



# TAARII NEWSLETTER

The American Academic Research Institute in Iraq

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## TAARII THANKS FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT FOR HIS SERVICE

On June 30, 2014, TAARII's founder, Professor McGuire Gibson, completed his third and final term as President. Professor Gibson helped found TAARII in 1989, under its former name, the American Association for Research on Baghdad (AARB). However, due to the Gulf War and Sanctions, AARB became dormant. Following a 2003 visit to Iraq, Gibson saw the opportunity for the revival of an Iraqi studies institute, which gave rise to TAARII in its current incarnation: one that focuses on ancient as well as contemporary Iraq. Gibson's dedication to Iraqi studies and collaboration between American and Iraqi colleagues have helped to establish and guide this academic organization through the ups and downs of the last decade. Despite difficulties in working in Iraq over the last decades, Gibson has been a staunch supporter of creating stronger links, opportunities, and projects to bring Iraqi projects to the fore and to provide resources for upcoming and established scholars of Iraq. Faithful to both the American and Iraqi sides of the equation, Gibson has been able to mold TAARII into an organization that speaks to a range of interests in order to better serve scholars.

Professor Gibson's love of Iraq and dedication to it become quickly evident to anyone who meets him, not to mention his sense of humor and entertaining stories from the "trenches" of Iraq archaeology. He has spent many years working in and visiting Iraq. His lifelong love of Iraq and its history is clear in his many publications and his presence in the community of Iraq scholars. His broad knowledge and many



Figure 1.1. (Above) McGuire Gibson after a panel discussion at the University of Maryland, College Park. (Photo credit: Abdulameer al-Hamdani, 2014)

Figure 1.2. (Below) McGuire Gibson attending a conference on Baghdad that TAARII co-organized with the Iraqi Cultural Center in Washington, D.C. (Photo credit: Iraqi Cultural Center, 2014)



connections have made him a wonderful resource for all those interested in Iraq, and he has used this knowledge to train the next generation of Iraq scholars and Mesopotamian archaeologists, including several of our current board of directors and TAARII members.

His most notable archaeological fieldwork in Iraq has been at Kish (1966), as part of the Chicago-Copenhagen Expedition to the Hamrin Salvage (1978–79), and the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute Expedition to Nippur, for which he has been the director since 1972. He has also conducted numerous excavations and surveys in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, as well as been involved in many publication projects, such as the Oriental





Institute Diyala Objects Publication Project (1995–present). Gibson also has numerous publications, ranging from excavation reports to books to articles and opinion pieces.

In recent years, Gibson has also been active in bringing attention to the destruction of Iraqi cultural sites due to the war. He has lectured widely on the looting, the damage to the Baghdad Museum, and the ruin of sites throughout Iraq.

In addition to TAARII, Professor Gibson helped found the American Institute for Yemeni Studies (AIYS) and CAORC (the Council of American Overseas Research Centers) (see figure 1.3). He served as the president of AIYS from 1978–80 and 1991–96. He was also the chairman (1984–88) and treasurer (1988–91) of CAORC. This experience and knowledge of the American Overseas Centers have helped in the creation of AARB/

TAARII and in its continuing efforts.

In further testament to his wide-ranging service to the scholarly community, the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) recognized Gibson with the Jere Bacharach Award for Distinguished Service award in 2010. Gibson received this award for his years of service with CAORC, AIYS, TAARII, and his role in promoting Iraqi studies, both modern and ancient.

While TAARII is sad to have Gibson step down from the role of president, we are thankful for his many years of service and guidance. He will remain on TAARII's Board of Directors as our founding president and will serve on the executive committee. As TAARII grows and expands, we look forward to working with him for many years to come.



Figure 1.3. (Above) CAORC Founding Meeting (Photo credit: CAORC)

Figure 1.4. (Bottom left) McGuire Gibson (center) at the TAARII-ICC conference on Baghdad, along with CAORC former Executive Director Mary Ellen Lane (left), and Columbia University Professor of History Richard Bulliet (right) (Photo credit: ICC, 2014)



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

PETER WIEN

As TAARII's new president, I would like to start by thanking TAARII's Board of Directors (who in turn represent the members) for their trust and confidence in electing me to this position. Since taking over in July 2014, I have received tremendous support and help from my predecessor, Mac Gibson, our Executive Director, Beth Kangas, our Amman Resident Director, Lucine Taminian, TAARII's current and previous officers, as well as Chris Tuttle, the Executive Director of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC). I thank Mac for the immeasurable efforts that he put in TAARII during his years of service. Since TAARII's foundation in 2004, he has steered the ship through rough waters under adverse conditions when war and civil war made it impossible for us to establish a presence in Iraq itself. Through projects, conferences, networking, and a successful research fellowship program, we have nevertheless managed to make a name for ourselves both in the U.S. and Iraq, as well as worldwide.

When I took over from Mac, we were optimistic about efforts to establish a physical presence for TAARII in Baghdad. At the end of May, Mac, Beth, and I had encouraging conversations with the Iraqi Ambassador in Washington, D.C., and the Department of State's Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau about moving our office from our temporary facilities in Amman, Jordan, to Baghdad. However, over the summer, the situation in Iraq deteriorated when ISIS conquered broad swaths of territory and brought

terror to a great number of Iraqis of all provinces.

We at TAARII remain concerned about the ongoing destruction to Iraq's cultural heritage and Iraqi society. We seek ways to collaborate with U.S., Iraqi, and international colleagues and institutions to make a positive contribution.

For example, TAARII has begun the initial steps of a project towards helping to document and eventually digitize the contents of Iraqi libraries, archives, and museums. The records, books, catalogs, and myriad small artifacts in collections and storage facilities constitute the country's institutionalized historical memory belonging to its various communities. Documenting these items would be a relatively small contribution, but one within our means, to alleviate the pains

of the current situation in Iraq when the cultures and societies that we are studying are at risk of disintegrating permanently. TAARII held a workshop at the University of Maryland, College Park, in December 2014 that brought together scholars with experience in digital humanities and Iraqi collections to discuss best practices and possible ways to help document Iraq's cultural heritage. The workshop built a foundation for a subsequent workshop in Iraq and several pilot projects.

I would like to end on a positive note. TAARII has come a long way over the past ten years, and I believe that we have even greater potential for the future. I am looking forward to working with all of you to advance the understanding of Iraq throughout the ages and make it useful for Iraqis and the rest of the world.



Figure 2.1. TAARII's visit to the Iraqi Cultural Center (ICC), May 2014. From left to right: Beth Kangas (TAARII Executive Director), Jabbar Jaafar (ICC Public Relations & Media Specialist), McGuire Gibson (TAARII Founding President), and Peter Wien (TAARII President) (Photo credit: Iraqi Cultural Center, 2014)

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

BETH KANGAS

The year 2014 brought changes to TAARII and Iraq. On July 1, we welcomed one returning and three new officers to TAARII (see box on page 5). We also saw the end of an era as our founder, McGuire Gibson, finished his third and final term as TAARII's President (see cover story). We continued to watch the situation in Iraq, waiting for circumstances to allow TAARII to transition its activities from Jordan to Iraq. The optimism that we had in May quickly turned to concern over the destruction that ensued from the efforts of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) to control Iraq. We wish for all of our Iraqi colleagues safety and security.

Several highlights of TAARII's activities this year include supporting the Iraqi and Mesopotamian scholarly communities and initiating discussions about the preservation of Iraq's cultural heritage. Despite a reduction in funding from the Department of State's Educational and Cultural Affairs Bureau, we were able to continue awarding research fellowships to U.S. and Iraqi scholars. We decided to divide the three U.S. fellowships (at \$10,000 each) among five individuals and the three Iraq fellowships (at \$3,000 each) also among five individuals in order to help TAARII's decreased funding go further and to receive the most value for the limited funds. TAARII's five U.S. fellows are featured in this newsletter issue (see pages 6–7). TAARII continues to keep the names of the Iraqi recipients confidential to protect their security and to follow their lead on when to publish the results of their research (e.g., pages 21–22). The projects of Iraqi research fellows for this year included studies of milk production, modern Iraqi

poetry, inscriptions, tombs, and peaceful coexistence.

To facilitate interactions with members of the Iraqi and Mesopotamian scholarly communities, TAARII held receptions in November at the annual meetings of the American Schools of Oriental Research (ASOR) in San Diego and the Middle East Studies Association in Washington, D.C. (see photos, page 23). At this year's ASOR meeting, TAARII's Secretary, Jason Ur of Harvard University, gave the plenary address on "The Renaissance of Archaeology in Iraq and its Kurdistan Region" (see figure 3.1.) A delegation from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq attended the meeting, including the General Director of Antiquities of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and two of the three directors of governorate offices. At the meeting, the delegation participated in a full day of sessions on archaeology in the Kurdistan Region. In the days before the meeting, the delegation visited Boston and Cambridge (Harvard), Baltimore (Johns Hopkins University), Washington, D.C., and Chicago (University of Chicago's Oriental Institute). Their visit was supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of State via the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad. In addition at ASOR, a double session was devoted to new archaeological initiatives in southern Iraq. Although TAARII had invited the Director of Archaeological Research at Iraq's State Board of Antiquities and Heritage (SBAH) to participate in the double session, he was unable to attend at the last minute. However, Qahtan Al Abeed, SBAH's Director of Antiquities for Basrah Governorate and Director of the Basrah Museum, and Badir Albadran, Chair of Geology

at the University of Basra, did attend, invited by TAARII members Carrie Hritz (AAS Fellow, Geosciences Division, National Science Foundation) and Jennifer Pournelle (University of South Carolina) and supported by their grant from the National Science Foundation. We appreciate the assistance that ASOR and the other institutions extended to all of the participants from Iraq.

