ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Uncovering AlUla Old Town: results of a multiscale study of urban dynamics in an Islamic medieval city

SOUBIRA T. [1]*, LOUMAN L. [1], ALMODARRA A. [3], ABOKADEJAH H. [2], GODEFROY A. [1], MANDON A. [1], OURAGHI N. [1], WASZAK M. [1]

[1] Archas, Paris, France
[2] Taibah University, Medina, Saudi Arabia
[3] King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

*Corresponding author

Abstract

Since 2021, the MUDUD project, or "Multiscalar Documentation for Urban Dynamics" has made significant strides in uncovering the history of the Old Town of AlUla, shedding light on human occupation from pre-Islamic times to the present.

The complexities of the urban environment have posed significant challenges for archaeological exploration. Indeed, the still standing walls of over 900 cadastral units, developed around Umm Nasir hill, creates a multi-layered archaeological context, where modern structures often obscure or interlace with older historical features. Despite these challenges, archaeological soundings have successfully identified significant mediaeval levels that reflect domestic activities or water management facilities.

This paper presents an overview of the history of the Old Town of AlUla from the beginning of Islam to the Saudi rule, reviewing our archaeological interventions across the city, with the support of pottery analysis and C14 data, and using a georeferenced database. Through methods derived from spatial analysis, it is possible to piece together the elements of this urban jigsaw. Overall, these recent discoveries not only enrich the narrative of AlUla's past but also challenge established understandings of urban development and social organization in the region, particularly during the Early Islamic period.

Keywords

Saudi Arabia, Islamic period, Historical documentation, Urban archaeology, Spatial analysis

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