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**of**  
**The Society for Arabian Studies**  
**جمعية دراسات الجزيرة العربية**

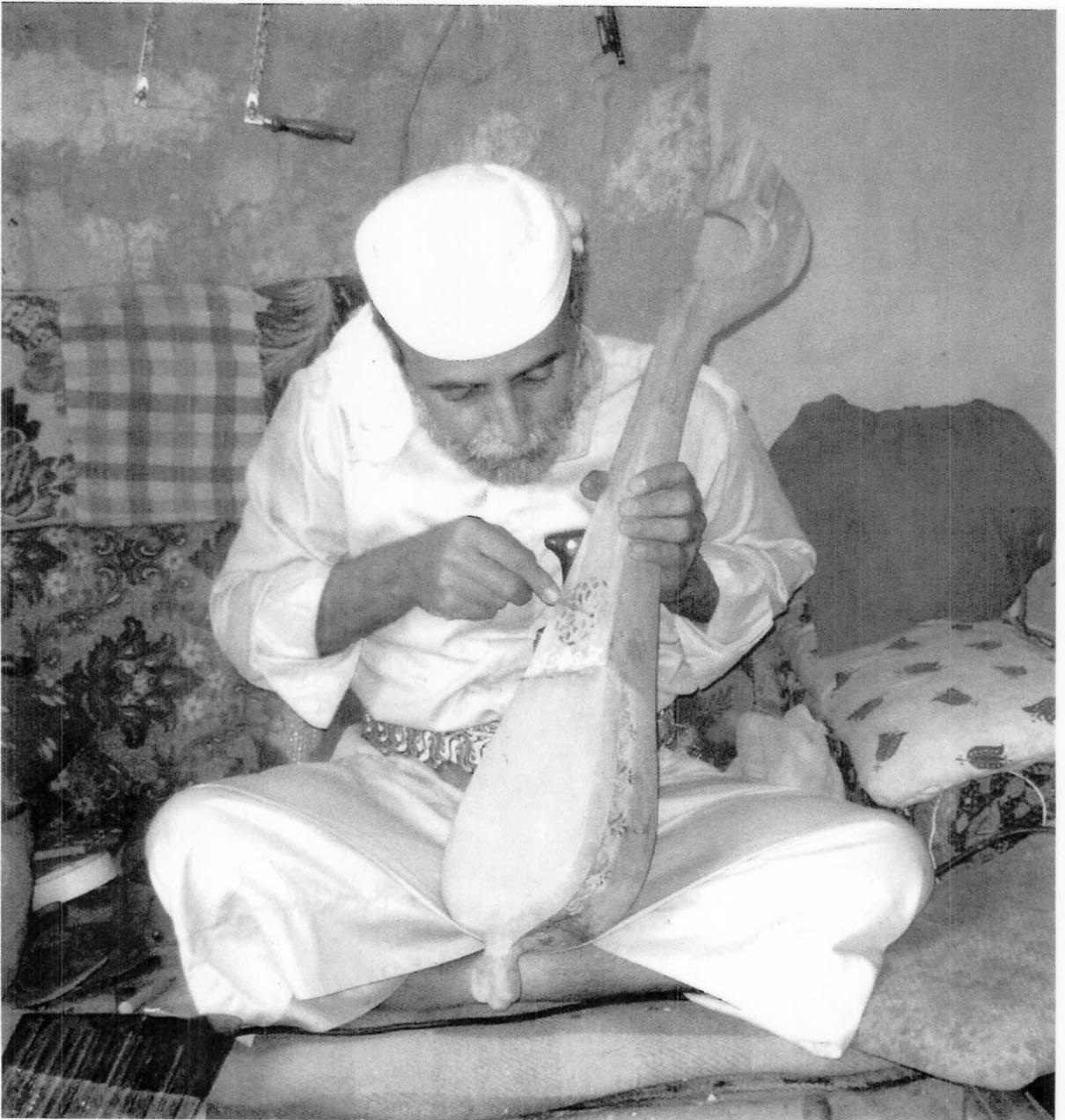
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# CONTENTS