In 2014, TAARII held three events on preserving Iraq's cultural heritage. On July 18, TAARII and the Iraqi Cultural Center held a program in Washington, D.C., on the implications of the fighting in Iraq on the country's cultural heritage. The program included three speakers: Katharyn Hanson, who works as an archaeologist specializing in the protection of cultural heritage; Brian Michael Lione, the Executive Director of University of Delaware Programs at the Iraqi Institute for the Conservation of Antiquities and Heritage (IICAH) in Erbil, Iraq; and Abdulameer al-Hamdani, an archaeologist from Iraq who is currently pursuing his Ph.D. at Stony Brook University. SAFE (Saving Antiquities for Everyone) live-tweeted the session and produced a summary of it. On December 11–12, TAARII held a panel discussion and workshop at the University of Maryland, College Park, on the technical, legal, and scholarly challenges of documenting Iraq's cultural heritage. The preliminary workshop provided the foundation for a workshop that we plan to hold in Iraq in 2015 with personnel from Iraq's museums, libraries, and archives. We will report on the cultural heritage events in Maryland in the next issue of the newsletter.

The year 2014 brought a final change for TAARII. On December 31,

2014, TAARII gave up its apartment/office in Amman. The reduction in TAARII's funding made it necessary to cut the annual rent that we had been paying. TAARII's library books and bookshelves have been put in storage in Amman; we will transfer them when we open an office in Baghdad when the conditions allow. Dr. Lucine Taminian, TAARII's Resident Director, will operate her TAARII activities from her house in Amman.

TAARII will continue to promote the study of ancient, medieval, and modern Iraq. In 2015, we will work on establishing TAARII as an institution in Iraq. We will continue our fellowship programs and focus on helping to document Iraq's cultural heritage. As always, we welcome your ideas and suggestions and we thank you for your support of TAARII and Iraqi/Mesopotamian Studies.



Figure 3.1. Jason Ur of Harvard University (TAARII Secretary) delivers the plenary address on “The Renaissance of Archaeology in Iraq and its Kurdistan Region” at the American Schools for Oriental Research (ASOR) annual meeting in San Diego, November 2014 (Photo credit: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2014)

### TAARII'S NEW OFFICERS

**President:** Peter Wien, University of Maryland, College Park

**Vice-President:** Eric Davis, Rutgers University

**Secretary:** Jason Ur, Harvard University

**Treasurer:** Waiel Hindo

### TAARII'S EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Magnus Bernhardsson, Williams College

Eric Davis, Rutgers University

McGuire Gibson, University of Chicago

Waiel Hindo

Stephen Humphreys, University of California, Santa Barbara

Dina Khoury, George Washington University

Peter Sluglett, National University of Singapore

Jason Ur, Harvard University

Peter Wien, University of Maryland, College Park

Bassam Yousif, Indiana State University



## 2014 U.S. FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS

ISACAR BOLAÑOS, HISTORY, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

*“Dates, Tides, and Plague: Environment and Administrative Reform in Basra and the Ottoman Gulf, 1839–1909”*

SAMUEL ENGLAND, AFRICAN LANGUAGES & LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

*“Iraqi Stones and Ink beneath the Spanish Century of Gold”*

M. WILLIS MONROE, ANCIENT WESTERN ASIAN STUDIES, BROWN UNIVERSITY

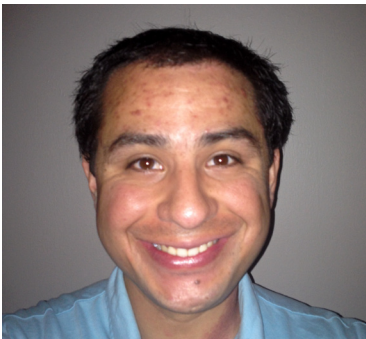
*“Innovation in Seleucid Astrology: Re-investigating the Micro-Zodiac”*

KALI RUBAIL, ANTHROPOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA–SANTA CRUZ

*“Futurity in Fallujah: An Anthropological Study of Possibility in a Landscape of Counterinsurgency”*

ZACKARY WAINER, ASSYRIOLOGY, BROWN UNIVERSITY

*“The Series Šumma Sîn ina tāmartišu and Its Position within Mesopotamian Scholarship of the First Millenium B.C.E.”*



ISACAR BOLAÑOS

Isacar Bolaños' project examines how environmental factors specific to Basra and the Persian Gulf (or Basra Körfezi) littoral informed Ottoman administrative practices and foreign interests (mainly, the development of quarantine stations along the Persian Gulf, and improved irrigation systems for the cultivation of dates in Basra) in the region between 1839 and 1909. Bolaños argues that primary among such environmental factors were: (1) the cultivation of and trade in dates; (2) the development of an irrigation system based on tidal patterns (*medd ü cezir*) specific to the Persian Gulf; and (3) attempts to stop the spread of plague and disease in the region. In 2014, Bolaños conducted archival research in Istanbul and London.

SAMUEL ENGLAND

In his research project, Samuel England shows how 'Abbasid Iraqi texts provided a conceptual basis for European theories of the world in the Middle Ages. He will analyze Arabic works that, issued in tenth-century Baghdad and translated in Europe 300 years later, defined empirical knowledge. England conducted archival research in Spain, Germany, and Canada, investigating 'Abbasid manuscripts and their translations by medieval European scholars. The first phase was to locate the specific folios upon which his research is based, from which point he would obtain the necessary facsimiles for the project's textual-analytic component. He spent two months studying the scientific and literary prose that developed from the 'Abbasid-European period of cultural contact. The goal of England's project is to examine these Arabic and Romance works in a comparative framework, and to publish the first book-length study of Iraqi Arabic texts' role in the beginnings of the Spanish "Golden Age" and the European Renaissance more broadly.



*These fellowships are funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs through a sub-grant from the Council of American Overseas Research Centers.*



M. WILLIS MONROE

M. Willis Monroe studied cuneiform material in three European museum collections to create a new comprehensive edition of an enigmatic text dealing with the Babylonian zodiac, called the micro-zodiac. This material has long fascinated both scholars and the wider public with its illustrated depictions of the zodiacal signs. Monroe's research will attempt to reconstruct the text as fully as the current material allows and investigate multiple issues surrounding its content, format, and composition. The composers of these tablets were well versed in thousands of years of cuneiform culture as well as remarkably current regarding the developments in astronomical and astrological knowledge happening around them. In addition, they developed new methods for organizing knowledge that have bearing on our modern

spreadsheets. Traveling to these collections in Berlin, London, and Paris allowed Monroe to re-study the published material and incorporate new fragments into a new edition shedding more light on the developments in late Babylonian scholarship.

KALI RUBAII

Kali Rubaii's comparative research project addresses the radical transformation of infrastructure and social structure in Iraq and Palestine over the past four decades. She will map an uncertain trajectory of possibility and social aspiration in a landscape permanently altered by chemical saturation and military infrastructure. Her ethnographic fieldwork includes participant observation and in-person interviews about people's sense of the future, the scope of their aspirations, and the limited possibilities for rural Iraqis and Palestinians as a result of infrastructural damage and chemical saturation on the landscape. For the TAARII-funded portion of her research, Rubaii interviewed families living in Amman, Jordan, who travel back and forth between Iraq and Jordan. She also interviewed military strategists in Amman, and visited weapon, chemical, and cement manufacturing sites, military training facilities, and archives. This supplements her fieldwork inside Iraq and Palestine. Rubaii's dissertation will explore how the immaterial qualities of futurity, hope, possibility, and aspiration are materialized through the landscape.



ZACKARY WAINER

Zackary Wainer's larger project will center upon an edition of the ancient Mesopotamian commentary series *Šumma Šîn ina tāmartišu* (*SIT*). Wainer's TAARII research fellowship allowed him to visit the British Museum, the Netherlands Institute for the Near East, and the Louvre to better reconstruct and edit the text of *SIT*, which will be the backbone of his dissertation, by taking new photographs, collating texts he has already edited, and searching for parallel texts amongst the museum collections. Once he has edited the series, he will employ *SIT* to address some important questions and assumptions concerning commentaries, scholarship, and canonization in Mesopotamia. Specifically, he will focus on canonization in light of commentary formation, the place of *SIT* within Mesopotamian scholarship of the first millennium, and how *SIT* fits into the larger Mesopotamian commentary tradition and other ancient Near Eastern exegetical practices.

#### TAARII PROGRAM: RESEARCH AFFILIATES IN JORDAN

TAARII invites applications for a Research Affiliate status for U.S. scholars working on Iraq while based in Amman, Jordan. As increasing numbers of American researchers undertake Iraq-related research in Jordan, TAARII aims to support their needs and work and to include them in the broader TAARII community. To apply for Research Affiliate status, please submit a brief project statement, together with a CV, to [beth@taarii.org](mailto:beth@taarii.org). There is no deadline and scholars can apply for Affiliate status on a short-term or long-term basis.

## LOCUSTS, ARSENIC, AND OLD WAYS: ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST

SAMUEL DOLBEE, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY & 2013 TAARII U.S. FELLOW

On April 30, 1860, the Tigris River flowed with the bodies of locusts.<sup>1</sup> According to Mehmet Veysi, the Ottoman governor of Mosul at the time, from morning until night ever since the end of Ramadan nine days before, there was not a rod's length between the flow of insect carcasses in the river. What turned the mighty waterway into a stream of bugs? The answer involves water far beyond the headwaters of the Tigris. Mehmet Veysi, in a letter to the grand vizier in Istanbul, explained that to avoid the devastation of locust invasions from the previous years, he had imported "locust water" (Ottoman: *mâülcerād*; Arabic: *mā' al-jarād*) from the Anatolian province of Konya. The liquid was supposed to attract a bird known in Turkish as the *sığircık*, which in turn was supposed to delight in devouring locusts.<sup>2</sup> In addition to birds and, in turn, locusts, the water also had an effect on humans. Poured in receptacles and hung in mosques, the "locust water," Mehmet Veysi wrote, was a substance "which the people believed in and took as a good sign." And, according to Mehmet Veysi, the flow of locust carcasses of 1860 had proven just how effective the remedy was. The birds had so taken control of the skies upriver from Mosul, that the bugs had no choice but to retreat into the water, whence they flowed to Mosul and beyond. "It is not known if they will return or not after they go downstream," Mehmet Veysi admitted, but he nevertheless gave thanks for what he called a "great gift." This was perhaps an understatement, given that the birds' chasing the locusts into the river meant not only that the region's barley and wheat, but also its peasants, struggling after

years of hardship, might survive another year. Of course, the peasants of Mosul did not simply have the magic water of Konya to thank for their survival and that of their fields. They also could thank themselves. They had, at the behest of Mehmet Veysi and his officials, scoured the rocky hatching grounds of the locust, collecting and destroying no less than 100,000 okka of locust eggs and 50,000 okka more of hatched locusts, which amounted to over 200 tons of locust matter destroyed.

