



GAZELLE



مجموعة دبي للتاريخ والطبيعي

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Contributors —

Thanks to the following members for their contributions this month:

Andrew Childs
Anelisa Lambert
Angela Manthorpe
Binish Roobas
Boraik Radwan
Gary Feulner
Valerie Chalmers

UAE Archaeology Conference 2022
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Introduction to the Sharjah Calligraphy Museum - Photo by Binish Roobas

Visiting Sharjah museums and the House of Wisdom

On Sunday 27th November 2022, DNHG members visited two museums in Sharjah and the House of Wisdom. The first museum visited was Sharjah Calligraphy Museum and Calligraphy Square venues in the Heart of Sharjah to see the Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial. The theme of the Biennial was “Elevation” which is the rise into an open space and field and is also the rise in both reality and imagination. To learn more about the meaning of “Elevation” and for further information on the Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial visit the Sharjah Department of Culture Information website on <https://sdc.gov.ae>

We then visited the Sharjah Art Museum to see the Lasting Impressions: Ismail Khayat Exhibition. Ismail Khayat – known as the stone man or the grandfather of Kurdish Art – is one of Iraq’s most prolific modernist artists specifically in Kurdistan. With a career spanning nearly six decades, he initiated the Kurdistan Iraqi Art Movement and is an icon in the Kurdish art circle.

He was also the former Director of Plastic Arts at the Ministry of Culture in Kurdistan. Khayat’s works belong in several art institutions, both regionally and internationally.

(Continued on page 4)

Announcements and Recordors



Monthly Lecture

Monday 16 January 2023 at 7.45pm

Speaker : Todd Reisz

Topic : *“An Unstable Equilibrium at Dubai Creek”*

Todd Reisz is an architect and writer.

His book *“Showpiece City: How Architecture Made Dubai”* (Stanford University Press, 2020) explores architecture’s packaging to sell Dubai on a global stage.

He has also co-edited and co-authored *“Building Sharjah”* with Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi (Birkhäuser, 2021) and the photo-essay *“Off Centre / On Stage: Dubai Scenes from the 1970s”* (Khatt, 2021) was published in 2021 on the occasion of an exhibition at Jameel Arts Centre, Dubai.

Todd has taught architecture and urban design at Yale University and Harvard University. Currently he is living in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

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From the Editor:

Winter has arrived and Mother Nature is beaconing.

Please share with us through the email below your observations, stories, photos and captions of wildlife and nature in the UAE or abroad.

Email: gazelleeditor@gmail.com

Deadline: 25 January 2023. We look forward to hearing from you.

Spotlight! - Insights into the Archaeology Conference 2022 - Abu Dhabi

The UAE Archaeology Conference 2022

On December 12th-13th several DNHG representatives attended the "Archaeology Conference 2022 – Advances in UAE Archaeology".

Organised by Abu Dhabi's Department of Culture and Tourism and emceed by Dr Peter Magee, Director of Zayed National Museum, the Conference took place over two days and featured a panel of over thirty international, regional and Emirati experts each playing some part in the discovery, conservation and presentation of the UAE's archaeology and heritage. Both days of the Conference can be found on YouTube – please see the links here below:

Day 1: https://youtu.be/iyRi8YAW5-4DAY_1

Day 2: <https://youtu.be/DxpKaOMeslk>

The conference program has been posted on the DNHG website under the heading "Resources - Other UAE Organisations" - please use the following link : <https://www.dnhg.org/resources.html>

Amongst the many excellent speakers, Day 1 saw Tariq Al Hammadi present new geospatial software for cultural heritage management (ADHER); Marc Händel's newly found Paleolithic surface scatter sites in the Eastern Region of Abu Dhabi and Dr Knut Bretzke's ongoing excavations in Central Sharjah indicating earlier dates than previously understood for Paleolithic activity in the UAE.

Moving into the Neolithic period, up-and-coming Emirati star Noura Al Hameli shared fascinating new interpretations from recent excavations at Marawah Island and Remy Crassard presented evidence for even earlier Neolithic activity on the newly excavated Ghagha Island.

