

LEIDEN CONFERENCE 2017

LANDSCAPES OF SURVIVAL

## ABSTRACTS of PRESENTATIONS

(in alphabetic order, according to author)

### **Social Landscapes: Long-Term Settlement Dynamics and Chronology in the Jebel Qurma Region, North-Eastern Jordan**

**Peter Akkermans** (Leiden University, The Netherlands)

Recent surveys and excavations in the Jebel Qurma region in north-eastern Jordan have provided evidence of people interacting with their landscapes for many thousands of years. Use of the area is complex and plentiful in some periods, while in other periods the evidence is minimal. The prehistoric inhabitants modified the landscape to create meaningful places for both the living and the dead. Later communities in the area continually re-used and further modified the previously built places, while adding novel types of sites and installations. This paper seeks to address the evidence for habitation and the treatment of the dead in the Jebel Qurma area over time, as well as the nature and date of the variations in the local settlement sequence.

### **The Conflict Between Nabataea and the Ḥawīlat: A View from Jebel Qurma**

**Ahmad Al-Jallad** (Leiden University, The Netherlands)

Two published Safaitic inscriptions mention a conflict between the Nabataeans and the Ḥawīlat, who are thought to be a nomadic group from North Arabia. The authors of these texts are sympathetic towards the Nabataean cause, asking the deities to aid them. The inscriptions of the Jebel Qurma area shed more light on this contest and the relationship between the nomads and the Nabataeans. Several texts mention 'guarding for the Nabataeans' and 'keeping watch for the Ḥawīlat'. This paper attempts to reconstruct the context of this conflict and the role the nomads may have played as auxiliaries in the Nabataean military in guarding the desert frontier and caravan routes.

### **The Badia in Early Islamic Times**

**Karin Bartl** (Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Jordan)

The northeastern steppe of Jordan today forms an inhospitable landscape with so little natural resources that its use for settlement seems unattractive. However, various investigations in recent decades have shown that the modern situation does not correspond to settlement activities in prehistoric and protohistoric periods, which were based on different ecological conditions. This also applies to the Late Roman / Early Byzantine period and the Early Islamic / Umayyad period (3<sup>rd</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> centuries), in which individual buildings such as watchtowers, castra and 'desert castles' as well as sporadic settlements are evident in the region. The variously documented hydraulic installations attest to sophisticated water management practices for this period and indirectly point to a more humid climate than today. A denser and more species-rich vegetation can be assumed, corresponding to richer fauna, and therefore generally more favorable settlement conditions. Settlement of the steppes in the Umayyad period is based on Late Antique traditions, but precise dating of the sites is sometimes difficult and in most cases is based on architectural and ceramic typologies. The comparatively large variety of architectural structures is striking and most likely is associated with different concepts of use. The Umayyad settlement forms the final climax of the pre-modern usage of the badia. The

period after 750 CE is characterized by a decrease of habitation. Reasons for this could be natural disasters such as earthquakes, political events such as the relocation of the center of Caliphal rule, or regional climate changes due to increasing aridity.

### **Marking the Black Desert: A Landscape Approach to *Wusūm* from the Jebel Qurma Region, Jordan**

**Koen Berghuijs** (Leiden University, The Netherlands)

*Wusūm* (generally translated as ‘tribal marks’), constitute a well-known and widespread category of Near Eastern petroglyphs, but have thus far received little scholarly attention. Although the markings are solely used today for the purpose of animal branding to indicate ownership, 19th-century ethnographic sources and travellers’ accounts reveal a wealth of other applications, which are commonly encountered the archaeological record. *Wusūm* are found on solitary rocks, in rock-art concentrations, and on a variety of archaeological structures, but understanding their chronology, distribution, and ‘meaning’ is fraught with difficulties. The Jebel Qurma dataset allows us to address these issues for the first time by considering *wusūm* in relation to their archaeological contexts and landscape setting. A combination of informal and formal methods (ethnographic sources and GIS-analysis, respectively) was used to analyse the *wusūm* corpus. Several petroglyphs can be relatively dated on the basis of associated inscriptions or rock-art scenes, suggesting that *wasm* marking was practiced in the region from the pre-Islamic era until well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Spatial analysis demonstrates that *wusūm* are mostly found at prominent locations along the major routes crossing the region, often in association with archaeological structures such as burial cairns and enclosures. The nature of these associations, however, is far from clear: several *wusūm* can be directly related to the construction of burials, whereas the majority appear to have been left behind as graffiti at a later point. This paper discusses the results of analyzing material from the Jebel Qurma region, and outlines some challenges for future *wusūm* research.