For all of this exertion, this type of struggle with locusts was nothing new for residents of the region; as early as the days of Hammurabi, the areas around Sinjar Mountain west of Mosul had functioned as locust hatching grounds.<sup>3</sup> Even the Roman author Pliny seems to have mentioned a ceremony that called for Jupiter to bring locust-slaying birds to the region near what is now Hatay in Turkey at the beginning of the Common Era.<sup>4</sup> But if this 1860 defense of Mosul by *sığircık* was far from the first of its kind it was also, I suggest, possibly one of the last; in the early twentieth century new methods of scientific pest

control instigated a rupture with the past founded on synthetic chemicals, the consequences of which are still being unpacked both for people and the environment.

Nearly eighty years after Mehmet Veysi and his holy locust water, and under a political regime of a decidedly different kind, the areas around Mosul remained at the mercy of this small bug. In his memoir published in 1937, Archibald Milne Hamilton, a native of New Zealand working as an engineer in Northern Iraq under the British mandate, described these creatures' onslaught in preternatural terms. Hamilton was a practical man, if nothing else; for example, he resolved the dilemma of whether his band of Jewish, Muslim, and Christian workers would rest on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday simply by giving them no day of rest at all.<sup>5</sup> Yet even this steadfast figure's descriptions of the locust invasions verge on the hyperbolic. Hamilton's claim that locusts proved more devastating than "war and aerial bombing" may have had special purchase given the novel forms of destruction wrought by air raids in

Iraq in the interwar period.<sup>6</sup> (It may also have had to do with the fact that the Royal Air Force never dropped its bombs on him.)

In addition to comparing the destruction caused by locusts to that of modern militaries, Hamilton also conceived of the locusts' behavior in military terms, writing that "they move with a slow advance over a frontage of many miles" much like "an invading army."<sup>7</sup> Another British observer, W.A. Lyon, echoed Hamilton's sense of awe at the insect's order: "They may be seen in clouds miles long in

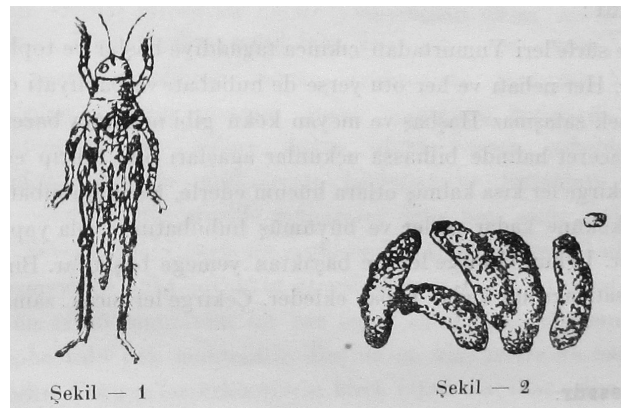


Figure 4.1. Drawing of a Moroccan locust (*Dociostaurus maroccanus*) and its eggs, 1931. Taken from Şevket, *Çekirgelerin envat, itlafl [The Types of Locusts, their Destruction]* (Istanbul: Hilal Matbaası, 1931), 5.



frontage, darkening the sky with their density and, as if guided by a single commander, marching or flying all in the same direction.”<sup>8</sup> He concluded, “They never turn back.”<sup>9</sup> And they consumed everything in their way, pursuing a sort of scorched earth policy. Hamilton cited stories of locusts devouring “disabled animals, and even small babies left unattended,” while Lyon claimed the insects would eat “the tent ropes if there is nothing more edible in reach,” leaving in their wake “nothing but black stumps and their own excreta.”<sup>10</sup>

It is perhaps not surprising for entomological enemies so often conceived of in military terms that the preferred methods of destruction of locusts were not so different from the preferred methods of destruction of humans, for example, the employment of flamethrowers. A Turkish pamphlet on locusts from 1931 dryly noted that the process of engulfing a three-inch-long insect in a ball of flame was “not cost-effective.”<sup>11</sup>

There were other, perhaps less comically asymmetric, methods of eliminating locusts, but still few totally evaded the overkill aspect of flamethrower versus locust. The use of “arsenic oxide,” according to Lyon, killed locusts.<sup>12</sup> But, according to the complaints of farmers, the poison likewise killed “cattle and sheep for years afterwards.” It also led to the demise of “unpopular and unwanted members of the community,” whose “unexplained deaths” seemed to “invariably” accompany “the government issue of large quantities” of the poison. Hamilton also described a slightly more labor-intensive procedure involving the construction of “trenches lined with smooth metal sheeting,” in which locusts would be trapped and subsequently burned or buried.<sup>13</sup> In lieu of zinc, which was the sleek metal of choice for these devices, one English officer in Iraq resorted to “the glossy pages of hundreds of the illustrated



Figure 4.2. Flamethrowers for locust control, Palestine, circa 1915–1930. Matson Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

London weekly papers.”<sup>14</sup>

And yet for all of the (over-) effectiveness of arsenic and the slick appeal of old photographs of Charlie Chaplin, locust control still relied on human knowledge in key ways. In 1930 in Kirkuk, for example, Lyon wrote of how a certain Abdul Wahab was charged with controlling locusts.<sup>15</sup> His main qualifications for the post included “running the blockade during the war, and afterwards evading the duty on tobacco caravans, which he slipped through the hills and round the checkpoints by night.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, he was a smuggler. Pinning a locust carcass “to his headcloth like a soldier’s cap badge,” Abdul Wahab proceeded to scrutinize the countryside on horseback for traces of the insect scourge. His search ended up fruitless, a result that didn’t pain him too much since, by his estimation, the successful eradication of the locust would also leave him without a job.

Whether Abdul Wahab found the bugs or not, the Iraqi state’s employment of this well-known smuggler to steer its

locust control efforts underscored a perhaps uncomfortable dynamic of the new nation-state. To control space within Iraqi borders, the state had to rely on a person whose expertise stemmed from his ability to move across these borders undetected. This skill was useful since locusts, much like the vast majority of residents of the Middle East not named Sykes or Picot, were not party to the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the secret treaty by which Britain and France demarcated post-World War I spheres of influence. The locusts had little respect for this division of the post-Ottoman world. Just as they had for millennia before 1916, locusts continued to swarm from their hatching grounds around Mosul into Syria and Turkey toward the Mediterranean.

The increasing virulence of chemicals, however, seems to have changed this interwar inter-border calculus. By 1947, for example, the Iraqi Department of Agriculture boasted of a successful campaign even amidst record-breaking infestation levels owed not to the prowess of men like Abdul Wahab, but rather, to arsenic. Iraqi Director-General of Agriculture Darwish al-Haidri told a newspaper that the conservative estimate of the amount of land infested with locusts (870,000 acres) was six times the previous record high (150,000 acres).<sup>17</sup> By al-Haidri’s accounting, the staunch defense in the face of such record numbers was the result of the distribution of 160 tons of Paris green and sodium arsenite “over the infested areas by dust ejectors and by hand in areas inaccessible to machines.”<sup>18</sup> This pesticide-heavy approach was very much in line with a post-World War II emphasis on scientific agriculture across both sides of the Cold War divide.

It is no stretch to say that al-Haidri’s pronouncements posed a real break with the past. Whereas Ottoman authorities relied on the power of prayers, the hands of peasants, and the wings of the *sığırık*

for their locust defenses, the Iraqi authorities relied on gasoline-powered trucks, buses, and cars — 750 of them — to spew poison in the face of a locust onslaught. Indeed, these vehicles relied on the form of energy that made Mosul a target of colonial meddling for much of the last century. In the region where less than a century before the Tigris had flowed with the bodies of locusts, al-Haidri witnessed a similar image of insect holocaust, noting that during a “17-mile motor drive in the north he had seen the earth black with layer upon layer of dead locusts.”<sup>19</sup> Paris green most certainly killed these locusts. And, along with other chemicals like DDT, it may well have killed the *sığircık* bird, too.

<sup>1</sup> Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Meclis-i Vala 756 36 (1276 Za 12).

<sup>2</sup> It seems people supplicated to a similar locust-eating bird in Aleppo and Damascus, referred to as the *samarmar* in Arabic. But the magic water that attracted this avian protector of the harvest hailed not from Konya but from Persia. James Grehan, “The Legend of the Samarmar: Parades and Communal Identity in Syrian Towns c. 1500–1800,” *Past & Present* 204, no. 1 (August 2009): 89–125.

<sup>3</sup> Magnus Widell, “Historical Evidence for Climate Instability and Environmental Catastrophes in Northern Syria and the Jazira: The Chronicle of Michael the Syrian,” *Environment and History* 13, no. 1 (February 2007): 57.

<sup>4</sup> J. G. Taylor, “Journal of a Tour in Armenia, Kurdistan, and Upper Mesopotamia, with Notes of Researches in the Deyrsim Dag, in 1866,” *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 38 (1868): 359.

<sup>5</sup> Archibald Milne Hamilton, *Road through Kurdistan: Travels in Northern Iraq* (New

York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 60.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Wallace A. Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Britons: the Memoir of Wallace Lyon in Iraq, 1918–44* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 174.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Hamilton, *Road through Kurdistan*, 143; Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Britons*, 174.