<b>A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN</b>	4		
<b>SOCIETY FOR ARABIAN STUDIES NEWS</b>	5		
<b>Monograph Series</b>	5		
<b>Grants in Aid of Research</b>	5		
– Society Grants-in-aid 2006	6		
– <i>Hawārī: Soqatra's hidden maritime treasure.</i> Grant report by Julian Jansen van Rensburg	6		
<b>Biennial Conference 2006</b>			
– <i>Natural Resources and Cultural Connections: Red Sea Project III.</i> Report by Janet Starkey	6		
<b>Biennial Conference 2008</b>			
– <i>Death and Burial in Arabia: From prehistory to today.</i> Announcement of 2008 conference	9		
<b>British Archaeological Mission in Yemen (BAMY)</b>	9		
– <i>Arab Trading Communities of the Medieval Malabar Coast: Summary of fieldwork in Yemen 2006–07.</i> (Sebastian Prange)	9		
– <i>Preliminary excavations at Al-Kashawba' 2006.</i> (Carl Phillips)	10		
<b>Lectures and Lecture Reports 2006</b>	11		
– <i>The Re-discovery of Madā'in Sālih, Ancient Hegra, Saudi Arabia.</i> (Laïla Nehmé)	11		
– <i>Arabia's History in the Nineteenth Century: A list of petty wars and intestine broils.</i> (Dr Paul Dresch)	12		
– <i>Hawārī: Soqatra's hidden maritime treasure.</i> (Julian Jansen van Rensburg)	16		
<b>Lecture Programme 2007</b>	17		
<b>ARABIAN NEWS AND RESEARCH</b>	18		
– General Interest	18		
– Bahrain	23		
– Kuwait	23		
– Oman	25		
– Qatar	26		
– Saudi Arabia	26		
– United Arab Emirates	27		
– Yemen	34		
<b>Grants and Prizes</b>	37		
<b>Societies and Associations</b>	39		
<b>Information Online</b>	41		
<b>Conferences, Seminars and Events 2006–07</b>	41		
<b>Museums and Exhibitions</b>	45		
		<b>Book Reviews</b>	47
		Robert Killick and Jane Moon (eds), <i>The Early Dilmun Settlement at Saar.</i> (Søren Fredslund Andersen)	47
		Mark J. Beech, <i>In the Land of the Ichthyophagi: Modelling fish exploitation in the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman from the 5th millennium BC to the late Islamic period.</i> (Geoff Bailey)	48
		Patricia Baker and Barbara Brend (eds), <i>Sifting Sands, Reading Signs: Studies in honour of Professor Géza Fehérvári.</i> (Venetia Porter)	49
		Mansour al-Hazimi, Ezzat Khattab et al. <i>Beyond the Dunes: An anthology of modern Saudi literature.</i> (Peter Clark)	50
		John F. T. Keane, <i>Six Months in the Hijaz: Journeys to Makkah and Madinah, 1877–1878.</i> (Andrew Thompson)	51
		Arthur J. B. Wavell, <i>A Modern Pilgrim in Mecca and a Siege in Sanaa.</i> (John Shipman)	52
		James Nicholson, <i>The Hejaz Railway.</i> (Paul Lunde)	53
		Alan Villiers, <i>Sons of Sindbad and Sons of Sindbad: The photographs.</i> (Dionisius A. Agius)	53
		Alexander Maitland, <i>Wilfred Thesiger: The life of the great explorer.</i> (Janet Starkey)	55
		Michael Quentin Morton, <i>In the Heart of the Desert: The story of an exploration geologist and the search for oil in the Middle East.</i> (Julian Lush)	56
		Leila Ingrams, <i>Yemen Engraved: Illustrations by foreign travellers, 1680–1903.</i> (Sarah Searight)	57
		Sheila Unwin, <i>The Arab Chest.</i> (Sarah Searight)	57
		<b>Publications</b>	58
		– Books and articles (A–Z by author)	58
		– Journals, conference proceedings, magazines and newsletters (A–Z by title)	61
		<b>Obituaries</b>	64
		Ralph Daly OBE (Julian Paxton)	64
		Professor W. Montgomery Watt (Carole Hillenbrand)	64
		Rosemary Said Zahlan (Shelagh Weir)	65
		<b>Acknowledgments</b>	

Front Cover: Fuad al-Quturi (the last *qanbus* maker) working on the Horniman *qanbus* in his workshop at Sanaa.  
Photo: Samir Mokrani, courtesy of Paul Hughes Smith.