### **Endangered Archaeology in the Badia and Possible Future Protection Strategies**

**Robert Bewley** (University of Oxford, UK)

The *Aerial Archaeology in Jordan project* has been undertaking aerial reconnaissance over the badia since 1997. The aim of our aerial surveys was initially to identify sites, building on existing knowledge and working with those currently in the field. The density of prehistoric and other sites visible from the air has been one of the encouraging highlights of this work. However, we have been drawn back again and again to record not only more sites, but also the damage and in some cases the total destruction of important known sites. As archaeologists we cannot expect to protect every site, and even from the air it is impossible to record everything, but we should expect to be able to record as many sites as possible before they are destroyed. This paper will summarise the main site types in the badia and the threats to sites in this landscape zone while suggesting possible future scenarios for improving and monitoring their protection.

### **Pastoralist Rock Art in the Black Desert of Jordan**

**Nathalie Brusgaard** (Leiden University, The Netherlands)

Until recently, the rock art of Arabia has received little attention from scholars when compared to the dedicated research that has been conducted on the epigraphy of this region for more than a century. In particular, few questions have been asked about what the rock art can tell us about the societies which created it. With a few notable exceptions, previous studies have instead generally focused on the identification of animal species, and the depiction of possible deities or cosmological figures. Now the systematic documentation of rock art in the Jebel Qurma region of the Black Desert, Jordan, allows for the first-ever in-depth analysis of the pictorial engravings associated with Safaitic inscriptions. In this presentation, the first results of this study will be shown using a case study on a fascinating motif: the dromedary camel. Looking at the nature and production of the camel figures, this presentation will endeavour to show what the rock art can contribute to our understanding of the Safaitic engravings and their creators.

## **Hunting Animals With Mega-Traps in the Harrat al-Sham, Jordan**

**Rémy Crassard** (CNRS-Lyon, France)

Since 2015, the *Globalkites Project* has carried out surveys and excavations in the Harrat Al-Sham, near the modern towns of As-Safawi and Ar-Ruwayshid. The goal of the project is to define the chronology, the variability and the functionality of 'desert kites', which are mega stone structures made of long walls or lines of stone that converge into an enclosure flanked by several closed rooms, called cells. The kites are considered to be hunting traps, but their dating and use remain unresolved questions. The project proposes an interdisciplinary approach at the intersection of anthropology (archeology and ethnology), geomatics, and geoarchaeological and bioarchaeological sciences. Another aspect of the project is the study of the kites' distribution in neighboring regions, and to more distant ones like Arabia, Caucasia and Central Asia. In Jordan, dozens of soundings were excavated, mostly within the cells of the kites. These soundings were particularly deep in most of the cases (> 2 meters from the surface), producing a very different picture of what is known from the satellite imagery. In most cases no archaeological material was retrieved from the soundings, except rare ceramic sherds and lithic fragments that date the kites from the end of the Neolithic to the Early Bronze Age. Efforts are being developed to find any other way to date the structures, with geoarchaeological analyses and by experimenting with additional dating techniques such as luminescence and radiocarbon.