<sup>11</sup> Şevket, *Çekirgelerin envai, itlafi [The Types of Locusts, their Destruction]* (Istanbul: Hilal Matbaası, 1931), 58.

<sup>12</sup> Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Britons*, 174.

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, *Road through Kurdistan*, 144.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Lyon, *Kurds, Arabs and Britons*, 175.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Associated Press, “Stiff Defense by Government Halts Iraq Locust Onslaught,” *The Christian Science Monitor* Jul. 10, 1947, 9.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

## EXILED NOSTALGIA

LILIANA CARRIZO, UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN & 2013 TAARII U.S. FELLOW

I arrived in Israel in March 2014 as a TAARII Fellow, with the intention of studying the improvised songs of Iraqi Jews. These songs are an intensely private musical practice, sung in Arabic melodic modes and recounted in Judeo-Arabic. I was only aware of their existence through my personal experiences as the daughter of an Iraqi Jew. Though I suspected that the improvisations of my childhood continued to thrive among surviving Iraqi Jews, I was not exactly sure what I would or could find once I embarked upon my research. After a month of conducting interviews, I was beginning to tire of hearing “No, I do not know any songs. I do not remember much of Iraq except

bitterness.” One day in early April, I happened to speak with an Iraqi Jew named Tsion who shared with me his life story. During our interview, my informant became visibly moved while discussing his past in Basra. In a fit of inspiration, he began to sing the song I share at the top of the following page, a song he improvised based on his yearning for the city in which he was raised. His improvisation is based on a song of anonymous origin, which he learned during his childhood in Iraq.

After that day in April, I began to understand that this rich world of underground song could not be approached openly. An overt question addressing the existence of these

songs, for example, was sure to receive a reply of denial. However, when I asked Iraqi women and men to share with me their life histories, the songs began to reveal themselves. Singers would interweave their melodies through tales of arranged marriage, familial deaths, bride theft, and personal experiences of leaving Iraq, allowing themselves to express personal sentiments and a hidden nostalgia for the homeland they left behind. These sentiments are not often articulated in open discourse, especially those associated with longing for an Arab past. In Israel’s contemporary political climate, Jews and Arabs are pitted on rival sides of what is presented as an almost



At dawn the long boat sails slowly on the river  
 How beautiful your dates, oh Basra  
 How beautiful, oh Basra  
 How beautiful your people  
 All my life, I long for you  
 Your atmosphere, your palm trees  
 But I must be patient.  
 The beauty of your days lives in my chest  
 I will defend you as my arms are long  
 Even while sleeping I still dream of you  
 When the first ray of the sun appears  
 Even then, I miss you.  
 I hide you in my heart forever  
 You are my secret  
 Intoxicating me with your memory.

– *Musical improvisation shared by Tsion Interview, Bnei Brak, Israel, April 2014*

primordial ethno-nationalist conflict. The nostalgic memories many Iraqi Jews harbor for their Arabic culture, language, and Iraqi homeland is indeed a “secret,” as Tsion poetically described in his improvisation, an intoxicating memory that can only be recounted through the secret world of song.

After my interview with Tsion in early April, I learned two things: one, that this musical practice, albeit dwindling, does indeed continue to thrive in hushed tones and private quarters; and two, that this tradition was adapted, not only by Iraqi women, but also by Iraqi men since their immigration to Israel in the 1950s. I was surprised to discover that such improvisations, once predominant in female-dominated domestic circles, have since been adopted by both genders as a medium for expressing intimate emotions and social commentary.

Throughout my months conducting fieldwork in Israel from March through June 2014, I attended familial gatherings and celebrations, completed many interviews, and recorded over fifty songs. These songs were always shared with me

in the context of storytelling: never openly, and only within the privacy of a home. My interviewees would recount their personal tales and life histories, and only in the context of reliving their experiences would they burst into song. Sometimes these songs were recounted by singers themselves, while other times they were recalled by the children of Iraqi Jews whose parents had since passed. Through my research, I recorded hundreds of colloquial idioms in the endangered Iraqi dialect of Judeo-Arabic, many of which have been incorporated into the lyrics of my informants’ songs. At times, having my young daughter with me during interviews helped my endeavors, and I recall one particularly vivid occasion where an Iraqi woman improvised a short poem inspired by my daughter’s presence.

I complemented my ethnographic study with archival research at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center (BJHC), where Hebrew-language scholarship on Iraqi Jewish song helped me identify “stock” songs upon which many singers base their improvisations. The BJHC is organized according to the “official”

narrative of Jewish Iraq, one that highlights the persecution of Jews in Iraq and presents the community’s mass immigration to Israel as inevitable. Such sentiments were echoed and overtly espoused by my informants in spoken discourse. Yet although I found that many Iraqi Jews explicitly recount the hardships of their final years in Iraq, and particularly their experiences of physical harm and death during the Farhud of 1941, their songs betray the affectionate memories they often do not openly admit. During interviews, for example, many Iraqi Jews expressed strongly nationalistic sentiments as Israeli citizens, and even made disdainful remarks about Arab-Iraqi society and culture in speech, just as they simultaneously extolled its virtues through song. I began to realize that these two sentiments associated with life in Iraq, both embittered and affectionate, comele uneasily within the hearts and minds of many of the Iraqi Jews I grew to know.

In light of these sentiments, how does improvised song help Iraqi Jews reconcile the conflicting experiences, memories, and identities they struggle

with as Israelis, Iraqis, Arabs, and Jews? How does this musical practice allow them to express the forbidden nostalgia they so often deny? Based on my findings, I theorize that improvised songs give voice to subversive expression and nostalgic sentiment in three ways: through their indexing of Arab melodic modes and musical genres associated with sadness and longing, through the language in which they are iterated (the Iraqi dialect of Judeo-Arabic), and through lyrical tropes and themes that evoke sensorial experiences. These songs, recounted in eloquent melodies or raspy monotonous voices (depending on the singer), are reminiscent of a musical genre known as *'ataba* practiced throughout the Arab world, a genre associated with feelings of longing, love, and nostalgic sentiment. Many, but not all, of the Iraqi Jewish songs I encountered index similar feelings as *'ataba* songs through their incorporation of musical features common to the genre. This includes the incorporation of melismatic vocal improvisation within some songs, where singers recite the word “oof, oof, oof,” in emotion-laden tones. These songs are further saturated with feelings of nostalgia, not only through the use of Iraqi dialect of Judeo-Arabic, itself a language of great sentimental meaning for many Iraqi Jews (especially considering its endangered status), but also through their depiction of embodied practice. Vivid sensorial experiences are nostalgically recounted in song lyrics, including personal memories revolving around the sights and smells of the streets of Baghdad and Basra, the particular spices and flavors of the



Figure 5.1. Liliana Carrizo interviewing Eli Sofer, an elderly Iraqi-Jewish man  
(Photo credit: Andres Carrizo, 2014)

food, and experiences swimming in the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Due to their private nature, these songs have never been described in scholarship. Thus, my research is important in exposing the existence of an emotionally laden, Arab-Jewish musical practice and an important part of Iraqi heritage writ large. My findings resonate with a wide array of scholarship, including literature on Iraqi musical practices, Iraqi immigrants in Israel, and the relationship of embodied practices to nationalist affiliation, nostalgia, and subversive memory — all of which intersect and contribute to the discipline of Iraqi Studies in important ways. Beyond the scholarly implications, however, these songs help reveal the hybridic experiences of Iraqis as both Jews and Arabs and demonstrate the constructed nature of ethno-nationalist affiliation. Their existence contradicts the polarization of Jewish and Arab identity in contemporary geopolitical discourse.

A study of their features and continued existence is extremely pertinent considering the current political climate, especially given the tragic events of the most recent conflict in Gaza.

My receipt of the TAARII fellowship marks a significant contribution to the realization of this research. Thanks to this generous and invaluable support, I was able to conduct the doctoral research I have detailed here. Since my tenure as a TAARII scholar, I have been awarded a Fulbright IIE Fellowship to continue fieldwork in Israel from October 2014 through June 2015, where I will conduct further research on these songs and share my preliminary findings with musicology

faculty and students at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. After I complete my research and dissertation, I will disseminate my findings through publications and papers delivered at scholarly conferences, and attain my Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology. This work will form the backbone of my academic career as a specialist in Iraqi-Jewish music. I am grateful to TAARII for helping me see this research come to fruition.

#### NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS, COMMENTS, & SUGGESTIONS

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## THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN IRAQ: LESSONS FROM EIGHT IRAQI FULBRIGHT SCHOLARS

SHAMIRAN MAKO AND DENIS J. SULLIVAN\*

On September 3, 2014, the Boston Consortium for Arab Region Studies (BCARS) hosted a unique workshop featuring eight Iraqi Fulbright visiting scholars, all graduates of various Iraqi institutions of higher education. These eight Fulbright Scholars spent the summer in Boston and were based at Salem State University. The scholars were selected to participate in the Fulbright program at Salem State from a pool of over 300 candidates across Iraq. The scholars specialize in various disciplines and sub-fields of English language training, including pedagogy, grammar, and applied linguistics at universities throughout Iraq. They represent several regions and universities, including the University of Baghdad, University of Diyala, University of Kufa, and Sulaymaniyah University in Iraqi Kurdistan.

The aim of the BCARS-hosted workshop was three-fold:

1. To facilitate a discussion with academics in the Boston area on the state of higher education in Iraq's conflict zones;
2. To better understand critical challenges facing Iraqi scholars and academics working inside the country; and
3. To elucidate the professional and personal needs of Iraqi academics working at various institutions of higher education inside Iraq, particularly following the post-2003 "brain drain."

