them, and also hopes to be able to revisit some of the villages in the near future with Iranian tourism representatives, with the possible view of exploring their heritage potential. Finding ways of presenting sites such as these villages, which are strongly linked to the White Revolution and deposition of the last Shah of Iran, is a challenge, and one that of course requires consultation and input from communities still linked to the sites.

The distinctive mud-brick villages of Oman are a significant representation of the recent past and rural ways of life prior to modernization from the 1970s onward (Korn 2010; Ministry of Heritage and Culture 2014a, 2014b), and Young (Young et al. [2017]) is currently directing an historical archaeology project in the mud-brick village of Bat (Figure 4). The aim of this project is to document the

FIGURE 4. The traditional mud-brick village in Bat, Oman. (Photo by Alasdair Brooks, 2015.)

creation and reproduction of sociopolitical power structures and systems within the old, abandoned village, which is to be achieved through the analysis of material culture (standing buildings, excavation and artifact analysis) and informant interview. Given the major social, economic, and political changes that have taken place in the recent past in Oman, such as contact with European expansionist powers from the 16th century onward and the *nahda* ("renaissance") following the accession of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos to the throne in 1970 (Valieri 2009:130–131), we are interested in the role of buildings in the creation and continuation of both memory and heritage, and also learning about the ways in which people lived within the mud-brick village and responded to these major changes in Omani life. While there are histories of Oman and anthropological studies of different aspects of society, and even architectural studies of civic and vernacular buildings, there have been no archaeological studies of the recent past. This project also aims to develop a significant heritage dimension. The mud-brick oasis of Bat can be viewed as a potential heritage resource, which could be linked to developments of the nearby World Heritage prehistoric sites and structures at Bat, Al Khutm, and Al Ain. What is critical in any heritage development in the 21st century is the involvement of local stakeholders in any planning and decision making, and this project is deeply entwined with local people, both as participants in interviews around use of space and memories, and through outreach and open days. Authenticity in heritage is increasingly recognized as important both to those being represented in heritage and in high-quality cultural tourism; e.g., Xu et al. (2014). By drawing on results of archaeology, ethnography, and building analysis, the results of this project can be used to provide information about the village, so that any heritage initiatives would be able to claim authenticity.

Conclusion

It is important to stress that this is only a sample of recent and current projects, and that the authors may have not included projects of great interest in the wider region. Publication of the results of these projects in journals accessible to a European and North American readership is therefore vital, to both ensure that their work is reaching the widest audience possible, and also so that historical archaeologists worldwide can recognize the huge potential in this region and the particular research issues of importance here. While publishing in local and regional journals is also important to raise the profile of historical archaeology in specific countries and regions, moving beyond country and area boundaries is necessary too.

Some of the key issues and challenges for historical archaeology in the Middle East include raising the profile of the discipline and showing that the archaeology of the post-medieval to the recent past is important and should be undertaken in its own right, not simply as an adjunct to "serious" prehistoric, Byzantine, or Islamic archaeology. Funding of course is always an issue, and much work around archaeology and heritage is a focus in countries with oil money and a strong drive to increase tourism, while those countries without oil money are often at the mercy of Western academics and their research interests, which, to date, do not often include the recent past.

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