Proceedings

of the

Seminar for Arabian Studies

Volume 55

2026

Papers from the fifty-eighth meeting of the
Seminar for Arabian Studies
held at Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi,
12–14 December 2025

Seminar for Arabian Studies

Archaeopress
Oxford

Orders for copies of this volume of the *Proceedings* and all back numbers should be sent to
Archaeopress Publishing Ltd, 13–14 Market Square, Bicester, Oxfordshire OX26 6AD, UK.
Tel +44(0)1865-311914 Fax +44(0)1865-512231
e-mail info@archaeopress.com
http://www.archaeopress.com
For the availability of back issues see http://www.archaeopress.com
For more information on the Seminar for Arabian Studies and the *Proceedings* please visit the International Association for the Study of Arabia (IASA)'s website: https://www.theiasa.com/seminar/

Seminar for Arabian Studies
c/o Department of Archaeology, University of Durham
Lower Mount Joy, South Rd, Durham DH1 3LE
e-mail psas@theiasa.com
The International Association for the Study of Arabia (formerly The British Foundation for the Study of Arabia): https://www.theiasa.com/

MEMBERS OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE OF THE SEMINAR FOR ARABIAN STUDIES

The Steering Committee of the Seminar for Arabian Studies is currently made up of twenty-five academic members. The Editorial Committee of the *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* includes nine additional members as follows:

STEERING COMMITTEE

Dr José Carvajal López (Joint Chairperson, Assistant Editor of PSAS)
Professor Derek Kennet (Joint Chairperson)
Dr Guillaume Chang-To (Secretary)
Simon Alderson (Treasurer)
Dr Silvia Lischi (Editor of PSAS)
Dr Akshyeta Suryanarayan (Assistant Editor of PSAS)
Dr Daniel Eddisford (Assistant Editor of PSAS)
Dr Dennys Frenez (Assistant Editor of PSAS)
Dr Orhan Elmaz (Assistant Editor of PSAS)
Helen Knox (Copy-editor of PSAS)
Dr Valentina Azzarà
Dr Knut Bretzke
Dr Irene Rossi
Professor Robert Carter
Dr Arnulf Hausleiter
Dr Julian Jansen van Rensburg
Dr Steven Karacic
Dr Steffen Terp Laursen
Dr Jérémie Schiettecatte
Professor Michael C.A. Macdonald
Dr Janet Watson
Dr Jennifer Swerida
Noura Al Hameli
Professor Maurizio Cattani
Dr Eugenio Bortolini

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE: ADDITIONAL MEMBERS

Professor Alessandra Avanzini
Professor Soumyen Bandyopadhyay
Professor Ricardo Eichmann
Professor Clive Holes
Professor Khalil Al-Muaikel
Professor Daniel T. Potts
Professor Christian J. Robin
Dr Janet Starkey
Professor Lloyd Weeks

Opinions expressed in papers published in the *Proceedings* are those of the authors and are not necessarily shared by the Editorial Committee.

© 2026 Archaeopress Publishing, Oxfordshire, UK.
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISSN 0308-8421
ISBN 978-1-80583-364-2
ISBN 978-1-80583-365-9 (e-PDF)

Contents

Guidelines and Transliteration iii

Editor's Foreword v

In Memoriam. Vittoria Buffa (1943–2026) vii

In Memoriam. Harriet Crawford (13 May 1937–7 May 2026) x

The 2025 field season at Tell Abraq: an overview and some chronological revisions 1
Michele Degli Esposti, Maria Paola Pellegrino, Rosa Rivoltella, Giuseppe Coda, Pietro Perrucci, Federico Borgi & Rania Hussein Kannouma

Plastic, people, and the past: community action at Al Zubarah Archaeological Site 18
Margaux Montserrat De Pauw, Jose Saucedo & Ferhan Sakal

Iron Age mortuary practices in south-east Arabia: preliminary results from the Qaṭṭāra necropolis (Al-ʿAyn, UAE) 33
Michel de Vreeze, Mikaila Walker, Tatiana Valente, Lucie Dingwall, Fabian D Silva, Christophe Moulherat, Filipe Costa Vaz & Saif Albusaeedi

Catchment area analysis of Umm an-Nar rectilinear architecture sites in northern central Oman 52
Stephanie Döpper

