



ABSTRACT SUBMISSION

Contextualizing Oases in the Archaeology and History of Arabia

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Abstract

In archaeological studies of Arabia, oases are central to interpretations of past cultures, economies, and sociopolitical organizations. Beginning with the Early Bronze Age, oases are viewed as pivotal nodes of concentrated resources and social interactions in the arid Arabian landscape that served as stages for fundamental developments in social complexity. Deeply entrenched in archaeological narratives of the region, this oasis-centered model of proto and early historic Arabia is further enshrined in the popular and scholarly consciousness by substantial investments heritage-based tourism around oasis sites. However, there is limited archaeological or epigraphic evidence to support a direct analogy between ancient sites and traditional (modern) Arabian oasis communities. In this paper, we discuss Arabian oases in the context of the available archaeological and ecological evidence. Additionally, we examine classical Islamic literature to assess whether and how oases were conceptualized and portrayed in historical discourse. Notably, the classical Arabic word for 'oasis'—*wḥḍa*—is a borrowing from Coptic, which may suggest that the concept was not indigenous to the Arabian Peninsula. Drawing especially on research in southeast Arabia, we consider resistance to "extra-oasis" narratives and the ways in which the over-emphasis on oases limits scholarly understanding of the resilient history of early Arabian societies.

Keywords

Oasis, Arabia, Heritage, Early Bronze Age, Class Islamic Literature

Session

1. Advances in Near Eastern Archaeology

Workshop

A16480SS - Is there really anything to be found there? Researching beyond the Established Frameworks of Near Eastern Archaeology

Type of paper

Oral presentation

