



Mapping and synthesizing ancient Arabia: The Maparabia project (2019-23)

Jérémie Schiettecatte, Irene Rossi

► To cite this version:

Jérémie Schiettecatte, Irene Rossi. Mapping and synthesizing ancient Arabia: The Maparabia project (2019-23). The International Association for the Study of Arabia Bulletin, 2021, 25, pp.17-18. halshs-03619697

HAL Id: halshs-03619697

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03619697>

Submitted on 25 Mar 2022

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial 4.0 International License

THE IASA BULLETIN



The Latest News and Research in the Arabian Peninsula



IASA
International Association
for the Study of Arabia
الرابطة الدولية لدراسة الجزيرة العربية

International Association for the Study of Arabia (IASA)

formerly the British Foundation for the Study of Arabia

Patron

Professor Valeria Piacentini

Trustees

Chair Dr Noel Brehony CMG

Treasurer Mr Simon Alderson

Hon Secretary Ms Amy Crossman

Website Co-ordinator Dr Robert Wilson,

Prof Dionisius Agius FBA, Dr Robert Bewley,

Prof Robert Carter, Prof Clive Holes FBA (co-opted),

Dr Julian Jansen van Rensburg, Dr Derek Kennet (co-opted),

Mr Michael C. A. Macdonald FBA,

Prof Peter Magee, Mr Gerard Russell,

Ms Ella Al-Shamahi

Grants

Chair Dr Derek Kennet, Dr Robert Bewley, Dr William Deadman

Monograph Series

Joint Editors Dr Derek Kennet, Dr St John Simpson

Seminar for Arabian Studies

Chair Dr Julian Jansen van Rensburg (Assistant Editor)

Treasurer Dr Robert Wilson,

Secretary 2021 Carolyn Perry

Dr Valentina Azzarà, Dr Knut Bretzke, Dr Orhan Elmaz (Assistant Editor), Dr. Arnulf Hausleiter,

Dr Steffen Terp Laursen, Dr Harry Munt (Assistant Editor),

Dr Tim Power (Assistant Editor), Prof Robert Carter,

Dr Bleda Düring, Dr Nadia Durrani, Dr Steven Karacic,

Dr Derek Kennet, Dr Jose Carvajal Lopez,

Mr Michael C.A. Macdonald FBA, Dr Irene Rossi,

Dr Janet Watson

PSAS Editor

2022 Dr Steven Karacic

Additional Members of PSAS Committee

Prof Alessandra Avanzini, Prof Soumyen Bandyopadhyay,

Dr Ricardo Eichmann, Prof Clive Holes, Prof Khalil Al-

Muaikel, Prof Daniel T. Potts, Prof Christian J. Robin,

Dr Janet Starkey, Prof Lloyd Weeks

The Bulletin

Editor Carolyn Perry, **Book Reviews** Dr Alexandra Hirst

Dr Noel Brehony & Marylyn Whaymand

The IASA Bulletin is an e-publication for members of the IASA. It is published twice a year, in Spring and Autumn. The Bulletin depends on the good will of IASA members and correspondents to provide contributions. News, items of general interest, details of completed postgraduate research, forthcoming conferences, meetings and special events are welcome.

Please email: bulletin@theiasa.com

The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors of the articles. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the IASA or its members.

Membership

Membership details are available from the IASA website www.theiasa.com/. For membership renewals contact William Deadman, IASA Membership Secretary, Department of Archaeology, Durham University, South Road, Durham, DH1 3LE, or email: membership@theiasa.com



For any enquiries:

contact@theiasa.com

Website: www.theiasa.com/



Cover photo: (c) Mukalla Museum, Yemen
See page 13. Country News and Research

Mapping and synthesizing ancient Arabia: The Maparabia project (2019-23)

Jérémie Schiettecatte (CNRS, UMR 8167 Orient et Méditerranée, Paris)

Irene Rossi (CNR, Istituto di Scienze del Patrimonio Culturale, Milan)

Keywords: Ancient Arabia; Digital humanities; Atlas; Gazetteer; Dictionary; Archaeology; Epigraphy.