While the Iraqi scholars reflected positively on the success of exchange and scholarship programs, such as Fulbright in the United States, Erasmus in the E.U., and Chevening in the U.K., they all highlighted critical challenges

to the state of higher education in Iraq, particularly post-2003. First, the types of constraints that shape the level of access and delivery of higher education vary between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In the case of the former, scholars underscored the security situation as a decisive factor in determining university enrollment and educator access to institutions of higher education. Physical safety has posed a big hurdle in accessing university classrooms and campuses, which has impeded education delivery. In fact, a professor from a university outside of Baghdad was advised by students not to carry a briefcase to work because that made her an identifiable target for terrorist groups targeting academics and professors, specifically. Others pointed to the prohibition of mobile devices (including cell phones and laptop computers) from university campuses across the country as such devices can be used to remotely activate and detonate bombs targeting students and faculty members; this prohibition clearly disrupts the delivery of information in an increasingly technologically dependent learning environment.

Moreover, although the security dimension was less of an issue for students and faculty in the Kurdistan Region, corruption and nepotism pose the biggest challenges to the state of higher education on both the state and the sub-state level. These issues extended to the selections of candidates to masters and doctoral programs, determined funding distribution, employment opportunities, and academic appointments. Furthermore, scholars from the Kurdistan Region emphasized issues regarding mandatory political party affiliations as decisive factors in graduate school admissions and faculty and academic

appointments throughout universities in the Kurdistan Region. On a regional level, however, there appears to be more investment in higher education capacity building through the formation of new universities and the creation of new departments and expansion of existing schools and faculties.

Although the challenges encountered varied across cities and most notably between Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, faculty and students alike experienced similar constraints in the circumstances that have affected higher education across the country. The scholars across Iraq point to the continued dearth of academics from the country stemming from the 1991 and the post-2003 "brain drain" that resulted in the targeting and subsequent flight of academics and technocrats from the country. This "brain drain" has affected the ratio of students to professors as the ever-growing levels of student enrollment far surpass the availability of professors, especially where the enrollment in English language programs specifically is increasing faster than faculty availability. Many English professors echo similar concerns regarding limited classroom space, increase in weekly lecturing hours to accommodate a larger student body (in one case, from eight hours per week to over thirty hours), limited faculty availability, and an exponential increase in administrative and academic duties associated with the rise in student enrollment. On a national level, the faculty members shared similar sentiments regarding the lack of overall funding and investment in higher education, including investment in new research technologies and digital access to domestic and international research resources. Likewise, the scholars noted limitations in the availability and

accessibility of digital research tools on and off college and university campuses for students and faculty members alike.

#### WHAT IS NEEDED TO HELP IRAQI SCHOLARS AND STUDENTS ALIKE?

The Fulbright Scholars at the BCARS workshop emphasized the ability for faculty and students to access digital resources for conducting research and for keeping up to date with emerging research across the region and on an international level. They collectively requested the aid of American, Canadian, and European colleges and universities to develop academic exchanges for both faculty and students so as to bolster their international networks in order to apply novel and innovative teaching tools. All expressed the need for updated teaching materials and basic needs starting with textbooks, databases, and lab equipment and are generally committed to enhancing their teaching skills with new technologies and academic team-teaching as well as collaborative research. They specifically requested assistance with the following issues:

- Co-teaching via video conferencing or Skype with non-Iraqi academics
- Well-equipped language learning facilities, including updated

software programs and training tools to enhance e-learning

- Recording devices to record and publish lectures online for easy access
- Access to virtual libraries and research resources (even if it is limited) from outside Iraq
- Updated books, libraries, and periodicals and training programs for faculty members
- Engagement in cooperative cultural discussions with U.S. and European academic institutions
- Collaborative research with non-Iraqi academics and publishing in global journals
- Assistance in internationalizing Iraqi academic institutions
- Bringing Iraqi scholars from different parts of the country to American institutions and vice versa in order to bolster academic exchange programs
- Creating opportunities for Iraqi scholars to attend international conferences
- A network of investments in international partnership programs for students, researchers, and faculty members

- A compilation of studies on global partnerships for students and academics on three levels: high school, university, and institutional leadership exchanges

- Partnerships to ensure the participation of the right people with right skills to advance and scale their promising results and initiatives. Alumni services can support these partnerships to invest and enhance previous programs.

Fundamentally, these Fulbright scholars are optimistic, yet realistic, in striving for academic integrity for themselves and their students; academic freedom for all students and faculty engaged in the pursuit of knowledge, science, and discovery; and achieving peace throughout Iraq, including on their campuses across the country, to enable all students, faculty, and staff to pursue these academic interests in a safe, conflict-free environment.

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## KINGDOM OF REEDS: THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE OF SOUTHERN IRAQI MARSHES

ABDULAMEER AL-HAMDANI, THE IRAQI STATE BOARD OF ANTIQUITIES AND HERITAGE  
& THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT STONY BROOK

Although most of the Mesopotamian alluvial plain has been surveyed and documented, many areas remain without documentation. Among these areas are the southern marshes, which are located between and alongside the lower courses of the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers. The existence of the marshes when Robert Adams and his colleagues conducted their surveys in the 1960s meant that they were unable to connect the settlement patterns that they had observed with the gulf to the south. In 2003, I was able to initiate a series of surveys in southern Iraq, including areas that had been marshes before Saddam Hussein drained them in 1992. There are three main areas of marshes that we were able to explore: Howr al-Ḥammār, which is located east of Ur; the Central Marshes, which extend between the lower courses of the Tigris and the Euphrates; and Howr al-Ḥūwaiza, which starts from the Tigris eastward to the Iranian territories.

The objective of this survey was primarily to determine the nature of the ancient occupation and the settlement system in areas closer to the gulf than had been possible when the earlier surveys were carried out. However, this survey also gave us the opportunity to understand how rivers that were known from earlier surveys connect to the gulf. Before our survey, the only record of sites in this area was that by George Roux, who visited a handful of sites located at the southern edge of Howr al-Ḥammār in 1953, describing them as primarily Islamic and pre-Islamic in date.<sup>1</sup>

The survey was conducted periodically from 2003–2009, and was designed

to record the sites before they were inundated. Colleagues from the southern provinces of Dhiqār, Maysān, and al-Baṣra contributed to this survey. Trucks were used on dry land and boats for water-covered areas, but in shallow or muddy marshes, walking was preferred even for considerable distances. Since 2008, a remote sensing technique was used to analyze the Digital Globe Quick Bird satellite images for part of the marshes in order to observe the landscape, and to trace courses of the ancient canal system. Also, the Geographic Information System (GIS) was used to map sites and features. Technical support was provided by Elizabeth Stone of State University of New York at Stony Brook.

### HOWR AL-ḤAMMĀR

In Howr al-Ḥammār, most of the sites were located alongside the very clear traces of an ancient river. This was an extension to the south of the watercourse that passed to the east of the ancient city of Eridu and past Tell el-Leḥem.<sup>2</sup> This river ran west of Uruk downward toward Telūl al-Deḥaila and Umm al-Jamajim, which both date back to early second millennium B.C. At Eridu, the course turns east toward Telūl al-Ṣūlibiyāt, an Old Babylonian settlement (1763–1595 B.C.), and then goes all the way to Tell el-Leḥem where it joins a canal that comes from Ur to form one course and runs eastward. Within our survey area, we traced it eastward until it disappeared north of the Basra oil field. As was the case with most of the sites surveyed by Henry Wright in the northern extensions of the ancient canal, most of the sites along its southern extensions dated back

to the second and first millennia B.C.

Early second millennium sites are located at the western part of Howr al-Ḥammār, alongside the river when it passed Tell el-Leḥem. The ancient course of the river is very obvious in this area, and its two-meter depth is distinguishable from the surrounding flat plain. The local population called it Kary Seḍa. Significant sites include Oasir Thāmir and Abu Thahab. Oasir Thāmir is located 13 km east of Tell el-Leḥem, is almost 30 hectares in size, and consists of two mounds. On the larger, southern mound, we found the foundations of an Old Babylonian public building. Abu Thahab, a 30-hectare site, is located 30 km east of Tell el-Leḥem; it, too, has an important Old Babylonian public building.

These sites were occupied for a short time during the first dynasty of Babylon until the 11th year of the reign of the son of Hammurabi, Samsu-Iluna, the king of Babylonia (1750–1710 B.C.), where he attacked the southern cities. As a reaction to this attack, the people of the south started rebelling against Babylon and created their own governmental structure, the so-called first Sealand Dynasty (ca. 1739–1340 B.C.), which led to the collapse of the first Babylonian dynasty in the south. During this time, the canals and rivers shifted their beds and created marshes and swamps in lower southern Mesopotamia. Based on the site surface pottery, most of the second millennium sites in this area and northward up to Larsa have settlement that dates back to the first Sealand dynasty, which lasted from the late Old Babylonian through the early Kassite periods.

Kassite sites (1595–1155 B.C.) were also represented in this area at the middle part of the ancient river. The most prominent site, Tell Abu Rūbāb, is located 38 km east of Tell el-Leḥem, is 75 ha, and is divided into two mounds by the ancient river. Tell Chirbāsy is the last Kassite site toward the eastern part of the ancient river, and is located 56 km east of Tell el-Leḥem.