8–10) this is no surprise, but for the otherwise excellent systematic pottery analysis in Chapter 6, one could wish that the interesting chronological and spatial observations made from the pottery sample had been applied to a full pottery analysis and integrated into an intra-site discussion.

Systematic analyses combining different categories of information, eg the architectural phasing and pottery chronology, are very few, and so are more detailed spatial and chronological analyses. Furthermore, no attempt has been made to place the Saar settlement in a broader local and regional context. In compensation, the authors' efforts to publish promptly and to share their results with others by making their archives available must be acknowledged and commended. The results are significant and form an excellent supplement to previous research, while the clear presentation of the data will be a useful source of information for future syntheses. Furthermore, ideas and methods have been introduced into Gulf archaeology which make the Saar report both interesting and thought-provoking. Despite the limitations mentioned above, this final volume from the London–Bahrain Archaeological Expedition provides a unique insight into the material culture of a village society in the Early Dilmun period.

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***In the Land of the Ichthyophagi  
Modelling fish exploitation in the Arabian Gulf  
and Gulf of Oman from the 5th millennium BC  
to the Late Islamic period***

Mark J. Beech



Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004.  
BAR International Series 1217,  
xxi + 293 pages. Large-format  
softback. 126 figures and 232  
tables. Abstract, bibliography, 8  
appendices. £41.00.  
ISBN: 1- 84171-577-8

This volume sets out with  
exemplary clarity and detail  
the results of the author's PhD

on fish remains from archaeological sites in the Arabian Gulf. The bulk of the study, and a substantial part of the present volume (Chapter 5), is taken up with the presentation of detailed analyses and statistics on the fish bone material from 23 recently excavated or previously unstudied assemblages, ranging in age from the Ubaid period in the 5th millennium BC to the Late Islamic period, with reference to previously published studies including material from further afield in the Gulf of Oman and Iran. This is a long and technical chapter packed with tables of statistics, which will appeal only to the most dedicated archaeozoologist or to other specialists working on fish data in the Gulf. It

is sandwiched between two groups of chapters of introductory and concluding material respectively, which offer more varied and palatable fare. The introductory chapters set out the principal objectives of the study (Chapter 1), the environmental and archaeological background (Chapter 2), a detailed and informative survey of modern fisheries data (Chapter 3), and a broad overview of current knowledge of fishing based on published information about fish bone collections and artefacts used in fishing such as net sinkers and fish hooks (Chapter 4). The later group of chapters considers the results of the technical analyses in the light of a range of themes: environment and ecology (Chapter 6), regional and environmental variation, seasonality and transhumance (Chapter 7), storage and trade (Chapter 8), and a short conclusion (Chapter 9).

Most of the material is from sites in the United Arab Emirates, reflecting the author's main area of experience and field activity, and especially the important and recently investigated Ubaid site of Dalma on Dalma Island, where he has played a key role as a member of the Abu Dhabi Islands Archaeological Survey. Dalma alone accounts for nearly a third of the total bone material analysed in this study. Eleven of the remaining assemblages are from two closely related clusters of sites, also on offshore islands in the southern Gulf: Merawah with sites mostly of Islamic date but also some Ubaid material; and Sir Bani Yas with sites of late pre-Islamic date (6th to 7th centuries AD). The Ubaid sites examined here are of particular interest in representing the earliest-known expression of coastal settlement in the Gulf and include Al-Sabiyah in Kuwait and the intriguing site of Dosariyah in Saudi Arabia, though the views of Oates *et al* (1977) and Masry (1977) resulting from the evidence of this site are not mentioned here. Other mostly smaller assemblages come from a scattering of sites with Bronze Age, Iron Age or later material.

What can we learn from this body of material? Clearly a large part of such a study must be taken up with technical issues and methods of analysis and this is far from a trivial issue. The author has devoted considerable time and energy to building up a modern reference collection of 215 modern fish specimens representing 112 species, a substantial achievement in its own right, and a major investment that will benefit future studies. Over 60,000 bone specimens were examined, and many were measured to aid in identification and reconstructions of fish sizes in a highly labour-intensive piece of research. Much attention is devoted to the problems and potential biasing effects of varying sample size, differential preservation and less than complete recovery methods – many collections were recovered by sieving through 4 mm mesh, which is likely to miss small but informative bones and to under-represent small-sized species, and 1 mm mesh size is now the standard in modern investigations.

