



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Hand-Shaped Adobe in Al-Ula Palm Grove (Northwest Saudi Arabia): Tracing the Use of an Ancient Technique in Early 20th-Century Oasian Architecture

KANHOUSH Y. ^{1,2,3}, CLAUSS-BALTY P. ¹, CASCETTA M. ¹, BEN BADER S. ¹, CHARBONNIER J. ¹*

¹ Archas (Archeaology, Cultural & Heritage), Lyon, France

² Archrient, CNRS/UMR 5133 (Maison de l'Orient et de la Miterran), Lyon, France

³ Centre franis de recherche de la pinsule Arabique (CEFREPA), Kowe, Kuwait

*Corresponding author

Abstract

In the early 20th century, Al-Ula oasis inhabitants employed hand-shaped adobe (HSA) to construct various structures within their gardens, including partition walls and houses. These carefully-built dwellings, made mainly from sun-dried earth clods formed by hand, demonstrate stability and adaptability to the harsh desert environment, suggesting that HSA may have performed comparably to molded adobe.

While late Ottoman photographs of Al-Ula depict its use, HSA's origins remain uncertain. Unlike molded adobe, which is prevalent at ancient sites in the Al-Ula Valley (Dadan and Hegra), HSA is notably absent, raising questions about its continuity or possible re-emergence. Indeed, HSA reflects ancient Near Eastern architectural practices from the late 9th to mid-7th millennia BCE, marking an early stage in earthen architecture before the widespread use of molded adobe.

This paper seeks to compare HSA's properties and methods with other building materials used in the palm grove. Additionally, we intend to identify similar techniques in other northwestern Arabian oases and beyond.

This research, part of the Al-Ula Cultural Oasis Project (UCOP), led by Archaios and funded and steered by the French Agency for AIUla Development on behalf of the Royal Commission for AIUla, aims to replace this technique within the region's architectural history.

Keywords

Hand-shaped adobe (HSA), Oasian earthen architecture, Architectural history, Late Ottoman/20th century, Northwestern Arabia

Session

8. Islamic archaeology

Type of paper

Oral presentation