The dispersed monastery on Ṣīr Banī Yās Island, Abu Dhabi, UAE: results of the 2025 excavations at two dispersed monastic cells (SBY0011 and SBY0014) 69
Maria Gajewska, Dominic Tomasi, Hager Almenhali, Fabian D Silva & Timothy Power

Isolation reconsidered: Jebel Barakah and Middle Palaeolithic landscape use — first results of the Al Dhafra Palaeolithic Project 87
Marc Händel, Norbert Buchinger, Noura Al Hameli & Kevin Lidour

Bronze Age burial practices at the oasis of Taymāʾ, north-west Arabia: archaeology, bioanthropology, chronology 103
Anne Kremmer, Arnulf Hausleiter, Alina Zur, Monice Timm & Majed Alonazi

Architectural phases and occupation horizons at Julfar al-Nudud (Ras al-Khaimah, UAE): results of the 2024–2025 excavations 123
Yvett Kujani

The rise of the Islamic Arabic epigraphic habit in the ninth–eleventh century: new evidence from Wādī Nakhlah (AlUla [al-ʿUlā] County, Saudi Arabia) 142
Julia Maczuga

The southern Ḥismā within the ancient and Islamic road network: a central or peripheral circulation channel? 158
Laïla Nehmé, Mohamed Hayyan & Jérôme Norris

Bioarchaeological excavations of the long-chamber Tomb 2 at Dibbā 76, Fujairah (UAE): the data framework 172
Kristina Pfeiffer, Julia Gresky, Heike Möller, Lydia Rust, Emmanuele Petiti & Salah A. Hassan

Between preservation and presentation: conservation of Al Jazeera Al Hamra's architectural heritage in a challenging environment 188
Hala Shankhour

Camel Hill, 'Throwing-Stick' Rocks, and People Rocks: motif concentrations in the rock art of the al-Ḥawrāʾ hinterland, Tabūk Province 204
Risa Tokunaga, Masahiro Etaya, Yasutomo Sato, Sultan Alrasheed, Saud Alhweiti, Naser Algoraibi, Deem Alsahli & So Hasegawa; With a contribution by Saud Alghamdi

Archaeometallurgical study of a small assemblage of copper-alloy artefacts from Thuqeībah–al-Madām (Sharjah, UAE) 221
Tatiana Valente, Carlos Fernández Rodríguez, Carmen del Cerro Linares & Paula Gómez Sanz

Special Session: Bahrain Archaeology Session

Introduction 237
Salman Almahari

The first season of the Aʿali West Archaeological Project in Bahrain 239
Masashi Abe, Kaoru Suemori, Tomoyo Kasahara, Takuma Nagao & Takashi Suzuki

Excavations at Hilla Archaeological Site, Bahrain (2024–2025) 249
Mashaal Alshamsi

Oxygen isotopes reveal water use and animal management in Bahrain from the Early Dilmun to the Islamic period 256
Caitlin Bonham Smith & Judith Littleton

New perspectives on Muharraq Town, Bahrain: insights from the early Islamic period and from 1600 to 1950 274
Samantha Dobson

Coins in Tylos and late pre-Islamic Bahrain: unpublished material from the Bahrain National Museum 287
Sergey Lapteff

Archaeology and urban planning in Bahrain: integrating heritage into contemporary landscapes 295
Melanie Muenzner

3D measurements of historical Islamic tombstones in Bahrain (2023–2025) 306
Takuma Nagao, Ayano Yamada & Masashi Abe

Funerary practices of the Tylos period through the excavation of the Maqaba burial mounds, Bahrain 315
Kiyohide Saito, Yohei Iwakoshi, Yumiko Oyabu, Yu Itahashi & Minoru Yoneda

Titles of papers read at the Seminar for Arabian Studies held at Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi, 12–14 December 2025 326

Guidelines and Transliteration

Guidelines for Authors

For details on the submission of papers and the preparation of papers for publication, authors are requested to consult and follow the latest *Guidelines for Authors.* These are available on the International Association for the Study of Arabia website at https://www.theiasa.com/seminar/publication/. Please contact the editors on https://www.theiasa.com/seminar/publication/ for further information.

Formatting

Electronic versions of papers being submitted for publication should be set in Times New Roman 12-point typeface if at all possible, with double-line spacing on A4-paper size and 2.45 cm margins all round.

The IASA System of Transliteration of Relevant Characters

Quotations, single words, and phrases from Arabic or other languages written in non-Roman alphabets, are transliterated according to the systems set out below.