Variability in species composition is determined mainly by local environmental conditions and shows a close similarity with regional variations in modern fisheries, with little evidence of any trends over time. Shallow-water and reef fish are present early and late in the sequence and so too are pelagic species such as tuna and mackerel. The latter are usually assumed to indicate deep-sea fishing although both are accessible in shallow inshore water at certain times of year. Analysis of seasonality casts doubt on the conventional view that fishing was a winter activity carried out by transhumant visitors from the interior. Tuna and mackerel are typically caught at this time of year but many other species prominent in these sites are best caught in the spring or summer months. In one of the most interesting analytical developments of the research, analysis of otoliths (ear-bones) from the Ubaid site of Umm al-Qaiwain demonstrates fishing over the period from spring to autumn. It has sometimes been assumed that regular annual growth increments in skeletal elements such as otoliths are not present in tropical fish. However, the author has undertaken a small control study on modern specimens from the Gulf that demonstrates otherwise and has successfully applied the technique to archaeological material. Such analyses are technically demanding but can provide a wide range of information not only on seasonality but also on fish growth rates and age structure, and these in their turn can inform on environmental trends and the varying impact of human fishing activity on the exploited fish populations. This is an important result and it is to be hoped that future work will build on it. A final brief discussion raises the question of fish storage and trade in fish products as deduced from the differential occurrence of different parts of the fish skeleton, but the available samples are too small and too hedged about with qualifications to provide more than a hint of such activity.

This research poses a number of wider questions about the economic status and role of ancient fishing communities in the Gulf, including the difficult question touched on but not resolved in this study of the relationship between fishing and land-based activities of pastoralism and agriculture. Interpretation of Arabian prehistory has often been informed by two underlying assumptions, that social and economic change was peripheral or subsidiary to major centres of development to the north, and that its peoples were until quite a late period predominantly nomadic. These notions seem increasingly at odds with evidence from many other parts of the world that productive coastlines are often precocious centres of social development in prehistory, supporting higher concentrations of settlement than their neighbouring hinterlands, facilitating sedentarism and cultural contact, and often acting as a pacemaker for change. The Gulf is

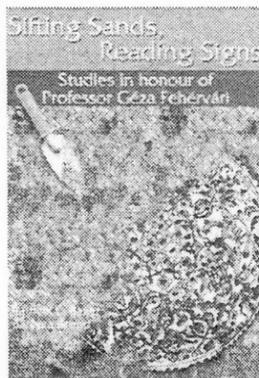
a fertile marine environment with highly productive fisheries by any standards, and it seems unlikely that these resources did not contribute in some way and from an early period to developments over a much wider territory. The fact that the earliest coastal people in the Gulf 7000 years ago were accomplished fishermen raises the even more tantalising question of the deeper history of such activity. Since sea level was substantially lower than the present earlier than 7000 years ago, any earlier coastal sites must now lie buried underwater, and underwater work in other parts of the world gives grounds for optimism that this submerged world is now technically within reach of archaeological investigation and capable of producing a rich harvest of new material (eg Flemming 2004). Wherever coastal sites are to be found, the surviving fish bones will provide a key source of evidence. This study points the way and provides an important foundation for the future. It is to be hoped that it will encourage new thinking, new field investigations with improved recovery techniques in excavation, larger bone collections and new research that further explores the fruitful area of mutual interest between fisheries biology and archaeology.

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- Oates, J., T.E. Davidson, D. Kamilli, & H. McKerrell (1977) Seafaring Merchants of Ur? *Antiquity* 51: 221–34.

#### *Sifting Sands, Reading Signs* *Studies in honour of Professor Géza Fehérvári* Patricia Baker and Barbara Brend (eds)



London: Furnace Publishing, 2006. 260 pp. Large-format softback. 16 colour plates; b/w illustrations. £24.99. ISBN: 0-9550266-0-1

This collection of twenty-six articles is a thoughtful and loving tribute to an inspirational teacher, archaeologist, scholar of Islamic art and kindest of colleagues. Fehérvári's continuing career, as outlined by Patricia Baker in the opening tribute, has been a fascinating one,