New developments at the Bronze Age sites at Kalba, Umm an-Nar Island and Masafi-5 were included, along with insights from the Second Millennium BC soft-stone vessels being found along the Oman Border Fence Project.

Amongst the presentations on Day 2, we were given fresh insights into new desert / hinterland survey projects north of Al Ain; the metallurgy, social cohesion and complexity at Iron Age Saruq al-Hadid; recent investigations from Iron Age Hili 14; preliminary results from the Umm Al Quwain side of Tell Abra; the striking funerary landscape of Mleiha; the evidence of extensive falaj engineering during the early Islamic Period in Al Ain; the newly discovered Nestorian monastery on Siniya Island, Umm Al Quwain; insights into the historical mosques of Abu Dhabi and a look at the historical development of mosque architecture in Ras Al Khaimah.

While more notice could have been given to allow interested members of the non-professional public to attend the conference, the content and organisation were otherwise excellent. The last conference took place in Al Ain back in 2018, but there seems to be a growing momentum to communicate the heritage and archaeology of the UAE to the broader public. Much of the new information will be exhibited at the Zayed National Museum which is currently under construction on Saadiyat Island. Hopefully this will result in some good field trips!

Contribution by Anelisa Lambert

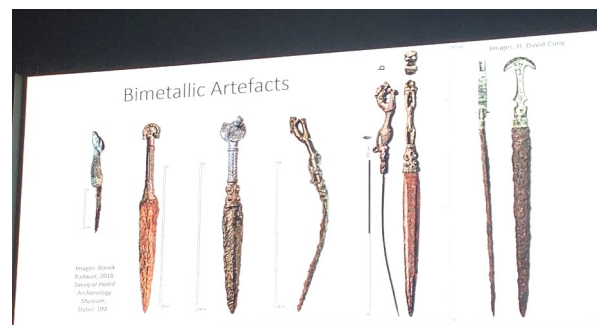
Photos by Anelisa Lambert and Boraik Radwan



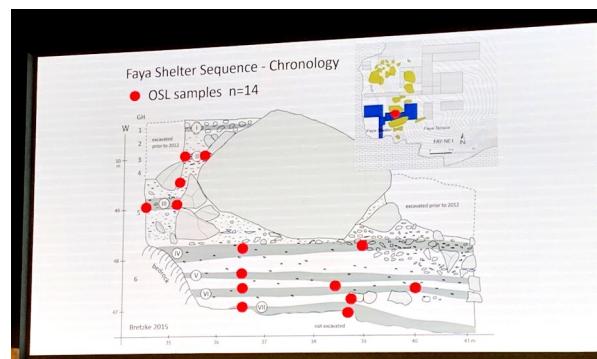
Excavation in 2022 revealed a single-aisled church within a monastic complex
The Monastery of Siniya Island: Dr Tim Power with the Tourism and Archeology Dept UAQ



The urban oasis of the Shaabiyaat: presentation by Peter Sheehan



Presentation by Dr Lloyd Weeks - the Metallurgy of Saruq al-Hadid - Photo: Boraik Radwan 2018



Dr Knut Bretzke on the exciting development at Faya Rock Shelter, Sharjah

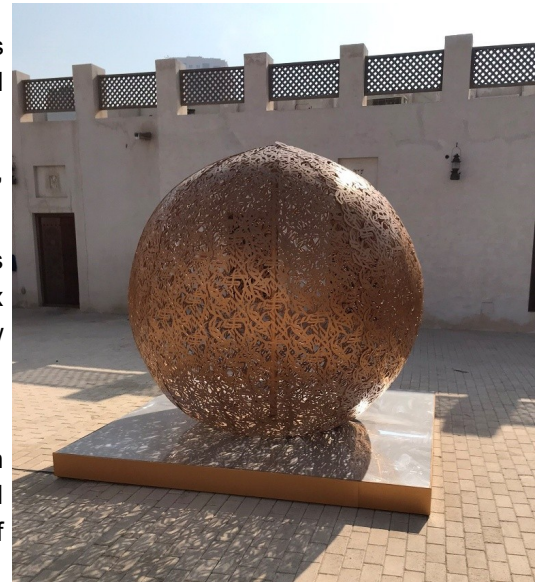
(Continued from page 1)

Born in 1944 in Khanaken, Kurdistan – Khayat got his drawing inspirations from his surroundings, the struggles of the Anfal genocide, and Kurdish folklore and symbolism. He taught for more than 24 years, while being the supervisor of the art schools in Sulaymaniyah. He later joined the American University of Iraq, Sulaymaniyah (AUIS) as a lecturer.