## **How Does a Dayfite Write? Some Observations on the Paleography of Safaitic Inscriptions**

**Chiara Della Puppa** (Leiden University, The Netherlands)

Recent studies (Macdonald 2015; Al-Jallad 2015) have considered only two main categories for the Safaitic script: 'normal' and 'square', with the latter being interpreted as the result of individual stylistic choices by the authors. Clark, however, had previously proposed five variants: 'square', '90°', 'formal', 'fine' and 'common' (Clark 1979). Within the framework of the Jebel Qurma archaeological project, more than 5000 Safaitic inscriptions have been systematically documented, providing us with a sample of inscriptions located at the southern edge of the Jordanian Ḥarrah. A study of the corpus has revealed that only a handful of texts were carved in what Clark labeled as the 'fine' script. These results match Clark's, who observed the same for his collection. He also remarked that texts in the 'fine' script appear much more frequently in the northern Ḥarrah. Significantly, two of the few 'fine' texts discovered in the Jebel Qurma region were produced by members of the lineage of ḏf, a social group whose territory seems to have been in the northern Ḥarrah. Inscriptions in the 'fine' script - and by members of this lineage - seem also to contain formulae which are rare or unattested in the other inscriptions of the Jebel Qurma region. This evidence suggests that variation in the Safaitic script is not completely idiosyncratic; instead, it can be correlated to the lineages of the authors, as well as to the contents and geographic distribution of the inscriptions. Even though the Safaitic dataset does not lend itself for an identification of 'older' and 'later' phases of the script, further palaeographic research is needed in order to describe synchronically the different Safaitic scripts and to update Clark's classification system.

Al-Jallad, A. (2015). *An Outline of a Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*. Leiden: Brill.

Clark, V.A. (1979). *A Study of New Safaitic Inscriptions from Jordan*. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International.

Macdonald, M.C.A. (2015). On the uses of writing in ancient Arabia and the role of paleography in studying them. *Arabian Epigraphic Notes* 1: 1-50.

## **Pastoralists of the Southern Nefud Desert: Inter-Regional Contact and Local Identity**

**Maria Guagnin** (University of Oxford, UK)

The oasis of Jubbah in Saudi Arabia provided an attractive environment for hunters and herders throughout the Holocene. While the archaeological record remains highly fragmentary, a combination of rock art and archaeological sites is beginning to outline the occupation history of Jubbah. The image that emerges is one of longer term, and perhaps even continuous occupation, with distinct local characteristics. However, there is also evidence for long distance contact with the Levant and western Saudi Arabia. Rather than being constrained by their surroundings, the occupants of Jubbah appear to have selectively adapted subsistence strategies from multiple neighbouring regions to suit their local environment.

## **The Cultural and Linguistic Relationships Between Ancient North-Arabian *Ḥarra* Inscriptions and Other Arabian Epigraphical Entities of Jordan: An Appraisal**

**Hani Hayajneh** (Yarmouk University, Jordan)

The Eastern parts of Jordan's badia are mainly desert areas which extend northwards to Syria and southwards to Saudi Arabia. The *Ḥarret Rāḡil* is only the most northerly of chain of such *Ḥarrāt* that stretch from southern Syria across Jordan and northern Saudi Arabia. The *Ḥarra* began to receive attention from scholars and explorers in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has continued to do so. Thousands of inscriptions and rock art engravings are spread extensively on the rocks and stones of this wide desert. The contents of these Safaitic inscriptions constitute a hitherto neglected source for the cultural heritage of the area, since they provide us with religious, historical, social and political information. They can be classified according to their contents as memorial inscriptions, claims to property, funerary inscriptions, and prayers. Contrary to other ancient Near Eastern texts, those of the Safaitic group do not contain literature. This paper argues that these previously 'peripheral', Ancient North Arabian (ANA) texts may be crucial to understanding the cultural and linguistic background of the corpus at large. By keeping in mind the lack of a chronological framework, an approach will be made to highlight the relationships between the peripheral sites (Madaba, Jerash, Ajloun, Irbid, Khirbet es-Samra, Udhruh, Bayir), and the areas where ANA inscriptions are concentrated in high numbers, such as the *Ḥarra* and *Hisma* regions. This paper will try to investigate the center-periphery, or dependency dynamics, which involve thinking of the epigraphical heritage inside the desert and urban areas.