The Neo-Babylonian sites (626–539 B.C.) are located close to the eastern end of the ancient river. The two most important sites were located at different ends of a rectangular island located at the eastern end of the watercourse — probably close to where it debouched into the gulf. Tell Abu Shuaib (25 ha) is located 69 km east of Tell el-Leḥem, and consists of four mounds, some of which

post-date the main Neo-Babylonian occupation. Tell Abu Ṣalābīkh (44 ha) lies 2 km to the south of Tell Abu Shuaib, but is larger and higher. In 1952, George Roux found a shoulder of a pot inscribed with a cuneiform phrase that says “SHA.BIT-IA-KIN”. Bit-Yakin was the most powerful of the Chaldean tribes in the seventh century B.C., dominating the land around Ur.<sup>3</sup>

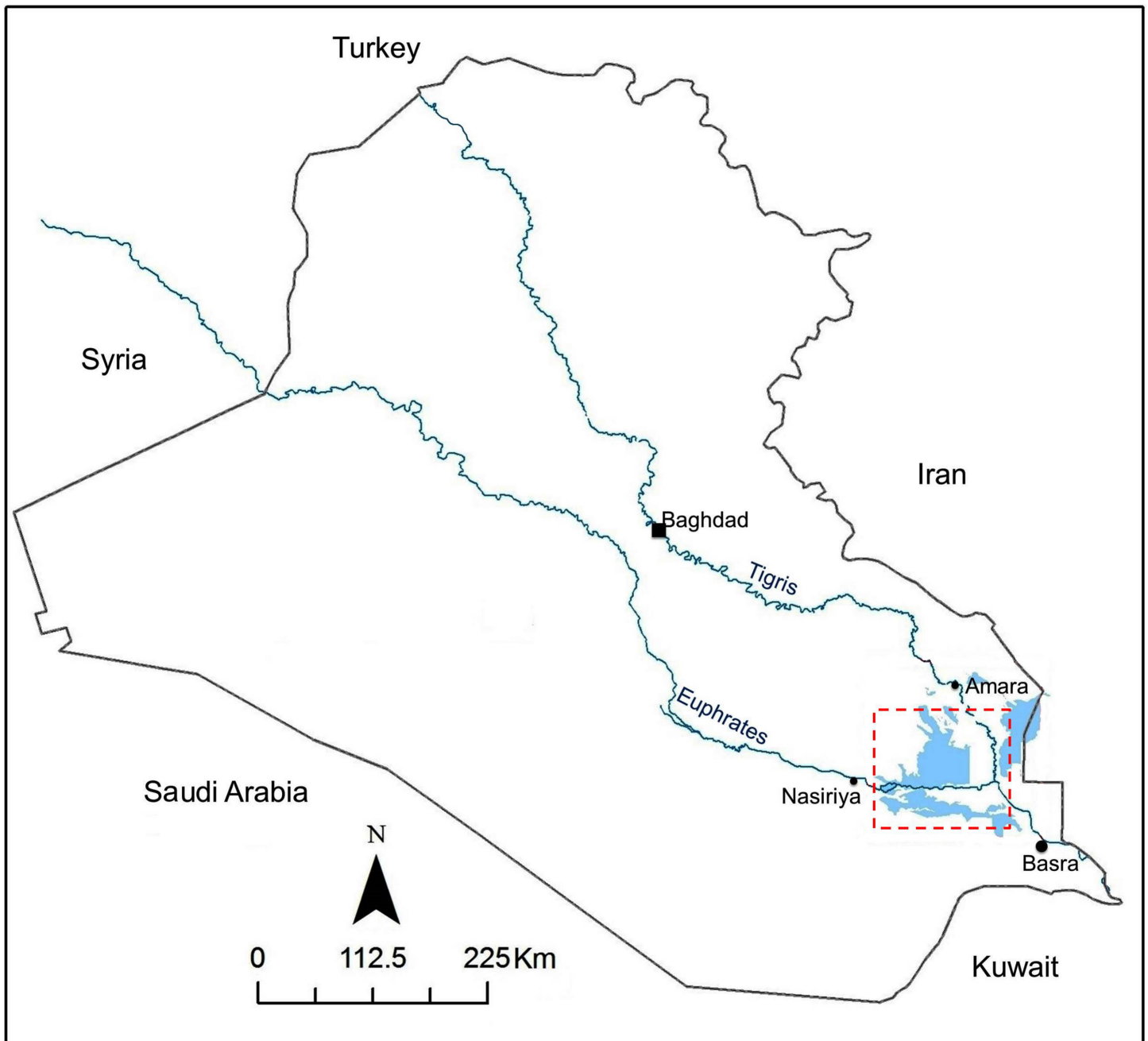


Figure 6.1. A map of Iraq showing the marshes. The dotted box shows the surveyed area.  
(Photo credit: Abdulameer al-Hamdani, 2014)

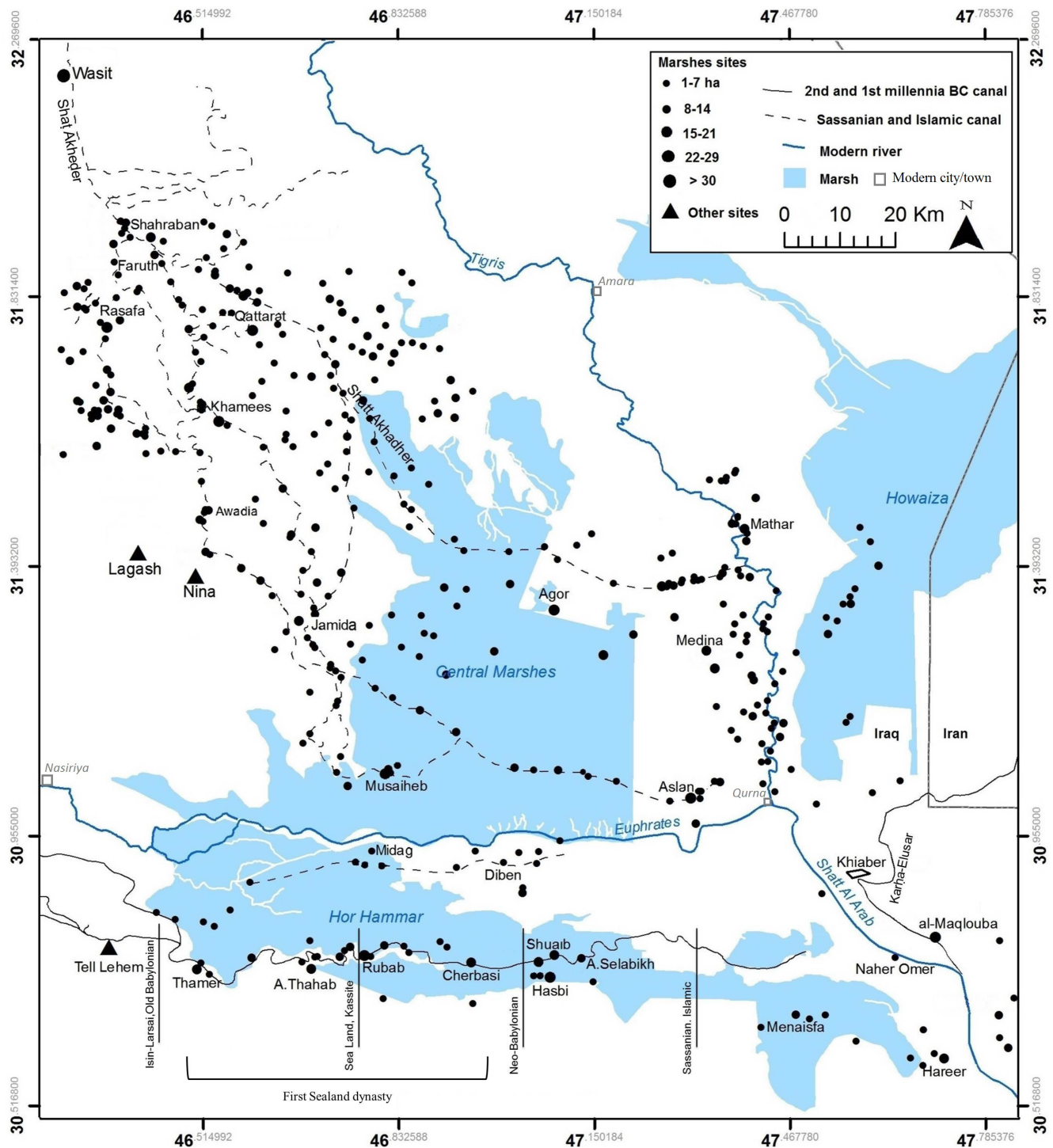


Figure 6.2. The map shows archaeological sites and ancient canals in the southern Iraqi marshes.  
(Photo credit: Abdulameer al-Hamdani, 2014)



The Sassanian (A.D. 224–651) and Islamic settlements, mostly Abbasid (A.D. 750–1258), are located at the eastern edge of Howr al-Ḥammar next to Shaṭ al-Arab. Among them are Tell Hareer, Tell Nahr Ūmer, Tell al-Nukhaila, and Telūl al-Deir. At the northern side of Howr al-Ḥammar below the Euphrates, a group of late Islamic sites are located alongside a bed of an extinct canal called Shaṭ al-Ḥamīdī. Among them are Eshān Umm al-Wadiḥ, al-Midag, al-Telail, and al-Khaiṭ. At the eastern end of Shaṭ al-Ḥamīdī at al-Chibāyesh, another group of small late Islamic sites is located that includes al-Ritba, Muḥibid al-Dibin, and Abū al-Sibūs. Another line of Islamic settlements is located at the southern side of Howr al-Ḥammar that sharply abuts the western desert. Among these is Tell al-Ḥaṣbi, which is located 70 km east of Tell el-Leḥem and 5 km south of Tell Abu Shuḥib. The surface of the 122 ha site is covered by Abbasid glazed pottery; traces of wall foundations are visible on the western part of the settlement.

My team and I were able to identify sixty sites, thirty sites dating to the Isin-Larsa, Old Babylonian, Kassite, and Neo-Babylonian periods, and thirty sites dating to the late Sassanian, and Abbasid period and beyond. Some of the sites are large enough to be towns and even cities, but the majority are villages and hamlets.

### THE CENTRAL MARSHES AND HOWR AL-ḤUWAIZA

As plans developed to re-flood the Central Marshes in 2007, I conducted a survey of the Central Marshes starting with an area that was going to be re-flooded soon, and then I extended my work to include most of these marshes.