With his unique style and getting inspirations from his surroundings, along with his passion for teaching arts, the retrospective show explored the works of more than six decades of his art practice and the impact on the Kurdish art scene. The show included over 100 artworks on display in various mediums and techniques.

The exhibition is part of the Lasting Impressions series, held annually at the Sharjah Art Museum. The aim is to focus on prominent Artists from the Arab region, who had a prolific career and left a lasting impression on the development and evolution of modern art in the Arab world.

Reference: Sharjah Museums Authority website on <https://www.sharjahmuseums.ae>



Calligraphy artwork
Photo by Valerie Chalmers



Calligraphy artworks - Photos by Valerie Chalmers

After lunch we visited The House of Wisdom, a two-storey, high-tech library and culture centre, featuring more than 100,000 books, which was opened as a part of Sharjah's newest award, UNESCO World Book Capital of 2019. It is situated alongside "The Scroll", a new piece of public art by British sculptor Gerry Judah, outside University City on the Sharjah International Airport Road and the building sits amid landscaped gardens. Its facilities include thousands of physical and digital books, exhibition spaces, a fabrication laboratory, print-on-demand book stations and discussion halls.

All three visits were very much enjoyed by everyone. Thank you very much to Hazelle Page for organizing the whole trip and providing us with information in advance.



House of Wisdom - Photo by Valerie Chalmers

Contribution by Valerie Chalmers
Photos by Valerie Chalmers and Binish Roobas

All about micro shells - Happy shelling to all!

Contribution and photos by Andrew Childs

We started collecting seashells nearly ten years ago and were inspired by the excellent book "Seashells of Eastern Arabia" which has clear pictures and descriptions. We decided to build our collection of shells from Oman and the UAE only, because we realised that we would not be collecting from the Northern Gulf countries (Iran, Iraq, Kuwait etc.). We also knew that some of the shells illustrated in the book were only known from 1 or 2 examples, and therefore we were unlikely to find those either. We had decided to set a target for our collection of an arbitrary minimum size limit of half an inch, as shells smaller than that are not easy to see from a distance as you stroll down the beach. Within those parameters, we set about searching for one or more examples of each of the shell species illustrated in the book, in order to build up our collection.

We visited most of the Oman coastline from the Yemen border up to the Musandam Governorate, including some very remote areas, using our 4x4 driving skills. We drove along the UAE coast from Ras al Khaimah down to the Saudi border, stopping at beaches where we could and were even lucky enough to get across the causeway to Ghagha Island before that was closed off by the UAE military. Our early collecting consisted largely of walking down the high tide line and back down the low tide line, seeing what we could spot washed up among the other debris. We realised that it was not enough for the shell just to be washed up on that particular beach but also that there was some element of luck as to whether you happened to spot it as you looked left and right while walking along! We also started looking under rocks in the inter-tidal zone, and sifting likely sandy areas.

With many visits to our favourite spots and enjoying some success, we ended up with examples of many species, gradually finding examples in better condition, and also several shell species that we felt were not in the book or at least that we could not identify. That box remains still quite full!

With some research online via various shelling forums, it became apparent that there are several people writing papers describing new mollusc species from the Arabian region, confirming what Donald Bosch wrote in his book - "More species to be found!". My list of species not in the book but able to be found in the UAE or Oman now exceeds 400; a list which I have shared with the team from the Smithsonian who are currently on a multi-year project to study the Oman marine molluscan fauna. Perhaps it is time for me to publish a formal list of these species, but maybe better to wait and see what new species they find in their study.