## **Defining Pastoralist Landscapes of Classical and Late Antiquity in the Badia: Campsites and Ceramic Assemblages from the Jebel Qurma Region, Jordan**

**Harmen O. Huigens** (Leiden University, The Netherlands)

The study of mobile pastoralists who inhabited the north-eastern badia in Classical and Late Antiquity has long been based on textual sources. In contrast, archaeological contributions have been very limited and, as a result, the role of mobile pastoralists in the cultural developments on the desert fringe is still poorly understood. This paper discusses the potential of survey data and landscape studies for better understanding pastoralism in the badia, based on fieldwork in the Jebel Qurma region that has been carried out since 2012. The first aim of this paper is to discuss methodologies of locating and analysing the archaeological remains of mobile pastoralists from historical periods in the badia. This is initially relevant because archaeologists have thus far been reluctant to study these remains at all, but also given the inherently ephemeral nature of inhabitation and land-use by small, mobile groups. Secondly, the ceramic assemblage from the Jebel Qurma region will be discussed. Ceramic distributions are an important tool in many archaeological landscape studies, both in terms of chronology and land-use. However, it will be shown that pottery was not necessarily equally present among pastoralists, even in historical times. Apart from its methodological implications, this is interesting in terms of developments in the material culture of pastoralist communities, and their relations with sedentary groups from which many of their artefacts originated. Thirdly, the residential spaces of pastoralist communities will be discussed, based on survey and excavation data. Although stone-built enclosures have often been associated with past camping activities, it will be suggested here that pastoralist campsites are mostly located elsewhere, with important implications for the reconstruction of pastoralist land-use in the badia.

## **The Works of the Old Men in Arabia – A Comparative Analysis**

**David Kennedy** (University of Western Australia, Australia)

The ancient stone-built structures known to the bedouin as the 'Works of the Old Men' found in the *Ḥarret al-Shaam* – especially the part located within Jordan, are familiar and increasingly well-documented. Many thousands of features known as kites, wheels, pendants, cairns and chain walls have been recorded and hundreds of kilometers of low, meandering walls mapped. Similar structures are found more widely. In the Middle East, kites – the best-known of these features, have been recorded as far away as Armenia and Yemen. There are parallels for some of the other *Ḥarret al-Shaam* structures as well, especially in the succession of

other lava fields (*harret*) found along the west coast of the Arabian peninsula. Although there has been little fieldwork and they are less well-explored on the satellite imagery, tens of thousands of sites have now been recorded on the latter revealing not just the expected parallels but surprising differences. Kites have been found in very large numbers in the Harret Khaybar, but seldom in the other *harret*, with many of a design notably different from elsewhere and unique to this lava field. Likewise, pendants and wheels are abundant but the designs are different. Even more notable are site types not found in these other *harret*, or others that are present here but absent in the Harret al-Shaam. Chain walls are not found outside the Harret al-Shaam; conversely, the *harret* of wider Arabia include at least two novel site types, gates and triangles. Variants in the design and differences in site-types, distribution patterns, and the associations between site types may be of significance in interpreting and explaining human activity in the region as a whole, but especially in the extensive lava fields.

## **Between the Desert and the Sown: A Landscape Archaeological Characterization of the Petraean Hinterland in Nabataean-Roman Times**

**Will M. Kennedy** (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

More than 15 years ago Stephan Schmid published a comprehensive and insightful paper on the cultural history the Nabataeans entitled, "*The Nabataeans: Travellers between Lifestyles*". The general perception was that the Nabataeans followed a linear development from a "primitive", non-sedentary origin to a more culturally enriched and sedentary lifestyle. However, based on the historical and material evidence, Schmid challenged this rather simplistic view of linear cultural evolution. Instead, he argued that characterizing Nabataean culture is a particularly complex issue and highlights the constant back-and-forth between Hellenized and Oriental, mobile and sedentary material culture. However, the evidence he provided was mostly limited to urban boundaries, particularly those of Petra. The question therefore arises whether the archaeological evidence in Petra's rural hinterland permits similar assumptions. Following general research projects on the rural organization of Petra's surroundings, numerous survey expeditions have already been carried out in the immediate environment of the Nabataean capital, documenting rural archaeological sites ranging from the Iron Age to the Byzantine and Early Islamic periods. Also, previous works have discussed rural settlements and land use strategies in the Petra region laying the focus outside Petra's city limits. Although these studies are immensely important for the understanding of rural Petra, they very strongly focus on particular (sedentary) settlement sites, thus falling short of an overall and in-depth contextualization of the various other archaeological sites and features in the Petra area. By applying modern landscape archaeological methodologies, this paper will therefore propose a revised definition of the Petraean hinterland and reevaluate the city's actual political, economic and social area of influence in Nabataean-Roman times and argue that the Nabataeans were indeed travelers between the desert and the sown.