- We firmly encourage authors to use the correctly transliterated form of any place name, but the names used for types of pottery, archaeological periods, and cultures which have become archaeological standards should be used in that form: Umm an-Nar, Julfar ware, etc. If any place name needs to be given in a non-standard format, the correctly transliterated form should be added in the first instance in any paper (see *Guidelines for Authors* for more details).
- Personal names, toponyms, and other words that have entered English or French in a particular form, should be used in that form when they occur in an English or French sentence, unless they are part of a quotation in the original language, or of a correctly transliterated name or phrase. In the latter cases, they should be correctly transliterated, even when they occur in an English or French sentence.

1. Arabic

ء	M	ج	j	ذ	dh (dh)	ش	sh (sh)	ظ	ẓ	ق	q	ن	n
ب	b	ح	ḥ	ر	r	ص	ṣ	ع	K	ك	k	ه	h
ت	t	خ	kh (kh)	ز	z	ض	ḍ	غ	gh (gh)	ل	l	و	w
ث	th (th)	د	d	س	s	ط	ṭ	ف	f	م	m	ي	y
Vowels		a i u ā ī ū		Diphthongs		aw	ay						

The underlined variants can be used to avoid any ambiguity, e.g. *lam yu<u>sh</u>ir* vs. *lam yushir.*

Initial *hamzah* is omitted.

Alif maqṣūrah is transliterated as ā.

The *lām* of the article is not assimilated before the 'sun letters', thus the form should be *al-shams* but not *ash-shams.*

The *hamzat al-waṣl* of the article should be shown after vowels except after the preposition *li-*, as in the Arabic script, e.g. *wa-ʾl-wazīr*, *fīʾl-bayt*, but *li-l-wazīr.*

Tāʾ marbūṭah (ة) should be rendered *-ah*, except in a construct: e.g. *birkah*, *zakāh*, and *birkat al-sibāḥah*, *zakāt al-fiṭr.*

2. Persian, Urdu, and Ottoman Turkish

Please transliterate these languages using the system set out for Arabic above with the additional letters transliterated according to the system in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-islamica/system-of-transliteration-of-arabic-and-persian-characters-transliteration) except that *ž* is used instead of *zh*. There is a useful table to convert Ottoman Turkish to modern Turkish characters on http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ottoman_Turkish_language.

3. Ancient North and South Arabian Consonants:

ʾ b t t̲ ḥ g h̲ d d̲ r z s¹ s² s³ ṣ

ḍ ṭ ẓ ʿ ġ f q k l m n h w y

4. Other Semitic languages

Please use the transliteration systems outlined in the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* (BASOR) 262 (1986), p. 3. (www.jstor.org/stable/i258780).

Editor's Foreword

The Seminar for Arabian Studies is the longest-running academic forum for the presentation of research on the cultural heritage of the Arabian Peninsula. Since its first meeting in 1968, the Seminar has covered a wide range of subjects, including archaeology, epigraphy, history, ethnography, art, architecture, linguistics, and literature from prehistory to the present. In recent years, the Seminar has developed as an increasingly international forum, bringing together scholars working on Arabia and its wider connections across different institutional and geographical settings. The 58th Seminar marked a particularly significant moment in this trajectory, as it was held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, bringing the Seminar to the Arabian Peninsula for the first time.

The 58th Seminar for Arabian Studies, held from 12 to 14 December 2025, was hosted at Zayed National Museum, in Abu Dhabi, in association with the Department of Culture and Tourism, to whom everyone associated with this Seminar is deeply grateful. The museum offered a particularly appropriate setting for a meeting devoted to the scholarly study of the cultural and natural heritage of Arabia. Its wonderful galleries explore the history, landscapes, communities, and long-term development of the United Arab Emirates and the wider region, many of which were also addressed in the Seminar programme. The reconstructed Bronze Age 'Magan Boat' provided a particularly relevant point of connection, recalling the maritime networks, technical knowledge, and long-distance exchanges that have shaped the history of Arabia and the Gulf. Holding the Seminar in this setting thus gave the meeting a particular resonance, bringing scholarly discussion into close contact with the material and historical worlds that form the focus of its research.

The meeting brought together scholars working across a wide chronological, geographical, and disciplinary range. The programme included ninety-two papers and sixteen posters, covering periods from the Palaeolithic to the recent past, alongside new technological and scientific approaches. The breadth of the programme reflects the vitality of current research across Arabia, with contributions addressing field archaeology, epigraphy, bioarchaeology, landscape studies, heritage management, museum collections, scientific analyses, and digital methods.