#### 1. Bāṭiḥat Wāsiṭ:

##### The upper part of the Central Marshes and Jeziret Seid Aḥmed al-Rifāʿī

This region is located south of the Islamic city of Wāsiṭ and goes down to

the east of the ancient cities of Girsu and Lagash. There was a well-organized and large-scale Sassanian irrigation system of canals and dams. This system collapsed dramatically at the end of the Sassanian period, specifically in the year A.D. 627, when the Sassanians were engrossed in repelling the Islamic conquest's armies.<sup>4</sup> The effect of this collapse turned the land into marshes until the Umayyad and early Abbasid periods, when the state trended towards reviving land by re-digging the Sassanian canals, digging new canals, and maintaining dams and river levees. The satellite imagery and ground survey in this area provide a clear picture to follow the courses of an ancient major river from Wāsiṭ downward to the current lower arm of the Tigris before its confluence with the Euphrates. The local population calls the dried course of this river Shaṭ al-Akheḍer. The most important selected archaeological sites in this area are Shahrabān, Fārūth, Telūl al-Raṣāfa, Telūl al-Qaṭṭārāt, Telūl Khamīs, and Tell al-Jāmida.

Shahrabān is located about 30 km south of Wāsiṭ. The oval shape of the 24 ha settlement was surrounded by a wall, the bricks of which are scattered all over the site, as well as sherds of glazed pottery and fragments of glass dated to the Sassanian and Abbasid periods. At 20 km south of Shahrabān is the 20 ha circular site of Fārūth. The site has a small Sassanian settlement and was reoccupied in the Abbasid period. It is situated at a nexus between what was once a series of watercourses. Raṣāfat Wāsiṭ, which means the harbor of Wāsiṭ, is located 16 km southwest of Farooth, and alongside the ancient river, Shaṭ al-Akhaḍer, that divided the site into two mounds. The western mound, the largest and highest one (24 ha), has a density of architectural traces and foundations. The surface is covered by typical Abbasid glazed pottery and glass, with indications of a small Sassanian occupation. The eastern

mound (8.4 ha) appears to be a harbor where a density of pithos and bitumen is scattered alongside its western edge. Telūl al-Qaṭṭārāt is located 17 km south of Fārūth. It consists of seven mounds scattered in an area of 3 square km. In one of the mounds, al-Qaṭṭār al-Janūbī, there is the shrine of Aḥmed al-Rifāʿī (A.D. 1118–1182), who was the founder of the Rifāʿī Sūfī. Telūl al-Jāmida is located 104 km south of Wāsiṭ and 17 km southeast of the ancient city of Nina, and situated alongside the lower course of the ancient river. The surface of the 32 ha settlement is covered with sherds of glazed pottery dated to the third and fourth Islamic centuries. Baked bricks are also scattered, specifically at the southern part of the settlement, where traces of walls are visible on the surface as well as remains of a baked-brick arch.

The 126 sites of this area are basically late Sassanian settlements that were abandoned in the early Islamic period, but were partially reoccupied during the Umayyad period and largely during the Abbasid period, specifically during the Emirate of al-Baṭāieḥ. The emirate was established by Imran bin Shahin in al-Baṭāieḥ, the great marshes of southern Iraq, in the mid-tenth century A.D. and remained in power from A.D. 949–1021. Indications of a small Parthian occupation (247 B.C.–A.D. 224), and post-Abbasid occupations, particularly the Ilkhanate period (ca. A.D. 1258–1335), exist. The sites can be classified as three cities, twelve towns, and forty-five villages; the rest are small villages and hamlets.

### 2. Bāṭiḥat of Maysān: The Central Marshes and Howr al-Ḥuwaiza

Maysān was a state founded by Hyspaosines during the first century B.C. in lower Mesopotamia, and called Mesene by Starbo, and Charācene by Pliny. It was called Shādh Bāḥman in the Sassanian times, but its Aramaic form of

Maysān was later adopted by the Arab conquerors and so survived as the name of southern Iraq until the late Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> Today the Central Marshes and Howr al-Ḥūwaiza are the territories of Maysān. The 110 sites in this area were Sassanian settlements reoccupied in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, specifically during the Emirate of al-Betāieh in the mid-tenth century A.D. A considerable number of settlements were established in the Seleucid period through the Parthian period, which is the time of the state of Masyān (Characene/Mesene) (ca. 140 B.C.–A.D. 220). A number of sites were the former homes of the Mandaean sect since many objects such as Mandaic lead rolls and scribed gold and silver amulets have been found in sites. The most important selected archaeological sites in this area are Tell al-Maḍār, Tell Madīna, Tell al-Aqor, Tell Aṣlān, and Telūl al-Mūsaihib.

Al-Maḍār was a city of much importance at the time of the Arab conquest, being the capital of the Dasty-Maysān region.<sup>6</sup> The 42 ha site of al-Maḍār is located 20 km southeast of Qalāt Ṣālih on the east bank of the Tigris. The shrine of ʿAbdullāh Bin ʿAlī is situated on top of the site. Tell Madīna is located 25 km south of al-Maḍār, north of the Tigris–Euphrates confluence. The surface of the 40 ha settlement is mostly covered by pottery of the third and fourth Islamic centuries, whereas typical Sassanian pottery covers the eastern part of the settlement. Tell al-Aqor is located 32 km southwest of al-Maḍār, on an island of 87 ha in the Central Marshes, alongside the north branch of Shaṭ al-Kheḍer, west of the Tigris. The distribution of the pottery indicates a large Abbasid occupation upon a late Sassanian settlement. An elderly man from a nearby village told me that people used to collect lead from the surface of the site to make cartridges for hunting birds; these are the so-called Mandaic scribed lead rolls. Tell Aṣlān is located 50 km southwest of al-Maḍār,

5 km north of the Euphrates, and is situated alongside the southern branch of Shaṭ al-Kheḍer. The site consists of small and large mounds. The 20 ha mound was occupied in the Sassanian period. The 50 ha mound is covered with Abbasid glazed pottery, which marks a large Abbasid occupation. Telūl al-Mūsaihib is located 30 km southeast of Telūl al-Jāmida, alongside the southern branch of Shaṭ al-Akheḍer. It contains four mounds that extend for an area of 200 ha. The 80 ha mound is covered with baked bricks and typical Sassanian pottery, which could mark the location of a public building. The 50 ha eastern mound is covered by typical Abbasid glazed pottery, while the southern 28 ha mound has a density of kiln remains such as triple-spacers, and molds for making slipper-shaped coffins, which indicate an industrial district.

### 3. Karkh Maysān: Howr Majnūn and the area east of Shaṭ al-ʿArab

The eastern side of Shaṭ al-ʿArab consists of a high level threshold that precludes inundation, as it is located between the shallow basin of the sedimentation where the Euphrates and Tigris pour their waters into extensive marshes, and the delta slopes downward towards the gulf in the south.<sup>7</sup>

On this threshold, many sites are distributed between al-Qūrna in the north and al-Baṣra in the south, alongside the ancient course of Shaṭ al-ʿArab (Dijla-al-ʿAwra). Other sites are located alongside the ancient course of Karkha River (an ancient Eulaeus canal), which rises in Iran and flows into the Ḥūwaiza marsh in Iraq.<sup>8</sup> The fourteen sites were occupied in the Seleucid period and its succeeding Parthian period as a part of the semi-independent kingdom of Characene/Mesene, in the Sassanian period as a part of Bahman Ardesheer district, and in the Islamic periods as a part of the Kuwar Dijla region. Today, the lower parts of

Howr al-Ḥūwaiza and Howr Majnūn from Shaṭ al-ʿArab eastward to Khuzstān are the territories of Karkh Maysān. The two important sites are Telūl Khiāber and Telūl al-Meglūba. Telūl Khiāber (ancient Karkh Maysan), a 336 ha walled site, is located 58 km northeast of old Baṣra, and 4 km east of the current course of Shaṭ al-ʿArab. It consists of seven mounds of different sizes. Telūl al-Meglūba (ancient Furāt Maysān), 230 ha, is located 16.4 km southeast of Telūl Khiāber. The two sites were ports that played a major role in the trade between the gulf and Mesopotamia, and further Syria and the eastern Mediterranean Sea.<sup>9</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The surveys show that the marshes of southern Iraq were occupied at very different periods. We were able to document 304 sites, most of which were hitherto unknown.

The periodic distribution of the sites in Howr al-Ḥammār, from the second and first millennia B.C. to the first millennium A.D., could indicate the progressive movement of the coast of a body of water. It could be a tremendous marsh, similar to the Howr al-Ḥammār, linking the lower Mesopotamian to the gulf. Sites of the second and first millennia B.C. were located alongside an ancient canal that started from Tell el-Lehem and ran eastward to Shaṭ al-ʿArab, where it disappeared north of the Basra oil fields. These sites have small-scale occupation from Isin-Larsa through Old Babylonian periods, but they flourished during the first Sealand dynasty through the Kassite period, but did gradually decline during the post-Kassite period. The late Islamic sites were located alongside a canal that ran south of the present course of the Euphrates. The eastern side of Shaṭ al-ʿArab was occupied in the Seleucid period through the Parthian period, and flourished during the late Sassanian period through the Umayyad and Abbasid periods.

There is no indication of occupation earlier than Parthian in the area east and south of the ancient cities of Girsu-Lagash-Nina on Shaṭ al-Gharrāf eastward to the Tigris. This area, the Central Marshes and Jeziret Seid Aḥmed al-Rifāʿī south of Wāsiṭ, was intensively occupied in the Sassanian period; settlements of this period were located alongside a large-scale irrigation canal system. Most of the sites were abandoned at the Islamic conquest, when the Sassanian canal system collapsed and the lands turned to marshes. This system was restored partially in the Umayyad period when some of the flooded lands had been dried and reclaimed. The settlements grew in size and number, and the canal system was largely restored during the Abbasid period. However, this system collapsed partially in the tenth century A.D. when the Buyid dynasty controlled Iraq, but it was restored in the thirteenth century, when towns and villages flourished and

agricultural fields were productive. In the Ottoman period, the area turned into a desert and settlements and canals were abandoned forever. The marshes moved back east and south to the lower course of the Tigris.