## **Graffiti and Complexity: Ways-of-life in the Hellenistic and Roman Harrah**

**Michael C.A. Macdonald** (University of Oxford, UK)

As is well-known, the basalt desert of southern Syria and north-eastern Jordan is full of inscriptions (the so-called "Safaitic" inscriptions), and the content of the vast majority suggest that they were carved by nomads. But there are also Greek graffiti carved by members of nomadic social groups, as well as by people who had travelled from the settled areas of the Ḥawrān or further. Some of these carved their graffiti in Safaitic, while claiming to be Nabataeans, while there are also tribes whose members carved Safaitic graffiti in the desert, while others set up Nabataean inscriptions in settled areas. There are even references to settlements of nomadic tribes in the desert. What does all this mean? In my paper, I will explore the interaction of nomadism and sedentarism in the badia in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods through the lens of the casual writings of individuals, and will attempt to show how the traditional antithesis of the "Desert and the Sown" hinders, rather than helps, our understanding of the ancient society in the badia.

## **Center, Hinterland and Nomadic Networks in Palmyrena from the Roman to the Early Islamic Period**

**Jørgen Christian Meyer** (University of Bergen, Norway)

In the Roman period, there was an extensive expansion of settlements and estates in the territory north of Palmyra with a dense pattern of water management systems. They became part of the food supply to the growing city of Palmyra, but culturally they differed from the center. The territory and the main communication lines were controlled by establishing military strongholds, some of them with personnel from the Roman army. The Palmyrene occupation of the hinterland can only be understood by including the large-scale nomadic network stretching as far as the 'Safaitic' region in southern Syria and northern Jordan. The paper will discuss the dynamics between the center in the oasis, the hinterland and the nomadic networks in the badia in a longer chronological perspective. The transformation of Palmyra to a military and administrative stronghold on the Strata Diocletiana at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> century did not change the pattern of settlements and military installations, though the settlements did lose their Palmyrene cultural characteristics. After the Umayyad period Palmyra was slowly reduced to a village in the oasis, but the water management systems established in the Roman period, continued to be used and maintained by the Bedouin population up to the end of the Ottoman period, giving them new possibilities in the region.

## **Dūšarā and Kahl in Thamudic B Inscriptions from Wādī Ramm (Jordan)**

**Jérôme Norris** (Université de Lorraine, France)

This paper aims to present two Thamudic B inscriptions which were recorded during the 2014 season of the French archaeological and epigraphical project at Wādī Ramm, in southern Jordan. Consisting of two prayers, the first text invokes Khl, a well-known deity in the Thamudic B inscriptions, whereas the second one is surprisingly addressed to the Nabataean god Dūšarā. While this deity is frequently mentioned in the graffiti of the nomads of the Ḥarrah and those of the Ḥismā, this seems to be its first attestation in Thamudic B. Of equal interest is the use which the author has made of the Hismaic sign to represent the letter *d*. This provides new insights to consider the chronology of the Thamudic B script and the interactions which took place between the various groups of peoples who lived in the Syro-Arabian deserts during antiquity.