As in previous years, 'Special Sessions' provided a platform for focused discussion on areas of particular scholarly importance. One Special Session, organized by Dr Salman Almahari, Director-General of Archaeology at the Bahrain Authority for Culture & Antiquities, was devoted to the archaeology of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Bringing together Bahraini and international researchers, it highlighted the exceptional richness of Bahrain's archaeological record and the continuing importance of collaborative research in developing new interpretations of Bahrain's past. The papers presented in this session covered almost four millennia, from the Early Dilmun period to the Tylos era and the Islamic period to contemporary heritage management. Eight of the papers from this Special Session are included in the present volume.

A second Special Session was dedicated to epigraphy, one of the fields that has long been central to the Seminar. The contributions ranged from the recent advances in the decipherment of the Dhofari epigraphic complex, to the epigraphy of al-ʿUlā, and *longue durée* approaches to the Ḥismā region. Together, the two Special Sessions reflect the Seminar's capacity to combine regional focus with broader methodological and disciplinary questions.

The Seminar also included the Society of Antiquaries of London, Beatrice de Cardi keynote lecture delivered by Dr Steffen T. Laursen and entitled *The Amorites and the Arabian Gulf Region*. This lecture formed an important part of a programme that combined detailed case studies with broader regional and methodological perspectives.

This volume of the *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* (*PSAS*) includes twenty-two papers presented at the ordinary and Special Sessions held in Abu Dhabi. Our thanks go to all the authors who submitted papers and to the anonymous reviewers who contributed to the academic quality of the volume. The December date of the 58th Seminar is outside the normal operating cycle of the Seminar and *PSAS* and necessarily affected the publication schedule of this volume. While it was therefore not possible for the volume to appear before the July/August 2026 Seminar in Bologna, it has nevertheless been published within a year of the Abu Dhabi meeting. Keeping to this strict

schedule preserves the Seminar's commitment to timely publication and allows the series to return, from the next volume onwards, to its customary summer publication schedule. This outcome was made possible by the efforts of the whole editorial team: the editor together with the assistant editors, José Carvajal López, Akshyeta Suryanarayan, Daniel Eddisford, Dennys Frenez, and Orhan Elmaz. We are also grateful to Patrick Harris and Erin McGowan of Archaeopress, whose dedicated work greatly facilitated publication. Finally, we wish to thank Helen Knox, our copy-editor, whose indefatigable and meticulous work helped bring this volume to completion.

Most importantly, the Seminar Steering Committee would like to express its gratitude to the Abu Dhabi Department of Culture and Tourism in particular its Chairman, His Excellency Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak and the Undersecretary, His Excellency Saood Abdulaziz Al Hosani, as well as the Zayed National Museum and its director Dr Peter Magee and the whole ZNM team for their excellent and diligent work in helping to set up and run the 58th Seminar so successfully. It was a wonderful experience for all, and perfectly reflected the best and deepest Arabian traditions of kind and generous hospitality.

The Seminar for Arabian Studies and *PSAS* are organized by the Seminar Steering Committee and the International Association for the Study of Arabia (IASA). For additional information please contact the Seminar Secretary Guillaume Chang-To (seminar@theiasa.com). The IASA is a charitable organization, registered in the UK, that promotes research on the cultural and natural heritage of the Arabian Peninsula. IASA publishes two issues of its bulletin annually. For further information about IASA, please e-mail contact@theiasa.com or visit the IASA website www.theiasa.com.

Silvia Lischi
July 2026

Society of Antiquaries of London, Beatrice de Cardi keynote lecture

This year's lecture entitled *The Amorites and the Arabian Gulf region*, was given by Dr Steffen T. Laursen.

The Beatrice de Cardi Awards are administered by the Society of Antiquaries of London. The grants are worth up to £15,000 for archaeological research on the United Arab Emirates, the Sultanate of Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the Pakistan province of Balochistan.

The deadline for applications is 15 January annually.

More information is available at www.sal.org.uk/what-we-do/grants/our-grant-programmes/

In Memoriam

Vittoria Buffa (1943–2026)



I met Vittoria Buffa several times in the 1990s at the annual meetings of scholars on pre-Islamic Arabia, but our collaboration and friendship began when she arrived in Oman with Alexander Sedov in 2000. It was then that I began to appreciate her well-defined scholarly profile and her personality.