Whoever has had the opportunity to consult maps of the ancient Near East has noticed the absence of most of the Arabian Peninsula, showing at best its northern fringe or the shore of the Persian Gulf. The region is often pushed into the background, relegated to purported desert emptiness. Yet, 50 years of intensive research into the pre-Islamic history of the Peninsula have shown otherwise. And the last decade was an incredible booster in this research area, fostered by the production of corpuses, the investigation of new territories, such as Saudi Arabia, and its share of breakthroughs. This discrepancy is as much a consequence of the scarcity of syntheses intended for non-specialists as of the nature of the pre-Islamic Arabian epigraphy, accessible only to a small number of specialists.

In other words, there is a considerable amount of data available that addresses topical issues — such as the human-environment relationship; the emergence of an Arab identity and the birth of Islam; the place of Arabia in a connected Old World system, etc., and it is now possible to take advantage of the existing corpuses to develop the tools for their analysis, to produce syntheses, and to make them accessible to the greatest number of people. This is the purpose of the Maparabia project.

Fig 1. Screenshot of the online digital atlas interface (Maparabia project/CNRS/CNR/Cartodia).



It is a 5-year project funded by the French National Research Agency (ANR-18-CE27-0015, PI J. Schiettecatte), 2019-23, which encompasses a variety of fields of research: history, archaeology, epigraphy, linguistics, palaeography, geomatics, and geography. The fifteen members of the project come from four laboratories dedicated to pre-Islamic Arabia: CNRS-Orient & Méditerranée (Paris), CNRS-Archéorient (Lyon), Dipartimento di Civiltà e Forme del Sapere of the University of Pisa, and CNR-ISPC (Milan).

Based on archaeological data and large epigraphic corpuses (DASI, OCIANA), the project aims to develop three free online research instruments, adhering to Open Science and FAIR principles.

1/ Digital atlas of ancient Arabia: This online platform is designed for the mapping of monuments, inscriptions, languages, scripts, cults and social groups (FIG. 1). It exposes a geolocated database (postgreSQL) of two types of entities: archaeological sites and inscriptions. The archaeological data is compiled from the existing bibliography; the epigraphic data is imported from the DASI corpus (about 7200 South Arabian inscriptions at the moment) and OCIANA (about 3500 North Arabian inscriptions). The platform includes full web-GIS functionality: a map displayed in a browser, with a dynamic legend and timeline to display/hide/filter layers and data; simple queries are possible according to specific attributes (scripts, languages, type of remains, etc.). In addition, the encoding of the epigraphic content of ancient Arabian inscriptions (names of deities and tribes) allows the mapping of the distribution of cults and social groups. Any specialist wishing to carry out advanced queries or spatial analyses may request access to the QGIS project and use the database on open-source GIS software for his/her own research.

This is a comprehensive electronic dictionary covering several aspects of the history, society, religion, linguistics

and topography of Arabia from the beginning of the first millennium BCE to the seventh century CE. The treatment of its entries is based primarily on the consideration of epigraphic and archaeological material, which in turn allows for an assessment of the reliability and historicity of other sources, often considered distorted by distance (classical sources) or remoteness (Arab-Islamic sources). In this respect, the TDAA is intended to meet the need for an up-to-date open-access synthesis. The TDAA will benefit both specialists of ancient Arabia, and the wider academic community, by facilitating access to sources essential for the understanding of the ancient world and the emergence of Islam. To date, more than 700 entries are planned and 90 contributors from different academic backgrounds are involved in their writing.

We plan to make these instruments publicly available in the course of 2022 (<https://ancientarabia.huma-num.fr>), and hope that this project will promote the production of a renewed regional history from the beginning of the first millennium BCE to the seventh century CE. We do not exclude extending the chronological range to the protohistoric and prehistoric periods in the future. One day at a time...