## **Rock Art in Saudi Arabia: a Window into the Past? First Insights of a Comparative Study of Rock Art Sites in the Dūmat al-Jandal, Riyadh and Najrān Regions**

**Charly Poliakoff** (Paris 1 Pantheon-Sorbonne University, France)

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, rock art has been found in many places of Saudi Arabia, and it is important to realize that the first modern expeditions in this country were only focused on epigraphic material. Nevertheless, a recent interest seems to have arisen for rock art, particularly how it can provide a vehicle for cultural identity. In fact, on the fringes of the Saudi deserts, many engravings occur on rocky hills and isolated boulders challenging the rare archaeological finds. The time span of these engraving practices range from the post-Paleolithic times to the modern period. Most of the time it depicts animal life, hunting practices, and warriors brandishing weapons. The date of these scenes could be inferred from multiple data. First, one can compare the patina colors and the superpositions which occur between figures in order to create a relative chronology. Second, the surrounding older inscriptions in Thamudean, South Arabian, Nabataean and Old Arabian, as well as some details in the scenes, such as weaponry, animal species and practices depicted can provide a chronological indicator. Furthermore, recording the precise location of engravings through the use of GPS and GIS systems could help to understand the regional distribution of figures. With these chronological and spatial approaches we will attempt to answer a critical question : *Does Saudi Arabian rock art help us to understand how these people once lived, conceived and perceived their own reality?* I will take in account the possibilities and the limits of such an exercise in three regions: Dumat al-Jandal, Riyadh, and Najrān.

## **First Inhabitants: the Early Prehistory of Northeast Jordan**

**Tobias Richter** (University of Copenhagen, Denmark)

Northeast Jordan preserves a remarkable sequence of early prehistoric settlement, stretching back at least 300,000 years. Early humans settled along lake shores and marshes in the Azraq Oasis and the surrounding area repeatedly, creating ever larger and more prominent sites. This contribution will chart the development of human societies in northeast Jordan from its earliest hunting and gathering inhabitants to the appearance of the first cultivators, from c. 300,000 to 10,000 years ago. Following an overview of the palaeoclimatic conditions in northeast Jordan, this paper will discuss the chronology of the prehistoric sites, and address the internal development of early human societies in this area in comparison with broader social and economic changes across the southern Levant.

## **Late Prehistoric Expansion in the Black Desert? Evidence for Occupation during the Seventh to Sixth Millennium BC**

**Yorke Rowan** (University of Chicago, USA), **Gary Rollefson** (Whitman College, USA) & **Alexander Wasse** (University of East Anglia, UK)

The *Eastern Badia Archaeological Project* study area comprises a west – east transect across the southern part of the eastern badia, and has been carefully selected to include a variety of ecological zones and to provide opportunities to assess the evidence for links with the 'Levantine corridor', the Hauran, northern Arabia, and Mesopotamia. To date, our survey and excavations have focused on two regions of the harra: Wisad Pools and Wadi al-Qattafi. Excavations in each area discovered well-built structures dating from the mid-7<sup>th</sup> millennium BC to mid-6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC. Extrapolating from those excavations to other building clusters identified through surveys, Late Neolithic hamlets probably were occupied on a seasonal basis. These substantial buildings, apparently constructed by hunter-herders relying heavily on hunted game, wild plants, and domesticated caprines, suggest a more amenable climate than currently exists. Coupled with evidence for oak, fig, *Typha* and *Lemna*, a better-watered environment with some topsoil is probable. In this paper we examine the utilization of the landscape by these Late Neolithic groups, and consider their long distance connections with other regions.

## **The Late Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age of the Badia and Beyond: Implications of the Preliminary Results of the Western Harra Survey**

**Stefan L. Smith** (Ghent University, Belgium)

In an already historically under-researched region, the Late Chalcolithic (LC) and beginning Early Bronze Age (EBA; ca. 4400-2800 BC) of the Jordanian badia are particularly poorly understood. The investigation of this time period is still very exploratory, complicated by site morphologies that are seemingly indistinguishable from those of the more numerous features of earlier periods, slowing down their recognition and rendering remote sensing identifications problematic. However, some recent archaeological analyses have shown LC/EBA sites to exist in several disparate parts of the *Harra*, meaning that occupation during this period perhaps was more prevalent than previously thought. One such investigation is the *Western Harra Survey*, the first season of which was conducted in October-November 2015, and is part of an ongoing region-wide project on "Human Adaptation in Climatically Marginal Environments of late-5<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> Millennium BC Syria and Jordan". The results of this fieldwork, which takes a *longue durée* diachronic approach but focuses on the LC/EBA, allow several preliminary interpretations to be made. These have implications for both periods and improve our understanding of regional settlement, nomadic potential, and trade patterns, as well as on the development of methodologies to holistically investigate the badia. This paper disseminates these implications for the study of north-eastern Jordan, and integrates them into the region-wide project to outline its direction and the future potential of further fieldwork in the western *Harra*.