Our collecting methods are now more refined, and we are moving into the realm of micro-shells, which initially we had completely discounted. I have made myself a crude sieve stack from some scrap wood with three mesh sizes (4.0mm, 2.36mm and 0.85mm). So we now sometimes collect a small zip-lock bag of shell grit from a likely beach, to take home for sorting and examination with the aid of a magnifying glass and some good lighting. With this apparatus it is possible to collect shells in the 1mm-5mm range, which was completely outside our initial target but has revealed a whole new selection of shell species which we had not collected before, along with much more material in the "unknown & unidentified" box!

I took my first samples on a beach in Cyprus, just before the first COVID lockdown in early 2020 and a small bucket of shell grit revealed over 60 distinct micro-shell species.

The challenge then becomes how to clean and photograph the shells. A magnifying lens, jeweller's eyeglass, fine dental pick and a macro lens are all very helpful additions to the sheller's toolkit. Future equipment might include a microscope with a built-in camera. Many small shells reveal fascinating sculpture when magnified, but the very tiny shells do require some photographic skills to get the lighting and depth of focus right.

Another great advantage is that a micro-shell collection does not take up much cupboard space – a distinct advantage that will be recognized by many shell collectors who have too many boxes full of shells collected over the years! A bag of shell grit collected in the winter months can also be kept for study when the summer heat or humidity makes venturing out on the beaches an unattractive proposition.



Horologica marianii Cecalupo & Perugia



Unknown *Asteonidae*



Unknown *Seila*



Pseudodaphnella fedosovi Horro, Gori, Rosado & Rolan



Conus melvilli G.B. Sowerby III

Unknown *Eulimastoma* (maybe)



Spider vs. Hornet: Whose side are you on?

Contribution and photos by Angela Manthorpe

Vespa orientalis, aka the Oriental Hornet, is not a popular insect in the UAE. These red-brown and yellow wasps are large and inquisitive and can impart a painful sting if you happen to get into an altercation. They seek out insects to feed to their larvae, but it might please some readers to know that they in turn have predators.

I was studying a large bush of flowering *Convulvulus virgatus* in a wadi on the East Coast of the UAE recently and happened to spot a hornet, seemingly immobile within the foliage. A closer look revealed that it was grasped firmly in the jaws of a female green lynx spider (*Peucetiace viridana*) and appeared to be dead. Green lynx spiders are ambush predators, active during the day and, although quite brightly coloured, they can sit unobtrusively within the confines of green foliage, darting forth when something tempting comes within range. I have found them with aphids, beetles and a caterpillar of the Blue Pansy (*Junonia orithya*) in their jaws.



Photo #3 *Cleome noeana* plant

Over the course of many observations, I have come to associate the spider with two plants in particular:

Cleome noeana – this plant is rather obnoxious! Get close and you will find that it has a bad smell and is covered in a sticky liquid. I often find the spiders (usually female, but with occasional males) around the base of the bush and sometimes the female will be guarding an egg sac as shown in Photo 3.

Abutilon pannosum – those big green leaves and showy orange flowers provide good cover and great hunting. Photo 4 shows a lynx spider with lunch (an oil beetle) on one of the leaves.

Other documented predators of *Vespa orientalis* in the UAE include Robberflies, the Giant Daddy Long-Legs spider *Artemadoriai* and the Arabian Toad *Schlerophrys arabica*.



Photo #2



Photo #4 *Abutilon pannosum* plant

Wadi Figs: To Fast or to Feast?

Contribution and photos by Binish Roobas and Gary Feulner

The Wadi Fig is a common tree in Hajar Mountain wadis, where it typically hugs the vertical walls of gravel terraces that line deeper wadis.

The round figs remain on the tree for a long time and seem to go uneaten. They are said to be toxic or debilitating, although not fatal to goats, and they are not eaten by human residents of mountain areas.

Few (if any) birds eat them. Foxes are said to eat them (presumably fallen fruits) but most of that information comes from fecal analysis, so the circumstances and effects are not generally known.