Vittoria's archaeological activity took place in chronologically varied sites: prehistoric and Bronze Age sites in southern Italy, the Yemeni plateau and the Aden region, a large South Arabian city from the Iron Age, and a classical-period port in Oman. Vittoria's distinctive approach as a scholar can be traced back to her training and collaboration with Renato Peroni, director of the Prehistory and Protohistory section at the Sapienza National School of Archaeology. Under Peroni's direction, Vittoria acquired, during this initial phase, a particularly refined methodology for excavating and studying finds, typical of protohistoric archaeology. These acquired skills proved invaluable in later stages of her career, when she worked in Yemen and Oman.

From 1980 to 1994 she participated in excavations, primarily in Calabria, at Broglio di Trebisacce and Torre Mordillo, directed by Renato Peroni. During the same years, as a scientific collaborator for the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, she also carried out the cataloguing of protohistoric materials for the L. Pigorini Museum in Rome. Peroni's group studied the previously unknown period from the Middle Bronze Age to the beginning of the Iron Age in Calabria. At the Broglio excavation, Vittoria supervised a section, the 'house of the *dolii*', where Mycenaean painted pottery was found along with large containers for storing oil. Based on analyses of the ceramics found during the excavations, trade with the Mycenaean world was evident and artisans of Mycenaean origin probably resided in Broglio.

By a lucky chance, a new phase in Vittoria's career began in the late 1980s. In Sana'a, where she had gone to visit a relative who worked for the cooperation, she met Alessandro de Maigret. A sincere friendship and great mutual respect would develop. The Italian Archaeological Mission to Yemen, led by Alessandro, began in 1980, and Vittoria participated from 1987. That same year, the Italian Mission was involved in the construction of the capital's new Archaeological Museum. Vittoria, together with Sabina Antonini and Maurizio Cattani, organized the materials in the display cases of the Hall of Prehistory. As part of the Italy-Yemen archaeological cooperation, she gave lectures to young Yemeni archaeologists.

Subsequently, she participated in the prospection and excavation of Bronze Age sites on the Yemeni plateau and in the excavation of Baraqish. Alexander de Maigret's high regard for Vittoria's work led him to recommend her collaboration to other colleagues working in Yemen. Vittoria participated in eight excavation campaigns at Timna with the French Archaeological Mission led by Christian Robin between 1999 and 2006 in the market square and necropolis, and from 1995 to 2002 in numerous excavations conducted by the German-Russian Archaeological Mission, led by Burkhard Vogt and Alexander Sedov. Burkhard and Alexander were interested in the late prehistory and Bronze Age in the Aden region, periods that Vittoria had also studied as part of Alexander's mission to the plateau ten years earlier. These were years of intense work in several sites: in 1995 and 1996 at Sabir; in 1997 and 1998 at Malayba; in 1999 on the Gulf of Aden coast; and in 2002 at an-Nabwa (third–second millennium BC) in Little Aden.

At Malayba, Vittoria conducted an extensive study of the irrigation system and the site's second-millennium BC pottery, a previously unknown material. Studying such a vast quantity of pottery fragments requires great accuracy, discipline, and imagination in the difficult task of matching them together. The study of Malayba pottery, certainly one of Vittoria's major scientific achievements, became her doctoral thesis, which she defended in Aix-en-Provence in 2003.

In 2000 Vittoria took part in the excavation of the shell middens of Khor Umayrah, halfway between Aden and Bab al-Mandeb — it was in the middle of nowhere, in a sandy desert reaching the sea, with no infrastructure, housing, or water. Moreover, working conditions in Yemen after the 1994 civil war were generally very difficult. Aspects of Vittoria's personality clearly emerged in those years and those working conditions. Vittoria had the qualities of a 'mountain woman' ready to face difficulties and the complete lack of any comfort, but at the same time she never lost her ladylike features, her natural elegance. She was equally at ease both in her excavation clothes and in a Givenchy dress.

Vittoria was a close friend of Burkhard and Alexander and they continued to see each other over the years. She went as far as Easter Island to visit Burkhard, and she enjoyed speculating on the meaning of a remarkable boat-shaped earthwork in Tepeu.