## **Linguistic Diversity in the Safaitic Inscriptions**

**Phillip W. Stokes** (The University of Texas at Austin, USA)

The Ḥarraḥ of southern Syria and northeastern Jordan is home to the vast majority of Safaitic inscriptions so far discovered, numbering in the tens of thousands. Remarkably, there is a great deal of linguistic and topical continuity across the inscriptions. A. Al-Jallad (2015: §22) has recently argued that the reason for this continuity lies in the formulaic nature of the Safaitic inscriptions. Learning to write therefore included learning what to write about. Despite the formulaic nature of the inscriptions, we nevertheless find a good deal of linguistic diversity manifested as well. In this paper, I will present new data from inscriptions discovered in Murabb aš-Šurafāt in NE Jordan in 2015, which add to the morphological and lexical diversity evidenced in the Safaitic corpus. More broadly, I will draw on parallels with other corpora, including early Islamic inscriptions, to discuss possible interpretations of the relationship between the formulaic nature of the writing tradition associated with the Safaitic script on the one hand, and the attested diversity on the other.

Al-Jallad, A. A. (2015). *An Outline of the Grammar of the Safaitic Inscriptions*. (Leiden: Brill)

## **New Techniques for Tracing Ephemeral Occupation in Arid, Dynamic Environments – Case Studies from Wadi Faynan and Wadi el-Jilat, Jordan**

**Daniella Vos** (Bournemouth University, UK)

Can we identify transitory and ephemeral campsites typical of mobile-pastoral subsistence strategies in dynamic environments? Ephemeral occupation is underrepresented within archaeological investigations, perhaps because short-lived sites are notoriously difficult to interpret due to the poor preservation of their remains. However, information about ancient modes of existence in peripheral areas carry great value for the interpretation of past ways of life that are currently understated within archaeological narratives. This paper will discuss recent methodological developments in geoarchaeology which may enable us to maximize the information gained from ephemeral sites, even after a long period of abandonment. The value of reconstructing “marginal” lifestyles for archaeological accounts will be discussed, addressing the visibility of subsistence strategies which have dominated many landscapes in the Near East since the Neolithic.

## **The Lucky Steppe: the Jordanian *Badia* in Late Antiquity**

**Alan Walmsley** (Sidney, Australia)

In recent years much attention has been paid to documenting and describing the many Late Antique (ca. 400-650 CE) village settlements of the Jordanian steppe, extending from the southern slopes of the Hauran to Arabia. Spawned by the empire-wide initiatives of Diocletian, the villages of the badia gained an unprecedented visible presence through the adoption of stone as a building material, thereby preserving local styles of planning and architecture that prevailed for over half a millennium. During this period the badia was a strategic geopolitical and cultural zone that brought fame and fortune to the Arabs who lived there, making it the ‘lucky steppe’. The richness of recent historical and archaeological research is manifest in the many publications that have appeared over the last few decades, notably those from the excavations of the late Michel Piccirillo east of Madaba, the detailed works of Bert de Vries at Umm al-Jimal, and the information-rich publications of the late Irfan Shahid. My current interest is to advance the comprehensive and transdisciplinary evaluation of this historical and archaeological material to reveal the distinctive social structures, belief systems, and ways of daily life shared between the villages and the pastoral countryside, and in which the chief protagonists – the Arab Christian tribes of the Jordanian steppe – featured prominently. This paper highlights some of the new advances in these areas. Once viewed in some quarters, as marginalized border-lands on the fringe of Byzantium, new methodological approaches and the exceptional survival of source material reveals that the Jordanian steppe holds many insights into the developing social and economic profiles of late antiquity in the wider eastern Mediterranean. These profiles record an Arab Christian way of life that deeply informed

the developing cultural horizons and political structures of Syria-Palestine in Late Antiquity, and trended with profound influence into and throughout early Islamic times.