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<sup>1</sup> Georges Roux, "Recently Discovered Ancient Sites in the Hammar Lake District (Southern Iraq)," *Sumer* 16/1–2 (1960): 30.

<sup>2</sup> Henry T. Wright, "The Southern Margins of Sumer," in *Heartland of Cities*, ed. Robert McC. Adams (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 295–346.

<sup>3</sup> Roux, "Recently Discovered Ancient Sites," 27.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Balāthiry, *Fitaḥ al-Buldān* (Cairo, 1901), 358.

<sup>5</sup> J. Hansman, *Urban Settlements and Water Utilization in South-western Khuzistan and South-eastern Iraq from Alexander the Great to the Mongol Conquest of 1258* (London: University of London, 1970), 67.

<sup>6</sup> Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Buldān IV* (Beirut: Dār Ṣād, 1977), 468.

<sup>7</sup> Roux, "Recently Discovered Ancient Sites," 22.

<sup>8</sup> Hansman, *Urban Settlements*, 183.

<sup>9</sup> Hansman, *Urban Settlements*, 188.

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## SUMMARY OF NEW RESEARCH

**“MOMENT INVARIANTS-BASED FEATURES EXTRACTION FOR  
CLASSIFICATION OF SYRIAC ALPHABET LANGUAGE” BY ABDUL MONEM S. RAHMA,  
BASIMA Z. YACOB, AND DANNY T. BAITO<sup>1</sup>**

To read this article in its entirety in the *International Journal of Advances in Engineering & Technology*, September 2013 issue, visit <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.403.8142&rep=rep1&type=pdf>.

In this project, funded by a TAARII Iraqi research fellowship, the goal was to convert Syriac letters into electronically readable letters so as to digitize Syriac documents. Optical Character Recognition (OCR) is a field intended to make handwritten or printed documents readable by computer programs. This will allow paper documents to be digitized and preserved electronically, allowing for not only the preservation of such information, but also easier dissemination.<sup>2</sup> In order to create OCR, system objects need to be represented as patterns to allow for computer system processing.<sup>3</sup>

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) of Syriac is a field that is socially very relevant and challenging. The social relevance lies in fact that the OCR can help preserve documents of the past for posterity. Many ancient manuscripts can be digitized and stored away for future editing and utilization using OCR. Transformation to electronic records is one of the most important objectives of the recent civilization, and the cultural interaction between the thought of the past and present generations is very important for developed life and settled societies.

In the past decades, many different projects and publications have been concerned with the recognition of Latin, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, and Japanese characters, but no progress has been made toward the OCR of Syriac characters. Yet, in order to preserve the legacy of this language and the documents available in Syriac, a basic foundation needs to be developed so that the computer can discriminate

the Syriac language alphabet, thereby paving the way for OCR and the ability to publish and make such Syriac sources more widely available.

Syriac is an ancient Iraqi language, and it continues to be part of Iraqi culture. Many religious, scientific, and literary books have been written in Syriac. It has a long history of usage in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran by Assyrians. It is an ancient language, and of the oldest

and rarest in the world. The Syriac alphabet consists of twenty-two characters and is written from right to left. The structure of most Syriac characters consists of small loops combined with curves; most characters also have strokes.

Most of the Syriac characters are universal, i.e., they can be used at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. There are a few, however, that change their shapes depending on their position in the word. For instance, the letter “meem” looks different when it is in the initial position, middle position, and final position. As can be seen in figure 7.1, the letters “kap” and “noon” have two different end versions; one joins the letter before it and the other does not.

This research project is concerned with the East


























 He	 Dalath	 Gamal	 Beit	 Alep
 Yud	 Deith	 Khaith	 Zain	 Wow
 Final Meem	 Meem	 Lamad	 Final Kap	 Kap
 Peh	 Ay	 Simkad	 Final Noon	 Noon
 Tav	 Sheen	 Resh	 Gop	 Sadeh

Figure 7.1. The Syriac alphabet. (Image adapted from Rev. Shlemon I. Khoshaba, *Lessons in the Teaching of the Syriac Language* [Duhok, Iraq: Al-Mashrq Cultural House, 2010])

Syriac alphabet. The features of each character are being extracted using moments to build the database for classification. In 1961, M. K. Hu first introduced seven moment invariants based on normalized geometrical central moments with the purpose of image analysis.<sup>4</sup> Basically, an image moment is a “certain particular weighted average (moment) of the image pixels’ intensities, or a function of such moments, usually chosen to have some attractive property or interpretation.”<sup>5</sup> Following a series of algorithms, the Syriac character recognitions will consist of pre-processing, segmentation, feature extraction, classification, and recognition. The proposed recognition process begins by segmenting the image of the Syriac alphabet into sub-images of characters and computing 7 or 6 or 5 or 4 or 3 or 2 or 1 invariant moments for each sub-image of a character as features; then, a database will be constructed based on these recognition features.

In the first step, the recognition system acquires a scanned image as an input image (e.g., JPEG, BMT, etc.). In the next step, a series of operations for pre-processing is performed on the image to enhance it and make it suitable for segmentation. One such operation in this step includes binarization, which converts a grayscale image into a binary image using global thresholding. In the next stage, segmentation, the Syriac

characters are decomposed into sub-images of individual characters. First, the image is divided into lines; then each line is segmented into isolated characters. Whitespace division is the simplest method for segmentation: the segmenter searches for horizontal and vertical lines of only background pixels and divides segments at that juncture.

The next step is feature extraction. This step uses algorithms to extract the moments for each Syriac letter as attributes and this helps to build the database for each letter. The next stages are classification and recognition. The classifier uses another algorithm that makes a final decision according to the extract feature and acquired knowledge. This classification technique depends on the moment invariants database to classify the input character. For the last step, the entered character will be recognized by selecting the shortest distance between the invariant moments of each entered character and each Syriac character via an equation.

The first step in this project was to build a database of the Syriac alphabet by calculating the moments of each character after the segmentation of the alphabet images into equal sizes of sub-images. The next step was to find the distance between the invariant

moments of the entered character and each Syriac character to be used in classification. The characters were inserted into the Recognition System with different rotation angles, ranging anywhere from 0° and 360°. The results of the recognition process were excellent when using 7, 6, 5, 4, or 3 moments. When the first two moments were used, there was a little difference in the rate of recognition at the angle of 25°, but the recognition ration differed when using the first one only.

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<sup>2</sup> Salama Brook and Zaher Al-Aghbari, “Holistic Approach for Classifying and Retrieving Personal Arabic Handwritten Documents,” WSEAS 7th International Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Knowledge Engineering, and Databases (AIKED 08), University of Cambridge, U.K., February 2008.

<sup>3</sup> T. Sergio, *Pattern Recognition*, second edition (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> M. K. Hu, “Visual Pattern Recognition by Moment Invariant,” *IRE Trans. Inform Theory* IT-8 (Feb. 1962): 179–87.

<sup>5</sup> Definition taken from Wikipedia.

### DISSERTATION PRIZE ANNOUNCEMENT

TAARII announces its bi-annual prizes for the best U.S. doctoral dissertations on Iraq. Dissertations defended during the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 academic years are eligible and may come from any discipline for the study of any time period. The competition is open to U.S. citizens at any university worldwide and any student at a U.S. university. One award of \$1,500 will be made for The Donny George Youkhana Dissertation Prize for the best dissertation on ancient Iraq. Another award of \$1,500 will be made for the best dissertation on medieval or modern Iraq. Nominations and submissions should come directly from dissertation advisors. Advisors should submit a PDF copy of the dissertation manuscript and a letter explaining the importance of the dissertation. Please send all nominations/submissions, along with contact information for dissertation authors, by July 1, 2015, to TAARII, [contact@taarii.org](mailto:contact@taarii.org). Only electronic submissions will be accepted. Queries may be addressed to Dr. Beth Kangas, Executive Director, at [beth@taarii.org](mailto:beth@taarii.org).





Figure 8.1. Peter Wien (TAARII President; left), Orit Bashkin (University of Chicago; second left), Jonathan Tenney (Cornell University; right), and Lucine Taminian (TAARII Resident Director; far right), enjoy the hors d'oeuvres at the MESA reception (Photo credit: Bassam Yousif, 2014)

## TAARII RECEPTIONS AT THE AMERICAN SCHOOLS OF ORIENTAL RESEARCH (ASOR) AND MIDDLE EAST STUDIES ASSOCIATION (MESA) ANNUAL MEETINGS



Figure 8.2. (Above) Jennifer Pournelle (University of South Carolina; left-center), and Gil Stein (Director of the University of Chicago Oriental Institute; right-center) (Photo credit: TAARII, 2014)



Figure 8.3. (Right, above) From left to right: Katharyn Hanson (University of Pennsylvania Cultural Heritage Center), Abdulwahhab Sulaiman Hassan (Head of Antiquities, Soran Department, KRG, Iraq), and Rafeeq Rasool Sofy (KRG Directorate of Antiquities) (Photo credit: TAARII, 2014)

Figure 8.4. (Right) From left to right: Constance Gane (Andrews University), Qahtan Al Abeed (Director of Antiquities, Basrah Governorate, and Director of Basrah Museum), Kamal Rasheed Raheem (Director of Antiquities, Suleimaniya Governorate, KRG Iraq), and Abdulameer al-Hamdani (Stony Brook University) (Photo credit: TAARII, 2014)





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## ABOUT TAARII

TAARII has been formed by a consortium of universities, colleges, and museums, which comprise its institutional membership. Each institution names a person to act as its representative on the Board of Directors. Individual Members elect additional Directors. The Officers and the Board of Directors are charged with assuring academic integrity, organizational oversight, and financial and programmatic accountability.

TAARII is a non-governmental organization and is incorporated in the state of Illinois as a not for profit organization and has 501(c)3 status with the Internal Revenue Service.