Thanks to her friendship and shared work with Alexander, Vittoria arrived in Oman. The mission in Oman had begun a few years earlier. After my experience as an epigrapher in Yemen when, as often happened then and in subsequent years, the political situation made fieldwork impossible, I accepted an invitation to travel to Oman in 1996 and saw Sumhuram for the first time. The decision to study the history of the Sumhuram settlement was dictated, I must confess, more by the site's magical beauty than by its potential interest. Sumhuram had already been partially excavated in the 1950s by an American mission, and it didn't seem possible to extract much new historical-archaeological data. This assumption soon proved wrong. After more than twenty years of excavations and surveys in the area, the port of Sumhuram has provided many new insights into the history of the ancient states of southern Arabia, the relationship between sea and land trade, and the development of long-distance sea trade between the Mediterranean, Egypt, the Horn of Africa, and India. It was the first fully excavated city in southern Arabia, and has thus provided data on its urban organization, the changes in architectural structures over time, and the religious and material life of its inhabitants.

Vittoria arrived at a crucial moment for the mission. At the beginning of this millennium, after brief prospecting campaigns, I decided to begin a systematic excavation of the city and enlisted the help of Alexander Sedov, whom I had met in Yemen, and at his suggestion, Vittoria, to whom I would entrust the study of the ceramics. The work of an archaeologist, and especially of someone like Vittoria who studied ceramics, requires an expert eye, the utmost precision, and the creation of typological grids. It is a laborious and often thankless task. I have always admired the enthusiasm with which Vittoria explained to me the criteria for designing the best grid for arranging the material. Her background as a prehistoric archaeologist certainly helped, but so did her sensitive and precise nature.

The well-known relations between Sumhuram and India led Vittoria and me to a conference in Cochin in 2013, where we met P.J. Cherian, head of the archaeological mission in Pattanam. Scientific collaborations and an intellectual exchange gave rise to a sincere friendship between the three of us. Vittoria returned to Pattanam in the following years to study the pottery with Cherian and his fantastic team.

Beyond a thorough stratigraphic analysis and study of ceramic typologies, there is a further level of study, which is not always possible. For each stratigraphic phase, the ceramic typology must be combined with the typology of objects, coins, any texts, and architectural structures. Only from this complex work can we reconstruct the relative and then absolute chronology of a settlement. Starting from the typology carried out by Alexia Pavan, with her 2019 book *The Becoming of a Town*, Vittoria reconstructed the chronology of large neighbourhoods of the city, their function, architectural evolution, and the daily life of its inhabitants.

As for our personal relationship, although I immediately perceived the scholar's seriousness and value, I couldn't completely connect with Vittoria. She seemed a bit cold and inflexible. These character traits have often proved very useful. Archaeological missions are made up of a group (often quite large) of people of different ages and

expertise. Everyone lives in the same house, and likes and dislikes arise. The risk of turning a work group into a sort of summer camp is strong. Even more so in our case; the wonderful climate, the mission house on the ocean, could have given the impression of being on holiday in Oman. Vittoria, however, didn't run this risk and had a firm sense of boundaries.

Over the years, I grew deeply fond of Vittoria. I enjoyed being with her and talking to her. She was affectionate within her reserved nature, and it is no coincidence that she was so highly respected and loved by her family. She had become a true friend. I miss her, I will miss her.

Alessandra Avanzini
August 2026

In Memoriam

Harriet Crawford (13 May 1937–7 May 2026)



Born in 1937, Harriet Elizabeth Walston Crawford will be warmly remembered as a major scholar of both Mesopotamian and Arabian Gulf archaeology, as well as a mentor, communicator, and friend to many. Her academic career spanned over half a century, beginning with her 1962 PhD on Mesopotamian architecture, supervised by Sir Max Mallowan at the Institute of Archaeology, London. The contents were published in 1977 as *The Architecture of Iraq in the Third Millennium BC*. Her last major work, *Ur: City of the Moon God*, was published in 2015 while she continued to contribute chapters to edited volumes until 2019. While her association with Mallowan linked her to the pioneering age of excavations in Mesopotamia, she remained up to date and engaged with new discoveries in archaeology until her final years.