So, does the fig fruit go unused as a resource? We know that is unlikely in nature.

The accompanying photos show that the figs are eagerly consumed, but by consumers with small mouths and only modest appetites.

Shown in the photos (all taken within ten minutes at the same tree in Wadi Hayl) are an Oriental Hornet, an Arabian Paper Wasp, an unidentified small wasp, and a Greenbottle fly.



Oriental Hornet—*Vespa.orientalis*



Greenbottle fly



Unidentified small wasp



Arabian Paper Wasp - *Polistes.wattii*

Inter - Emirates Weekend Friday 24th February to Sunday 26th February 2023

What is Inter-Emirates Weekend? Each year since 1988 a weekend hosted by one of the 4 Natural History Groups in the Emirates has taken place.

The first IEW was hosted by the DNHG at the Hatta Fort Hotel in 1988 and since then IEWs have been held in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Al Ain, Fujairah and Ras Al Khaimah and even in Khor Fakkan, Sohar, on Futaisi Island, at Jebal Dhana and in the Liwa. The weekend is a chance for the members of each group to meet up together. The weekend consists of various field trips on both days plus sometimes workshops and a Gala Dinner in the evening of the second night. At the Gala Dinner the two annual awards the Sheikh Mubarak bin Mohamed Award for Natural History and the Bish Brown Award – are presented. Often we have a speaker at the dinner and sometimes we run quizzes.

I am pleased to announce that Inter-Emirates Weekend 2023 will take place from 24th to 26th February 2023 and will be hosted by the Dubai Natural History Group. It will be based around the various Emirates, staying once again at the Centro Hotel (part of the Rotana Hotels Group) near Sharjah Airport.

Registration will commence on Friday night, 24th February. The programme of activities will begin early on Saturday morning, 25th February.

Activities and field trips on Saturday and Sunday are in the planning stages.

On Saturday evening the IEW Gala Dinner and award ceremony will be held. We are intending to have a distinguished speaker and will also hold the Inter-Emirates Photographic Competition.

The hotel has reserved 30 to 40 rooms for the Friday and Saturday nights which can be paid for online. Details on how to book rooms for the Event and the Gala Dinner have already been sent to the members of the four NHG groups.

Dubai Natural History Group (DNHG) Programme 2022/2023

DNHG Lectures 2023

- 16 January: Topic: An Unstable Equilibrium at Dubai Creek
Speaker: Todd Reisz
- 6 February: Topic: The cultural, physiological and psychological aspects of ultra-running through the Sahara Desert
Speaker: Harry George

DNHG Field Trips 2023

- 21 January: Geology trip to Rainbow Valley
- 11 - 18 February: Kerala, India
- 24 - 26 February: 2023 Inter-Emirates Weekend (*further details on p.7*)
- 19 - 23 April: Tiger Safari in Ranthambore National Park, India
- 20 - 28 May: In the Footsteps of Alexander the Great, Greece
- 23 June - 1 July: Northern Sulawesi

For more information and sign-up please contact:

* Binish Roobas at binishroobas@hotmail.com for Kerela, Ranthambore National Park & Northern Sulawesi

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DNHG Membership

DNHG membership remains one of Dubai's best bargains at Dh100 for families and Dh50 for singles. Membership for the current year is valid from September 2022 to September 2023. As we have started hybrid meetings from September 2022, renewal fees can be paid at meetings or by the methods mentioned below.

New members can join by (i) sending to the Membership Secretary (see above) a completed one-page membership form, which can be downloaded from our website (www.dnhg.org) and (ii) making payment to our Emirates NBD account by cash deposit or transfer from your bank or ATM, using our IBAN number AE640260001012012013302. However, this process does not always identify the payer. So if you wish to pay by cash deposit, please also photograph or scan a copy of your payment confirmation and send via e-mail to the Membership Secretary, so we know whose money we have received.

DNHG membership entitles you to participate in field trips and helps pay for our lecture hall, publication and distribution of our monthly newsletter, the *Gazelle*, our post office box, additions to our library, incidental expenses of speakers and occasional special projects.