Harriet's PhD and several subsequent works were concerned with architecture, but the central theme of much of her research was trade and communication between regions and cultures. This was first demonstrated in a seminal article in 1973, 'Mesopotamia's invisible exports in the third millennium BC' (a paper that she herself considered to be her most significant contribution to her field), followed by another in 1974, 'The problem of tin in Mesopotamian bronzes'. Not content with using only data gathered by others, Harriet was active in fieldwork, and much of her success was due to her involvement in field projects. She worked at Abu Salabikh with the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, and went on to co-found major projects in Bahrain (Saar) and Kuwait (H3 Al Sabiyah). She was closely involved with the British School of Archaeology in Iraq, acting as Vice Chair in 1999–2000, then Acting Head of the Appeal Committee, and Chair of the BISI Visiting Scholars Committee until 2012. She provided a steady hand as the institution adjusted to a prolonged loss of access to Iraq, and as it prepared to transition to the British Institute for the Study of Iraq (BISI). She organized and co-edited a conference with BISI on Regime Change in the Ancient Near East and Egypt in 2004 (published in 2007). Her involvement continued thereafter, and the Institute's visiting scholarship programme was partly funded by her own charitable foundation (the Thriplow Charitable Trust, set up with her husband Sir Peter Swinnerton-Dyer).

Harriet shifted her focus to the archaeology of the Arabian Gulf in the 1990s, joining a wider post-Gulf War exodus of Mesopotamia experts from Iraq, and building on her long-standing interests in the regions that traded with southern Mesopotamia. Her work with Jane Moon and Robert Killick at Saar, Bahrain, resulted in a string of articles with her collaborators that immensely enriched our understanding of the Early Dilmun period in Bahrain. She co-authored *The Dilmun Temple at Saar* (1997) and produced an invaluable catalogue and analysis of Dilmun seals and seal impressions (*Early Dilmun Seals from Saar*, 2001), providing a cornerstone text in glyptic studies. Her shift in research culminated in *Dilmun and its Gulf Neighbours* (1998), which introduced the still nascent field of Gulf archaeology to a new generation of students. In 2000 she co-curated an exhibition on Dilmun, *Traces of Paradise*, at the Brunei Gallery, London, using objects from the Bahrain National Museum.

Following this, her drive for new research and her desire to provide research and funding outlets to the British Institute for the Study of Iraq, led her to Kuwait. Here, in the Al-Sabiyah region of northern Kuwait, a site known as H3 had been identified by Dr Fahad Al Wohaibi of the Kuwait National Museum as showing promising signs of

Ubaid-period interactions between southern Iraq and the Gulf region. A multi-year project followed that produced remarkable evidence for early trade and maritime technology, culminating in a co-authored site monograph *Maritime Interactions in the Arabian Neolithic* (2010).

Despite her involvement in Gulf archaeology she never gave up her love of the Sumerians (or 'those little bald men' as she sometimes described them). Her classic text, *Sumer and the Sumerians* (1993) was reissued numerous times and is still set as core reading. Its success was marked by a revised and expanded edition in 2004, which was translated into Turkish. *The Sumerian World* (2013) eventually followed during her active retirement, in which she collected and edited a huge range of papers, with a contribution of her own on Sumerian trade.

While conducting this research and writing, Harriet was first a Fellow at Lucy Cavendish College, Cambridge (1971–1990), and then taught Mesopotamian archaeology at the Institute of Archaeology, London (1990–2002), instilling a love of Mesopotamian and Arabian archaeology into new generations of archaeologists, academics, and museum experts. For many years she formed a formidable double-act with Dr Georgina Herrmann, with whom she shared an office as well as responsibility for teaching the archaeology of Mesopotamia. A student who ventured in to receive guidance from one would sometimes receive forthright advice from both. As a PhD supervisor, Harriet was diligent and direct but kind. As a lecturer and academic writer, her great skill was communication using simple yet elegant language — she had no time for overcomplex jargon-ridden prose that could only be understood by the writer and a handful of others. She was able to distil a level of detail and argument that supported both beginners and experts.

Following her retirement from the Institute of Archaeology, Harriet remained extremely active in research and publication. She was Reader Emerita at the Institute, Honorary Visiting Professor at UCL Qatar, and a Senior McDonald Fellow at the McDonald Institute, Cambridge. She remained active at BISI for many years.

Harriet was full of character. Small, sharp, witty, direct, and occasionally slightly terrifying; she had little time for muddled thinking, pomposity, or long-windedness ('blether'). Her kindness was immense — she provided personal and professional support to many students and others, and always welcomed visitors to her home in Thriplow with warmth and generosity. Her husband Peter predeceased her, and she is survived by her three children, James, Catharine, and Angus and numerous grandchildren. Her departure leaves us at a loss, but her legacy remains.

Robert Carter
August 2026